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# Factors of Resilience that Support University Art and Design Students

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Factors of Resilience That Support University Art and Design Students

by

Ruth C. Morgan

MA, California State University-Northridge, 1992

BS, Michigan State University, 1974

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Education

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February 2016

Abstract

Graduation rates in bachelor's degrees in the United States continue to be lower than stakeholders expect, despite the many advantages of college completion. This phenomenological study investigated the interplay between resilience, coping strategies, and college completion for undergraduate art and design students in an effort to improve graduation rates. The purpose of this study was to address gaps in the literature regarding art and design student's resilience and academic success. Findings were interpreted using 3 conceptual frameworks: resilience theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecology of human development, and Dweck's theory of mindsets and self-beliefs. Research questions guiding this study addressed the external and internal factors that support resilience, the most stressful situations students faced while attending the university, and the coping strategies graduating seniors used to manage stress, regain resilience, and graduate. Data collection included individual semi-structured interviews with 11 graduating seniors and an alum from a single public university in the eastern United States. Data were supplemented by interviews with 1 faculty member and 2 counselors from the same university who had extensive interactions with art and design students. Key results from the data analysis found that supportive relationships with peers, access to financial aid, stress-free living environments, motivation, tenacity, and self-efficacy were important factors for academic success. The most stressful situations students reported were studio critiques, a lack of compatibility with roommates, and health issues. This study promotes positive social change by providing information for stakeholders' use in bolstering students' resilience in order to manage stress and improve college completion rates.

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Dedication

To my daughter Allison, whose listening ear and words of encouragement helped me stay focused on this Ph.D., and to my late husband Steve, who is always on my mind. I feel your love and support. To the strong, resilient women in my life, my mother Rosemary, and my grandmother Margaret: You are all amazing individuals and I feel truly blessed to have known you.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Many U. S. employers consider a bachelor's degree to be the minimum education required for entry into most professions. The advantages of obtaining a bachelor's degree include economic self-sufficiency, increased career options, and career satisfaction (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Cheah, 2012). Not only are college graduates more likely to earn a good living, but they are more likely to secure and maintain employment during economic downturns. Carnevale, et al., reported "2.8 million jobs out of 2.9 million jobs" created since the economy rebounded were filled by workers with at least a bachelor's degree (Carnevale, Jayasundera, & Gulish, 2015, p. 6). In addition to the expanded career opportunities, college graduates can anticipate higher income. As the United States has recovered from the recent recession, most of the "middle-wage ($32,000-$53,000) and better jobs ($53,000+)" have gone to college graduates (Carnevale, et al., 2015, p. 5).

Despite the advantages of college completion, graduation remains difficult for many U.S. students. According to the U.S. Dept. of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, (2015), "only 59% of first-time U.S. college students who began a bachelor's degree in 2007 had completed it by 2013" (p. 28). Student persistence and retention in higher education has been studied by many researchers and the reasons for withdrawal are varied (Mattern, Marini, & Shaw, 2015; Tinto, 2007). Mattern et al. (2015) reported three key issues for withdrawal: "affordability, academic underperformance, [and] the inability to face the hurdles" that college completion requires (p. 18). Low graduation rates indicate students face significant obstacles as they pursue a bachelor's degree. Work scheduling conflicts, financial problems, academic

performance, family responsibilities, stress, and mental health issues are reasons students give for withdrawal (Becker & Gable, 2009; Brougham, Zail, Mendoza & Miller, 2009; Mandracchia & Pendleton, 2015).

The issues that frame college completion are complex. Artistic talent and intelligence are important, but they are not the only factors students need to complete a bachelor's degree. Sternberg (2014) asserted that resilience is more important for success, than "IQ, emotional intelligence, or even creativity" (p. 2). Zautra, Hall, & Murray (2010) defined resilience as the "outcome of successful adaptation to adversity" (p. 4). When university students experience stress and adversity, it is critical that they cope with this stress by building resilience (Feder, Nestler, Westphal, & Charney, 2010).

Colleges and universities have studied ways of improving student retention for decades, but little is known about resilience, which can influence academic success (Bean 2005; Hartley, 2013; Reich, et al., 2010). Mental health issues also influence university graduation rates (Gallagher, 2013). Several studies have raised significant concerns about U.S. university students' mental health (American Psychological Association, 2011; Center for Collegiate Mental Health, 2013; National Institute of Mental Health, 2012). The Center for Collegiate Mental Health (CCMH), (2013) reported growing numbers of mental health problems on campuses across the country. This finding was also reported by the APA (2011) and Zivin, Eisenberg, Gollust, and Golberstein (2008). Depression and anxiety are the most prevalent mental health concerns among college students and present challenges to students' resilience and academic success (Mistler, Reetz, Krylowicz, & Barr, 2012). The focus of this study was on resilience as a dynamic process

that includes relationships, personal traits, and the effective coping strategies students relied on to build resilience and graduate.

## Background of the Study

Acquiring a college degree in art and design offers the potential for satisfaction, but can also involve challenges and stress (Grant, 2010). As students' progress through their college years, they are likely to face a number of stressful events and adversity (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). How students cope with stress and adversity to push forward with graduation is at the heart of this study.

Students struggle with adverse events such as physical illness, financial problems, the death of a loved one, disappointment over grades, and romantic breakups; these events often have a detrimental effect on students' performance (Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003; Burris, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009). Recent research on college freshmen found that they had "the lowest rating of physical and emotional health since 1985" (Lipka, 2013, p. 24). Resilience and effective coping strategies help students recover and move forward with their education (Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010).

Resilience has various definitions and has been explored from several theoretical perspectives. Resilience refers to how well people fully recover from challenges and develop the capacity to "continue forward in the face of adversity" (Zautra et al., 2010, p. 4). An individual who demonstrates high levels of resilience has positive beliefs about their personal ability to succeed in any goal they pursue (Bandura, 1977; Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcn, 2013; Dweck, 2014). One perspective used to examine the phenomenon of resilience includes the study of individual personality traits (Skodol, 2010). Another

perspective considers resilience as a dynamic process (Boerner & Jopp, 2010; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). A third perspective considers resilience as outcomes of effective coping strategies (Zautra, et al., 2010; Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Lastly, another perspective are the genetic influences on the individual and the environment and how they work together to promote resilience (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010). However, the focus of this study was on resilience as a dynamic process that includes relationships, personal traits, stress, and the benefits of effective coping strategies used by art and design students.

## The Problem Statement

This study addressed two separate research gaps. First, a gap in the literature exists regarding the resilience and coping strategies that college students use to persist to graduation (Hartley, 2011, 2013; Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Educators need more research on the phenomenon of resilience as it relates to college students' academic persistence in order to improve graduation rates (Hartley, 2011). Second, little research has been conducted on factors of resilience and their relationship to students' academic success in university art and design programs (Hickman, 2008). A significant body of prior research in the arts has focused on the life and works of famous artists (e.g., Rothko, Gauguin, and Van Gogh) and artists' emotional health (Maisel, 2002; Panter, 2009). Hickman (2008) posits "there is a lack of empirical studies in art education" (p. 11). Some prior research has addressed assessment and critiques and was reported in the data analysis of this study (Cennamo et al., 2011; de la Harpe et al., 2009).

Art and design students are likely to face the same challenges as students in other majors, but also report additional stresses from program-related activities such as studio critiques (Buster & Crawford, 2010; Dannels, Housley Gaffney, & Martin, 2011; Dannels & Martin, 2008). According to Grant (2010) all college students experience stress, but mental health counselors say art and design students experience "intense kinds of stress that students in other majors do not" (p. 1). Most art and design students have their work placed openly in classrooms and critiqued in front of fellow students (Blair, 2006; Koch, Schwennsen, Dutton, & Smith, 2002). Prior researchers reported many art and design students described critiques as ordeals they must survive that create stress, fear and anxiety (Anthony, 1991; Dannels & Martin, 2008).

The purpose of this study was to address the two identified research gaps by capturing the lived experiences of college art and design seniors and recent alums with regard to resilience. How art and design students build and maintain resilience after experiencing a stressful event or period in their lives while in college depends on multiple factors and coping strategies (Reich, Zautra, & Hall, 2010). Prior research studies of persistence and retention have focused on the skills of the individual, the college environment, and institutional support (e. g., Astin & Antonio, 2012; Bean, 2005; Mattern, et al., 2015; Tinto, 1993). In this study the supportive relationships and personal traits that students used to overcome stress, foster resilience, and achieve a bachelor's degree were explored.

## Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to examine resilience and academic success among U. S. university art and design students. It was specifically designed to document and explain the supportive relationships, behaviors, and attitudes that university art and design seniors used to bolster resilience and achieve academic success. To address the two identified research gaps, face-to-face interviews captured the lived experiences of college art and design seniors and recent alums with regard to stress, coping strategies, and resilience. The primary data source was individual interviews with graduating students and one alum; these data were supplemented by interviews with faculty and campus counselors. The central phenomena of the study were the resilient factors and coping strategies students used as they interacted with the university environment to successfully complete their academic program. A goal of this study was to share the factors that graduating seniors and alums used to bolster their resilience to help educators and future students persist with their education and successfully graduate.

Little research has been conducted with art and design students on the phenomenon of resilience and successful coping strategies. This exploratory study was intended to add depth and detail to what is known about resilience and persistence in university students, as suggested by Patton (2002). These perspectives and other findings from the study will be shared with administrators, art and design faculty, and campus counselors to help them better understand students' experiences.

**Research Questions**

The research questions in this study were designed to explore external and internal protective factors that were previously identified by scholars, as significant elements for bolstering resilience. These questions were:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which external protective factors of resilience (e.g., family, faculty, peers, counselors, coaches, finances, and religion) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question 2 (RQ2): Which internal protective factors (e.g., mindsets, hardiness, motivation, optimism, self-efficacy, and spiritual beliefs) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question 3 (RQ3): What stressors present the greatest challenges for college art and design students with regard to persistence?

- Research Question 4 (RQ4): What coping strategies and resources do successful art and design students use to sustain resilience through their college experiences?

**Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual frameworks for this study were based on three theories. First, resilience theory is the study of personal traits, processes, and outcomes that work in concert to help an individual return to a state of balance after an adverse event (Campbell-Sills, Cohen, & Stein, 2006; Masten, 2001; Masten & Obradovic, 2008;

Reich, et al., 2010; Southwick & Charney, 2012; Zolli & Healy, 2012). Contemporary scholars describe resilience as a dynamic process that includes personal traits identified by earlier researchers, such as self-efficacy, optimism, determination, and perseverance (Bandura, 1977; Garmezy, 1991; Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Werner & Smith, 2001). Environmental influences including family cohesion, schools, teachers, friends, coaches, churches, and community activities support resilience (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Masten, Best, & Garmezy, 1990; Reich et al., 2010).

Several theorists have stated that the mindset a person adopts about their abilities, has a profound influence on their persistence and academic success (Bandura, 1995; Burnette, O'Boyle, Van Epps, & Pollack 2013; Dweck, 2014; Dweck & Molden 2005; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). The praise and criticism students receive from parents and teachers when they are young have a powerful influence on later learning and resilience (Dweck & Molden, 2005, p. 134; Kamins & Dweck, 1999). The resulting mindsets influence internal protective factors for resilience such as self-efficacy, hardiness, motivation, optimism, and perseverance, which in turn bolster resilience.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development focuses on the human being and the environment that influences growth. According to this theory, human development and resilience do not occur in a vacuum. Human development occurs as a result of the interaction between personal, social, and cultural elements that influence growth and resilience. This theory states that human development is a dynamic process that interconnects individuals with their environment. As time passes, each interconnection influences the individual's growth. Likewise, each interconnection also

influences the environment. For example, art and design students learn through observation, faculty demonstrations, trial, and experimentation with different mediums (Madoff, 2009). These students later influence the art world when their art inspires future artists and receives acclaim from art critics and clients.

The factors that support resilience for one student may differ from the factors that support resilience for another student. Research findings provided a cluster of common factors that help support resilience.

**Resilience Theory**

Resilience theory provides a lens to view individual attributes, social connections, and adaptation to life stressors (Reich et al., 2010; Zolli & Healy, 2012). Stressful events occur in everyone's life, regardless of age or education; life is inherently stressful because of external events and challenges (Maddi, Harvey, Khoshaba, Fazel & Resurreccion, 2012). Prior research has investigated how protective factors for resilience can be used to support students and improve their performance (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Ong, Bergeman, & Chow, 2010; Wolniak, 2012).

Early research in resilience has focused on the area of trauma psychology. Banyard and Cantor (2004) found students who survived traumatic stress in childhood had difficulties making the transition from high school to college. Researchers studied problems with self-regulation and the impact of trauma on the developing brain, such as cognitive deficits, with abused and neglected children (Masten & Garmezy, 1985; Perry, 2005; van der Kolk, Roth, Pelcovitz, Sunday, & Spinazzola, 2005). Social and behavioral scientists have studied resilience in negative life events to help at-risk children and

reduce the need for social services (Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Kumpfer, 1999). Werner

and Smith (2001) studied the personal traits of vulnerable children who experienced

stress and trauma over the years from birth to middle age; children whose parents were

mentally ill, alcoholics, or were abused to see how these issues affected their growth and

development (Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Perry,

2005). This approach was called the *person-oriented approach* (Boerner & Jopp, 2010, p.

127). Researchers following this approach have examined personal characteristics or

traits individuals possessed such as hardiness, optimism, intelligence, and self-efficacy,

and examined how those traits helped people weather adversity (American Psychological

Association [APA], 2000; Ong, Bergeman, & Chow, 2010; Skodol, 2010; Sternberg,

2005).

Another approach to studying resilience considers resilience as "a dynamic

process of successful adaptation to adversity revealed through the lens of developmental

psychopathology" (Zautra et al., 2008, p. 4). Researchers employing this *process-

oriented approach,* investigate individuals' abilities and social support and how they

connect to resilience (Boerner & Jopp, 2010, p. 127; Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The

process-oriented approach emphasizes personal traits, but also looks at social

components, the environment, and how they work together to bolster resilience (Boerner

& Jopp, 2010).

The factors that support resilience differ with each student, but some supportive

factors are common to all successful students (Kumpfer, 1999; Skodol, 2010). Some

students who have experienced adverse childhoods are motivated to change the trajectory

of their early life experiences; in contrast, others see themselves as victims and perceived themselves as helpless and depressed (Werner & Smith, 2001; Wolniak, 2011).

Still another approach to the study of resilience theory examines outcomes that reflect adaptive functioning in the face of adversity (Bonanno, 2004; Mancini & Bonanno, 2010). Outcomes for college students include the ability to complete coursework and graduate in spite of adversity. Werner and Smith (2001) studied vulnerable children from birth to adulthood identifying resilient outcomes in adults such as gainful employment, being in a stable marriage, self-acceptance, engagement with the community, and feelings that life had meaning. Low depression and anxiety after loss, positive emotions and hopefulness, and a rapid return to normal activities following adversity are other outcomes that demonstrate resilience (Zautra et al., 2008).

Internal protective factors such as mindsets of self-efficacy, hardiness, optimism, and motivation support resilience (Bandura, 1977, 1995; Dweck, 2014, 2006; Khoshasa, 1979; Maddi, 2007). Mindsets are an internal protective factor for resilience and consist of self-beliefs about intelligence, talent, social skills, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995; Becker & Gable, 2009; Burnette et al., 2013; Dweck & Molden, 2005). External protective factors such as supportive relationships with parents, friends, mentors, and other social connections, as well as financial assistance, and a stress-free living environment support resilience (Luecken & Gress, 2010; Seery, Holman, & Silver, 2010; Southwick & Charney, 2012; Zolli & Healy, 2012). Resilient individuals draw on a combination of external and internal protective factors to build resilience (Bandura, 1997; Duckworth, Peterson, Matthews, & Kelly, 2007; Dweck, 2000; Maddi, 2007; Maddi et

al., 2012). A resilient student does not need every external or internal protective factor identified, but needs a combination of several external and internal factors that will restore functioning after a setback.

Studies of personal traits and social environments have dominated the research on resilience. Recent advances in neurobiological or genetic correlates are now considered to contribute to the phenomenon of resilience (Cicchetti, 2010). Contemporary developments in genetics and brain imaging now permit a closer study of the interconnections for resilience and well-being. "Genetic influences do not operate in isolation," but work in concert with the environment (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 71). In this study the emphasis is on internal protective factors (personal traits) and external protective factors (environmental) for developing resilience.

Resilience is the ability of individuals to adapt successfully to "acute stress, trauma, or chronic adversity, maintain or regain psychological well-being and physiological homeostasis" (Feder, et al., 2010, p. 35). One prominent theme in resilience refers to the use of effective coping strategies to rebound from an event, called recovery. The second prominent theme comprises sustainability, growth, and adaptation to the stressful experience (Reich et al., 2010). Resilient individuals tend to focus on problems they believe they can solve with realistic optimism (Reivich, Shatte, & Gillham, 2003; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Although life may not transpire as students' desire, by knowing which protective factors and positive coping strategies support resilience, students will be better able to recuperate after an adverse event (Dweck, Walton, & Cohen 2011; Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Ong et al., 2010).

Resilient individuals take responsibility for their emotional well-being and may use traumatic experiences as opportunities for growth (Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Southwick & Charney, 2012). The factors that bolster resilience among young and middle age adults can vary in individuals (Hines, Merdinger, & Wyatt, 2005; Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012).

**Mindsets**

Significant research exists on the assumption that students' perceptions of their capabilities are vital forces in their success or failure in education (Bandura, 1995; Dweck, 2000; Elliott & Dweck, 2005; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Students form opinions of themselves based on their successes and failures in previous academic environments (Bandura, 1995). Students can have positive opinions of their skills in one domain (e.g., painting and writing) and low opinions of themselves (e.g., social skills or mathematics) in another domain (Bandura, 1995). These beliefs, in turn, influence students' self-perceptions and willingness to challenge themselves in future endeavors (Dweck, 2000; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2010). Mindsets about learning and success suggest that the challenge of learning new material and gaining new skills builds confidence and reduces the fear of future challenges (Bandura, 1995; Dweck, 2000; Elliot & Dweck, 2005).

Mindsets about intelligence and academic success influence how a student approaches learning (Dweck, 2000; Dweck et al., 2011; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Niiya, Crocker, & Bartmess, 2004). Students' beliefs about their abilities to succeed in achieving their goals influence resilience (Bandura, 1997; Elliot & Dweck,

2005; Karoly, 2010; Skodol, 2010; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Mindsets

focus on thoughts individuals have regarding their ability, success, and failure, and those

beliefs influence resilience (Burnette et al., 2013; Dweck, 2000, 2006).

Students with *incremental beliefs* (growth mindsets) see intelligence and artistic

talent or other abilities as factors that can be enhanced with practice and hard work

(Dweck, 2000; Dweck et al., 2011; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). Students with *entity beliefs*

(fixed mindsets) see intelligence, artistic talent, or other abilities as fixed at birth (Dweck,

2000; Schunk & Pajares, 2005). These students are afraid to address new challenges for

fear of failure (Dweck, 2000; Sternberg, 2005). Students' beliefs in their own ability to

solve a problem is a type of motivation that requires resilience (Sternberg, 2005, p. 19).

Mindsets works together with social and academic environments to enhance students'

ability to persist and challenge their abilities. Resilient individuals have positive,

optimistic attitudes toward life, but are able to accept certain negative facts of life

(Boerner & Jopp, 2010).

Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human development, Schunk

and Pajares (2005) suggested that resilience is the result of a dynamic group of personal,

social, and environmental factors. Resilient individuals face challenges with confidence

and rely on many protective factors working in concert to help them manage stress in

their lives.

**Ecology of Human-Development Theory**

The ecological theory of human development focuses on an individual's

relationship with the environment, and how they interact to influence the behavior and

values of an individual (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Interactions between students and their academic and social challenges in the college environment are key factors for the study of resilience. These interactions follow the conceptual frameworks Bronfenbrenner (1979) identified as important for human development.

To fully understand how students achieved resilient functioning after setbacks, it was important to look at the complexity of their day-to-day living experiences. As colleges and universities prepare students for the rigors of a professional career in the arts, it is important that students graduate with a cache of resources to help them persist in their personal and career goals. These resources are relevant to graduating students who will soon enter the workforce and need resilience to be creative, inspired artists and designers. If their work is not well received, students and professionals need resilient coping strategies to recover and move forward.

Researchers identified additional resources that address student resilience (APA, 2014; Beasley, Thompson, & Davidson, 2003; Brewer & Yucedag-Ozen, 2013; Campbell-Sills et al., 2006). College students begin to build a larger network of support as they mature (Luecken & Gress, 2010). This support system includes faculty, mentors, advisors, and counselors who help gather the protective factors that support academic and social resilience (Luecken & Gress, 2010). Relationships with family and loved ones who support students in achieving their goals are critical to students' persistence and, therefore, resilience (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Conley, Travers, et al., 2013; Hartley, 2013; Kahn, 2013; Mayer & Faber, 2010). Students who do not have supportive family members can still achieve their goals, but may need the support of a

coach, counselor, mentor, advisor, spiritual or religious community, or support group.

These external supports are important factors for student resilience (Struthers, R. Perry,

& Menec, 2000; Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012).

## Nature of the Study

Social science researchers use two basic approaches: quantitative and qualitative

(Creswell, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Patton, 2002). Qualitative

research is ideal to explore complex social and psychological phenomena. Among the

approaches to qualitative research, I rejected narrative inquiry, case study, grounded

theory, and ethnography as ways to address my research questions. Although all

qualitative approaches place an emphasis on the lived experience of the participants,

phenomenology is best for addressing how college seniors and recent graduates report

their lived experiences (Husserl, 1970). Narrative analysis is useful for understanding an

individual's life history through artifacts such as memoirs, diaries, and family stories and

through data gathered from in-depth interviews and life history narratives (Riessman,

1993). It was not best suited for the present study, given the emphasis on protective

factors for resilience across participants. The intention was to limit students' stories to

their 4-6-year time at the university, but students occasionally reported adverse

experiences in childhood that still influenced them during their college years. The case-

study approach looks for meaning and understanding of a bounded system (Denzin, 1989;

Miles & Huberman, 1994). Case studies focus on a unit of analysis—an individual,

group, or event bounded by time—and give the reader a vicarious experience of a

phenomenon (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Merriam, 2009). The case-study approach was not

appropriate for the present study because factors of resilience are not a bounded entity. In grounded theory, the researcher derives an abstract theory of a process from the views of participants. Grounded theory emerged to build a case for inductively analyzing social phenomenon, and separated data collection from data analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Merriam, 2009). Grounded theory focuses on generating theory rather than testing it. Given that generating a theory was not the goal of the present study, grounded theory was also ruled out. Ethnographic research is most commonly used by anthropologists to study a particular culture, and is now used in many disciplines. In an ethnographic study, researchers study the behaviors, values, and rituals of a group of people. Ethnographic inquiry is a description of culture that emerges after a long period of living in the culture (Merriam, 2009; van Maanen, 1982). This type of qualitative research was not selected because this study did not focus on students' college culture per se, but on factors of resilience, reported by individual students and corroborated by faculty and counselors with whom they interact.

Quantitative research attempts to test theories and answer questions with the use of variables that can be measured on instruments using numbers and percentages (Creswell, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008). The quantitative approach was inappropriate for this study because behaviors and challenges cannot be explored in the same way as a phenomenological approach. According to Creswell (2014) researchers can best use a quantitative approach to examine the relationship among variables containing numbered data that can be measured and analyzed using statistical procedures.

**Rationale for Chosen Methodology**

In this study, the phenomenon under investigation was resilience and academic success of university seniors and recent graduates majoring in art and design. A phenomenological approach with semi-structured interviews were used to discern perceptions of students who have undergone some adversity and returned to healthy functioning while they pursued bachelor's degrees. Only students who have lived and experienced challenges while pursuing their degree can discuss the joys and stresses they faced, and share how they coped with them. The factors that have bolstered their resilience and the coping strategies students have used to be academically successful are reflected in this study.

Phenomenology shares its origins with existentialism, emphasizing individuals in the real world. German philosopher Husserl (1859–1938), considered the formative leader of phenomenology, used the term "life world, *Lebenswelt,* to mean world of lived experiences" (as cited in Van Manen, 1990, p. 182). Phenomenology looks to the evidence of first person lived experiences to provide descriptions of experiences. Husserl (1970) stated that the embodied experience consists of facial expressions and gestures, for example, shaking hands and smiling; practical activities such as attending lectures; and meaningful situations such as critiques in the painting studio. Existential sociologist Tiryakian (1965) used Husserl's phenomenology to attempt to build a better society. Tiryakian developed the "assumptive frame of reference," a term that drew attention to the social knowledge individuals have, depending on elements such as culture, ethnicity, family, and nationality (p. 199).

From the existentialist perspective, the desire of the individual to find and create meaning in life's struggles is a common theme. According to Johnson and Melnikov, (2008) existential philosophers believe individuals have a choice regarding how to respond to events and challenges. Heidegger stated that all individuals are "thrown into" family, community, and an ethnic group and are influenced by "social, cultural, and political beliefs" from an early age (Johnson & Melnikov, 2008, p. 34). Students have a choice to accept the cultural and social beliefs they learned from childhood or reject them. When students accepted a belief, an attitude of resignation or rebellion, their choices defined them.

The time students spent at the university were filled with academic and social challenges and rewarding experiences as they grew and adapted to the environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Luecken & Gress, 2010). These challenges were explained by the students who lived through these events. Because phenomenology is a method to describe how the world is experienced through conscious acts (Merriam, 2009), this study of how students described and experienced university life events was at the core of this inquiry. Students only knew what they directly experienced. Little research has been conducted with art and design students regarding resilience and coping strategies, a phenomenological approach was the best method for data collection.

Phenomenology is the rigorous study of consciousness; the goal was to gather information on student experiences and understand how they interpreted ideas, emotions, and experiences (Husserl, 1970; Johnson & Melnikov, 2008). Graduating students and the recent alum were the primary source of data and were asked the same questions. To

corroborate the patterns that emerged from the students' data, I also interviewed faculty and campus counselors. Using the phenomenological study, I pursued experiences and significant factors of the phenomenon of resilience among university art and design students and the recent alum. Following Husserl (1970), I described the life experiences of art and design students as they revealed their world to me.

I conducted face-to-face interviews to collect data from 11 graduating students and one alum majoring in art and design. I investigated how art and design students made sense of their college experiences, positive and negative, and transformed those experiences into personal and shared meaning. I asked participants to provide historical information from freshman to senior years. Through one-on-one interviews, I probed for the best and worst college-student experiences. Students described how they managed challenges, coped with stress, and what or who helped them build resilience. Students illuminated the process of resilience as they described how they managed events and challenges. Interview questions for each group are listed in the Appendices: Appendix A, Student and Alum Interview Questions, Appendix B, Faculty Interview Questions, and Appendix C Campus Counselor Interview Questions.

The criteria for faculty selection included art and design faculty at the host institution who interacted with students on a regular basis (at least weekly), and taught part-time or full-time freshman through senior levels. My goal was to interview four to five faculty members who taught undergraduate art and design students. However, because faculty had heavy commitments at the end of the school year, only one faculty member volunteered to be interviewed. Data from the faculty interview supplemented the

factors students and the alum identified as significant to their resilience. A third source of data consisted of interviews with two counselors from the campus counseling center. The fourth source of data collected was from journal entries that I recorded before and after each interview. The purpose of the journal was to examine possible bias I may have had in gathering data and provided a self-audit of the study process.

Triangulation of data sources means, at minimum, that data are derived from two or more sources. The triangulation of data sources increases the credibility of study findings and supports validity by combining methods (Denzin, 1989). I was the sole collector of data. The use of *epoche*, or bracketing, my perceptions of participants and the process compelled me to identify bias and state any concerns, resulting in interviews that were receptive to participants' remarks (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994, p. 33; Patton, 2002).

### Definitions of Terms

The terms listed below appear in the literature as important key elements for resilience and were examined in greater depth in the literature review.

*Academic success:* Academic success consists of student performance, learning, and intellectual growth that lead a student to course completion and graduation (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Academic success in previous learning environments is important for building resilience (Dweck & Molden, 2005).

*Alums:* The term refers to graduates of a particular school or college. Alumnae is the Latin word for women, in the plural. Alumni is the Latin word for men, in the plural. Graduates of both genders are identified as alums ("Alums," 1996).

*Coping strategies:* Coping strategies are ways individuals attempt to manage stressful, adverse events in their life. Positive coping strategies include counseling, exercise, meditation, yoga, prescription drugs, spiritual guidance, tutoring, discussions with family, friends, and faculty, and strengthening resilience (Beasley et al., 2003; Brougham, Zail, Mendoza, & Miller, 2009; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Negative coping strategies include avoidance, social withdrawal, binge eating or drinking, alcohol or drug abuse, and self-harm; these strategies do not support resilience (Burris, Brechting, Salsman, & Carlson, 2009; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Mason, Zaharakis, & Benotsch, 2014). In the face of setbacks, students must determine when to intensify effort and when to relinquish the goal (Carver & Scheier, 2005).

*External protective factors:* When confronted with risk, people rely on protective factors to overcome adversity and to increase competence and resilience (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). External protective factors of resilience included social connections to friends and family, teachers, coaches, counselors, and mentors (Luthar, Cicchetti, & Becker, 2000; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Werner & Smith, 2001). A safe living environment and financial resources were also considered external protective factors (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012).

*Hardiness:* Hardiness is a protective factor for resilience. What makes one *hardy* is the motivation and courage to see challenges and to deal with them appropriately, which enhances resilience (Maddi et al., 2012). Hardiness comprised the feeling students have that they are in control of their destiny, not helpless in determining their success (Frazier et al., 2011; Skodol, 2010, p. 115).

*Internal protective factors:* Internal protective factors reduce the threats of environmental stressors and provide individuals with coping resources that protect against stress and support resilience (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008; Werner & Smith, 2001). Internal protective factors promote beliefs and behaviors that buffer individuals from adversity and promote resilience (Garmezy, 1991; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). Internal protective factors include hardiness, mindsets, motivation, optimism, perseverance, and self-efficacy.

*Mindsets:* Mindsets are internal protective factors for resilience. Students form beliefs about artistic, athletic, and musical talent and intelligence based on feedback in early childhood. If individuals believe they can achieve a goal, they are likely to try. If a student believes a task cannot be done, the student will not try or will give up easily (Bandura, 1995; Dweck, 2000).

*Motivation:* Motivation involves those processes that give behavior its energy, direction, and drive (Dweck et al., 2011; Reeve, 2009). Students' goals and their desire to succeed influence resilience. Motivation is an internal protective factor for resilience and is indispensable for academic success (Dembo & Seli, 2008; Karoly, 2010; Sternberg, 2005, p. 19).

*Optimism:* Optimism is a positive and hopeful attitude and internal protective factor for resilience (Skodol, 2010; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Optimism is a core belief that positive outcomes are forthcoming regardless of circumstances (Anderson & Anderson, 2003).

*Perseverance:* Perseverance is an internal protective factor and predictor of resilience and academic success (Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). Perseverance is the ability to persist in a difficult task until it is completed (Duckworth & Quinn, 2009).

*Persistence:* In an educational context, persistence refers to an individual's ability to move continuously from beginning to degree completion from the institution of initial enrollment or one different from the initial institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2014, p. 9). Key determinants of academic persistence are the relationship between resilience and mental health (Hartley, 2011).

*Self-beliefs*: Self-beliefs are internal protective factors that influence academic success, social success, and resilience. These thoughts influence ability, success, and failure (Dweck, 2000).

*Self-efficacy:* Self-efficacy beliefs consider self-confidence, positive attitude to succeed, and one's persistence and ability to succeed in reaching personal goals (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1995, 1997). Self-efficacy is an internal protective factor for resilience and student success (Becker & Gable, 2009; Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcn, 2013; Burris et al., 2009; Coutu, 2002).

*Student success:* College-student success involves a variety of elements such as grades, courses passed toward a degree, graduation, students' satisfaction with their experiences in the learning environment, and, personal developmental outcomes that benefit the individual and society (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Kuh et al., 2006).

**Assumptions**

Five key assumptions undergirded this study. First, graduating seniors or recent graduates will have experienced and overcome challenges that were significant to their progress to graduate. Second, graduating seniors and recent graduates were able to recall, articulate, and interpret their college experiences that took place over a 4 to 6-year period. Participants were able to identify the significant factors that helped them build and gain resilient factors. Third, some majors involve particular stressors. I attempted to sort for different majors so students across art and design majors were represented and so one major was not overrepresented. Fourth, as an outsider to the institution, students may have been more forthcoming with me because I am unaffiliated with the university. I only knew students as they chose to reveal themselves to me. I had no influence on their academic progress. Fifth, I assumed that various factors influenced who volunteered to participate in the study.

Students and the alum who experienced adversity, trauma, or challenges and overcame them volunteered. Students and the alum who were talkative and outgoing were another group that volunteered. Students who wanted to earn the gift card also volunteered. Students and the alum who were curious about how research studies are conducted or interested in doctoral work also volunteered. With regard to faculty participation, faculty who were most likely to participate were those devoted to helping students succeed by understanding current issues that confronted students. Campus counselors worked with students daily on social and mental health issues that affect performance and provided a well-informed perspective. Students, alums, faculty, and

counselors were subject to university schedules that determined their availability to participate.

## Scope and Delimitations

Interviews took place at one public institution accredited by the Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. I recruited participants from the student body who were graduating and an alum who graduated within the last 3 years. All graduating seniors and the alum majored in one of the following areas: art education, art history, textiles, fine art, graphic design, painting, photography, printmaking, or sculpture. The study included one-on-one interviews face-to-face with all participants: 11 graduating seniors and one recent alum, one faculty member, and two campus counselors. The total enrollment of the host university is over 13,000 students for all majors. The senior class of art and design majors consisted of 55 students and the subsequent year's class size is likely to be the same. With a sample size of 11 students and one alum, about one-sixth of the senior class participated. Counselors had extensive experience with students of all majors who visited the campus counseling center. Two campus counselors participated in interviews and shared information about services they provided to students that influenced academic success. The host institution is hundreds of miles from my home, and required travel and lodging expenses, so all interviews occurred over a 7 to 10-day period.

Delimitations define the parameters of the investigation. Delimitations are choices researchers make that serve as boundaries established for the study. I did not study students who had withdrawn from the university before reaching senior status or seniors

who were not in good academic standing. I was on campus for a limited time, so the stress and challenges students reported to me may have been related to issues they were addressing at that time in the semester as they neared completing requirements for graduation

Transferability in qualitative research suggests that results of this study can be applied to other individuals or institutions (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). If investigators conduct research with a population of similar size and characteristics among students, faculty, and counselors using different people in other settings, findings could be of value to other art and design educators. Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested the transferability of data is only relevant from the perspective of the individuals who want to apply data to another similar situation (p. 298). Findings from this study will be relevant to the host institution and to educators and other stakeholders who focus on protective factors and similar research questions in similar environments.

<div align="center">

**Limitations**

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Limitations are conditions the researcher cannot control, align with any type of study, and may influence the results. I relied on the help of the department chair to recruit the students, alums, and faculty participants needed for this study. Given logistical constraints (time on campus) and looming graduation deadlines, students, alums, faculty, and campus counselors' participation was influenced by schedules and availability. One limitation was being able to recruit a sufficient number of faculty members for interviews. I interviewed two campus counselors and I contacted campus counselors

directly to schedule interviews. Deadlines for the senior thesis project, faculty schedules, teaching, and portfolio reviews required flexible scheduling on my part.

Phenomenological research is subject to distortion due to personal bias, anger, anxiety, or politics (Patton, 2002, p. 306). I have had years of teaching and administrative work that may have helped or hindered my interviews. It may have been difficult to approach the interviews with the naive openness required. My previous experience as an adviser and professor may have been an asset or a drawback. Participants may have reacted to me, as an outsider to the institution, with caution, not revealing events fully. It is possible that participants were not comfortable sharing sensitive personal information with anyone and may have presented an edited version of events. Participants who engaged in maladaptive coping activities (drug and alcohol abuse or self-harm) may have withheld this information. In qualitative research, certain limitations mean that the findings cannot be generalized to the general student art and design population.

Participants' ability to communicate orally and with precision may not have been strong. It was likely that students who are organized, are able to spare time to participate in an interview, are reflective and articulate were most likely to participate. Students who are behind schedule, or uncomfortable talking to others, may not have volunteered to participate in the study. Participants may have had psychological risks due to sadness and distress as they recalled sensitive or difficult times, but I worked to minimize this possibility. With many majors in art and design under investigation, the sample did not compare one major with another. I used purposeful sampling to select students who returned the initial e-mail request, asking them to share the favorable and unfavorable

aspects of their college experience. I intended to interview the first 10 students or alums who were willing to participate, I had a total of 12 in this group. I selected the first students who were willing to participate if they met the criteria. No students were waitlisted. The clarity of participants' thoughts and ability to express themselves in the initial e-mail reply, along with the major they pursued, were used to screen potential student participants. Although it was unlikely that research findings would allow me to generalize, results may open an opportunity for future studies. The value of purposeful sampling comes from the in-depth understanding I gleaned from information rich interviews.

I reported the favorable aspects of each students' accomplishments from freshman year to senior year, as well as their greatest challenges and stressors. I worked to gather data that would add to research findings from other researchers on resilience, coping strategies, and persistence in university students. This information may benefit the host institution as well as the profession of art and design education.

**Ethical Concerns**

Regulations regarding ethical issues are critical for research in the social sciences and were strictly followed. The sole purpose of research is to enhance the knowledge of a phenomenon. However, research must be conducted without inflicting harm on research participants (Creswell, 2014; Frankfort-Nachmias & Nachmias, 2008; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). I completed the National Institutes of Health training course on protecting human research participants. Following the ethical-issues checklist included explaining the purpose of the study, promises and reciprocity to the participant, risk assessment,

confidentiality, informed consent, data access, and ownership (Patton, 2002, pp. 408–409). Patton (2002) stated, description should be separated from interpretation as descriptions are one thing and interpretation "involves explaining the findings and putting patterns into an analytic framework" (p. 438). I followed Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) guidelines for confidentiality.

It was possible that recalling an adverse event may have brought back sad memories of the experience. I assured participants they would not be forced to share any information they did not feel comfortable discussing. Likewise, participants were able to raise new issues and control the length of the interview.

**Threats to Quality and Potential Methodological Weaknesses of the Study**

Memory was likely to influence participants' ability to recall events accurately. It is possible that students or the alum had forgotten stressful events from prior years. This study followed a number of procedures to assure the accuracy of data. Data integrity included tape-recorded interviews, transcribed notes of interviews and participants' replies for clarification, a faculty interview transcript, campus counselors' interview transcripts, and my journal entries. Students' were able to read transcripts of their interviews for accuracy and make comments by e-mail.

I looked for themes or patterns of factors that supported resilience and coping strategies that helped undergraduates persist. Information gathered from the faculty member may be inspired by years of observing, counseling, and mentoring students. Faculty responses to the interview questions confirmed student responses related to critiques, sophomore review and senior capstone stress. Campus-counselor reported on

programs they offered that provided emotional support and stress reduction. These data sources enhanced validity.

## Significance

Several reasons point to the importance of helping art and design majors succeed in college. Art education adds value to the U.S. economy and provides businesses with creative and innovative thinkers. Dun and Bradstreet (2012) reported that "there are 905,689 businesses in the U.S. that create or distribute art, employing 3.35 million people" (Cohen, 2013, p. 2). Businesses that hire individuals with an art education include museums, film studios, theaters, architecture firms, and product, industrial, interior and graphic design companies. Every object in homes, offices, and hospitals have been designed by creative, artistic individuals. From the fashions one wears, the illustrations in media and advertising, and the video games and films many enjoy—all originate with creative artists and designers. According to Iyengar and Hudson (2014), "In 2011, arts education added $7.6-billion to the nation's gross domestic products" and employed "17,900 workers" (p. 1). Art and design college graduates have employment opportunities in the art related professions. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce report, "by 2018 job openings in Community Services and Arts occupations will include 818,000 openings for graduates with bachelor's degrees" (Carnevale, Smith, & Strohl, 2010, p. 58).

Findings from this study have the potential to lead to greater understanding of the issues that challenge university students and the high points that helped them remain

enrolled until graduation. Identifying the behaviors that design students used to cope with stress has the potential to guide future students to success. Advice graduating seniors offered to future students had the potential to provide university freshmen with useful information that could ease their transition from high school to university life. Findings from this study report supportive relationships, beliefs and attitudes that fostered resilience and enhanced the ability of students to persist to graduation. Findings from this study adds to the research on why students stay and persist to graduation.

<div align="center">**Positive Social Change**</div>

This study has implications for students, educators, and advisors who are committed to helping students develop resilience and effective coping strategies to manage challenges and persist to graduation. Learning how to cope with adversity is a life-skill that will not only help students' complete coursework and earn bachelor's degrees, but prepare them to enter professions that can be highly competitive. A college degree is the gateway to a professional career with mobility, higher earnings, and career satisfaction (Carnevale et al., 2012). An educated individual who can live independently, work in a field that engages them intellectually and creatively, and does not rely on public assistance to survive, benefits society (Carnevale et al., 2012; Kuh et al., 2006).

Education has long been a force for social change in the United States. Faculty work to educate students in key academic domains, support creativity, collaboration, and prepare students for the rigors of professional careers. Current research suggests that college art instructors can enhance student success in art studios by understanding the vulnerability of students and the mental health challenges many students face. Educators

should be mindful of the reasons students give for their successes and failures. At the heart of this study are the ways in which educators can support students and help them find their way to college completion using a wealth of resources and interventions to become stronger, more resilient individuals. As the daily point of contact for students, faculty must remind students of the support available to them from counselors, mentors, tutors and financial aid advisors. The intent of this study was to promote awareness regarding the resilient factors that are important to art and design students in helping them handle the stressors they face while pursuing their degrees. Findings from this study on resilience has significance for a wider audience who feel they could benefit from resilience interventions.

Informing art and design educators regarding the factors of resilience seniors and the alum reported as significant to their success, universities have the ability to organize a social climate that educates, inspires, and motivates students to graduate. By creating a learning environment that is sensitive to the stresses students' face, educators can help them develop coping strategies that bolster resilience, persistence, and retention. Although academic learning and credentials are often the goals students pursue, the skills students develop in college, such as building resilient coping strategies, will serve them in all aspects of their lives. Walden University is committed to effecting positive social change with its educational programs. This study attempts to add to this initiative.

## Summary

In this chapter I presented the major sections of this study including the background, purpose, and research questions. I offered information on the selection of

conceptual frameworks that frame this study: resilience theory, mindsets, and the ecology

of human development, discussing definitions of key terms, and the rationale for the

selection of phenomenology as the research approach. I introduced the assumptions,

scope, delimitations, and limitations. Student success is vital to educators, students,

employers, and society. However, the challenges, trauma, and stresses inherent in a

student's life can set them back, making university completion difficult. Although I

gathered data from individuals, I also attempted to make sense of what this group of

participants said collectively, seeking themes and patterns. By knowing and

understanding the resilient factors, processes, and coping strategies that help students

gain resilience, educators can support a stronger, healthier student.

Even though critiques can be stressful events, art students rely on them to

strengthen their work. Studio critiques and student shows provide artists and designers

with beneficial feedback and inspiration. A student who is likely to have the resilience to

navigate the challenges inherent in college life is likely to complete their degree.

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human development states many factors come

together to develop a healthy adult. A talented, intelligent student relies on many external

and internal protective factors to achieve success. Students who lack strong resilient

coping strategies can benefit from interventions that build resilience. In Chapter 2, I

present relevant literature from empirical data-based research studies related to what

scholars currently know about resilience, stress, trauma, and coping strategies for college

students in general, and for college art and design students in particular.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

**Introduction**

I conducted a qualitative phenomenological study of the phenomenon of resilience in college art and design students using face-to-face interviews with students, faculty, and counselors. This chapter contains the literature-review strategy, conceptual frameworks of the study, and relevant research studies on resilience, stress, and mental health issues on college campuses today. The chapter includes information about students who struggle with mental health issues, abuse in childhood, and how these events affect academic success. The chapter incorporates external and internal protective factors that build and support resilience. It also discusses the particular stresses faced by students majoring in art and design, common coping strategies used by university students in general, and interventions that bolster student resilience, reduce stress, and enhance persistence are included. This review draws on literature on the social, psychological, educational, and biological aspects of resilience in college and university students, along with the coping strategies successful students used to navigate stressful college-life events.

College and university students nationwide are having a difficult time graduating in 6 years with a 4-year degree. According to a report by Selingo (2015) on student success, only "39% of first-time, full-time students" completed their bachelor's degree within four years, and "59% completed their degree in six years" (p.1). These statistics are alarming given the importance of a college degree in the job market today. Many reasons exist for low graduation rates and include financial concerns, relationship

problems, academic difficulties, family obligations, health concerns, changing career goals, and military service (Lipka, 2014; Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2007). College completion is difficult for many U.S. students and resilience and effective coping strategies are essential for student success (American College Health Association [ACHA], 2013; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Hartley, 2011, 2013).

An abundance of literature has shown the connection between stressful life events and their relationship to ill-health and psychological dysfunction (Beasley et al., 2003). Researchers have identified stress as an important contributing factor for diabetes, heart problems, depression, and substance abuse (Cohen, 2014). The APA (2011) reported that in the 1990s, college students pursued counseling services for informational needs, such as to resolve roommate and relationship problems. More recently, college counseling centers have noticed a shift in the needs of students. Larger numbers of students are dealing with mental health problems including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and self-injury (APA, 2011). Whether students have overcome trauma and abuse in childhood or have had stable family lives, many students still struggle to graduate (Angel & Connelly, 2011; Johnson, 2012; Lipka, 2014). The multiple protective factors that bolster resilience and success in college art and design students are key elements of this research study.

The topics discussed in this literature review are resilience in childhood, college stress in general, protective resilience factors, biological influences, coping strategies, and interventions to develop effective coping strategies and resilience. An abundance of research exists on resilience in childhood (Garmezy, 1991; Luthar et al., 2000; Masten,

2001; Werner & Smith, 2001). Early researchers focused on the resilience of children who were raised with neglect, abuse, trauma, and those whose parents were drug addicts, alcoholics, or mentally ill (Garmezy, 1991; Werner & Smith, 2001). Information from these research studies have been included in the report because memories of past events of childhood traumatic abuse, such as sexual and emotional abuse and neglect, community violence, poverty, natural disasters, and the death of a loved one, are likely to influence resilience in adulthood (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Werner & Smith, 2001; Wolniak, Rude, Gebhardt, & Hoffer, 2011). The death of a loved one was the most common adverse event among college students and has been reported by "22% of students" as highly stressful (Bonanno 2004, 2009; Rutter, Weatherill, Krill, Orazem, & Taft, 2013, p. 58).

I discuss the three theories that contributed to the conceptual frameworks for this study in this literature review. First, the theory of resilience includes the many definitions and perspectives that support resilience. Resilience theory suggests four ways to examine this phenomenon: behaviors, process, genetics, and outcomes (Cicchetti, 2010; Lemery-Chalfant, 2010). Second, I examined mindset theories of self-beliefs regarding resilience. Mindsets include self-efficacy, optimism, perseverance, and hardiness, and are considered internal protective factors. Third, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory of human development addresses a students' interactions with the environment, called external protective factors, that influences human development.

This chapter includes a discussion of literature on the effects of stress and trauma on learning as they are experienced in the general college student population and the

unique stresses that art and design students face. I did not include articles or studies related to K–12 art and design education, and resilience of individuals based on ethnicity, religious affiliation, marital status, medical conditions, old age, or military experience in this study because the focus of this study was on university art and design students.

## Literature Search Strategy

I found research articles analyzed for this literature review through a search of the EBSCO*host* and Psych Info electronic databases. The key search terms included resilience, college-student stress, art and design mental health, college-student resilience, educational resilience, ego resilience, student success, self-efficacy, mindsets, phenomenology, rejection, self-beliefs, visual-art stress, coping strategies, and studio critiques. Advanced searches were conducted with Walden's library resources and included these terms: art and design attrition, art and design resilience, college-student educational resilience, college-student depression, retention, college-student persistence, gene environment, Husserl, Heidegger, and epigenetics.

Few peer-reviewed articles described the mental health of art and design students. The pressure to produce a painting or sculpture, or render a design that is original can be stressful because of the personal nature of presenting their work before the class (Grant, 2010). Therefore, much of the literature on college-student resilience, coping strategies, and stress is based on college students in general and its generalizability to art and design students is unclear.

**Conceptual Frameworks**

The conceptual frameworks for this study were designed to inductively build on concepts and theories. A conceptual framework defines the assumptions, beliefs, and theories that inform this research (Merriam, 2009). No single theory could frame the research questions in this study because of the complex issues and multiple factors that influence resilience and retention. Resilience theory, mindsets, and the ecology of human-development theory provided the basic structure for this qualitative study. These theories guided the research process and supported the investigation, design, and data-collection strategies.

**Resilience Theory**

Definitions of resilience abound. The English word resilience is derived from the Latin word *resiliens*, which means "to spring forward or leap back into position" (Robertson, 2012, p. 4). Resilience theory examines the process of recovery from adversity, which is influenced by culture, individual attributes, family, and the environment (Glantz & Johnson, 1999; Reich et al., 2010). Resilience theory provides a lens to view individual attributes and coping strategies that help a person adapt to stress and unwanted change (Reich et al., 2010; Zolli & Healy, 2012).

Some scholars have debated whether resilience is a group of personality traits, a process, or the outcome of successful adaptation to adversity (Luthar et al., 2000; Zautra et al., 2008). According to Masten and O'Dougherty Wright (2010), resilience may be a dynamic process that comes from many processes and interactions that occur during and following an adverse event. Contemporary research looks at genetic influences on

resilience. "Resilience involves intrinsic and extrinsic processes of successful adaptation to adversity, and genetic variations contribute to individual differences in these capacities" (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 71). I explain all four in this literature review.

According to Masten et al., (1990), the dynamic process of resilience requires a study of two critical conditions: exposure to a significant threat or adversity, and positive adaption to this adversity. According to this theory, a resilient outcome would be the successful completion of a senior-thesis project or the completion of a college degree. Why do some students buckle under pressure, while other students forge ahead? Coutu (2002) posited that resilient people have a good grasp on reality, strongly held values that life is meaningful, and an uncanny ability to improvise (p. 2). The factors that scholars agree influence resilience will be identified in this chapter.

Critics of resilience report that there is nothing special or unique about resilient individuals (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, 2001; Perry, 1997, 2000). Masten (2001) reported that resilience is not extraordinary, but very commonplace, and is the result of the operation of basic human adaptation. Some researchers contend that resilience is a common response to adversity. "There is now compelling evidence, however, that a genuine and enduring resilience is not rare but is common and neither a sign of exceptional strength or psychopathology, but a fundamental feature of normal coping skills" (as cited in Mancini & Bonanno, 2010, p. 262). Perry (2000) posited that early life abuse and neglect can have detrimental effects lasting well into adulthood and "that children are malleable, but not resilient" (p. 124).

Many trauma practitioners and scholars focus on maltreated children such as children who have been neglected or sexually, emotionally, or physically abused (Johnson, 2012; Perry, 2008; Van der Kolk et al., 2005). An individual who has experienced trauma is less able to concentrate, is more anxious, and may feel overwhelmed, angry, or helpless (Perry, 2006). According to Perry (2006), among adults who have experienced abuse, neglect, developmental chaos, or violence in childhood, "nearly one-third have trouble learning" (p. 21). When a student feels threatened, for example, during a formal critique of their work, responses can vary. Perry (2006) stated that dissociation is a mental mechanism where one withdraws; "daydreaming is an example of a dissociative event that occurs in many classrooms" (p. 24).

In this study, I focused on definitions of resilience that pertain to educational psychology and not trauma psychology, because the study is centered on students in higher education. Resilience develops, in part, when someone in the individual's environment cares for them and looks at them as though they are smart and wonderful (Luthar, 2006; Werner & Smith, 2001). If this does not happen, the individual will not have learned empathy or compassion and they may be hurtful toward themselves (self-hateful) or others (Perry, 2006). The individual may develop posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, or depression, as well as attachment disorders (Johnson, 2012; Perry & Szalavitz, 2011). As the individual matures, trauma-related mental disorders will continue unless otherwise treated with psychotherapy (Perry & Szalavitz, 2011). Whether one believes resilience is a phenomenon, or is mainly a process of human adaptation, or a process of childhood experiences and environments, it is worthy of review to understand

the causes behind why some students fail and others succeed in college art and design programs.

**Mindsets**

The mindset a person adopts regarding intelligence, artistic talent, and personal success is likely to influence resilience and college completion. Dweck's (2006) self-theories focus on beliefs individuals have regarding ability, success, and failure. Dweck, Walton, and Cohen (2014) posited students' beliefs about themselves, their feelings, and self-control matter more to resilience than academic ability. Mindsets are an internal protective factor for resilience and consist of self-beliefs about intelligence, talent, social skills, and self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Skodol, 2010; Dweck, 2000; Dweck et al., 2014). Students who are given positive feedback about their effort and hard work as they progress through their college years may become more positive about their social and academic abilities and develop an enhanced sense of self-worth (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005).

Dweck (2006) found students to be of either a *growth mindset,* following an *incremental theory*, or a *fixed mindset,* following an *entity theory*. Students with growth mindsets adopt learning goals and are motivated by learning new ideas, excited by the challenge of trying to master a new project (Dweck & Molden, 2005; Elliot & Dweck, 2005; Reeve, 2009). Findings from research by Burnette et al. (2013) demonstrated that college students with growth mindsets used self-regulation processes that influenced "goal setting, goal operating, and goal monitoring" (p. 655). For students with growth mindsets, failure is less devastating because even though these students might not have

the skills or abilities they want, that lack can be mitigated through practice and increased effort (Dweck et al., 1995).

In contrast, students with fixed mindsets believe that intelligence, artistic or musical talent, and athletic abilities are characteristics with which someone is born. Students with a fixed mindsets prefer to avoid new projects because they fear they will look stupid or incompetent if they are not proficient on the first try. The student with a fixed mindset may be quite talented and intelligent, but this mindset seems to prevent effective use of adaptive coping strategies (Dweck, 2006, p. 39). Students with fixed mindsets have a tendency to ruminate on problems and setbacks, tormenting themselves with thoughts that they are incompetent (Dweck, 2006; Dweck et al., 2011). Congruent with Dweck's earlier research, Robins and Pals (2002) found that students with fixed mindsets adopted performance goals and displayed a helpless response when faced with challenging work; whereas students with growth mindsets exhibited learning goals (p. 313). Students with fixed-mindset beliefs viewed setbacks as signs of poor ability; failure threatened self-esteem because it indicated they lacked the ability in question and would never have it (Dweck, 2000; Dweck & Molden, 2005).

Niiya et al. (2004) reported "that entity theories [fixed mindsets] and contingent self-worth were unrelated" (p. 804). This contrasts with Dweck's (2000) suggestion that students' beliefs that support a fixed mindset cause contingent self-worth. Dweck suggested that growth mindsets protected self-esteem. Niiya et al. did not find this to be true. Niiya et al. suggested that training students with fixed mindsets to focus on learning

and improving, instead of showing others how smart and talented they are, could be an effective intervention for students with vulnerable self-esteem and depression (p. 804).

Congruent with a large body of literature, academic self-beliefs relate positively to student success (Mattern & Shaw, 2010, p. 675). What a student believes about their abilities regarding their intelligence and talent often determines their motivation to achieve goals, resilience, and cope successfully when faced with challenging events. Self-beliefs and personal traits will be discussed later in this chapter in the section on internal protective factors.

**The Ecology of Human-Development**

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) conceptual framework states that to understand human development, the environment in which one lives is a significant element and requires consideration. Bronfenbrenner's seminal work has influenced the ways researchers study the influences that shape human beings. The ecology of human development suggests that the study of human growth is interactive, and that multiple factors work together to influence growth. As a person moves through life, changes in neighborhoods, schools, friends, caretakers, teachers, and coaches influence growth and development. Scholars agree that the tender, loving care of a parent or caregiver is critical to human development and influences brain and social development (Johnson, 2012; Luthar et al., 2000; Perry, 1997, 2000, 2005, 2008; Werner & Smith, 2001).

Initially, the *microsystem* fosters development between a person and activities, roles, and interpersonal relationships, such as family and friends (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 21–22). Luthar (2006) concluded after a review of 50 years of research on resilience,

"Resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships" (p. 780). Simply stated, the people students have in their lives who support their dreams and offer wise counsel help bolster resilience. Secondly, the *mesosystem*, influences human development among two or more settings. For a college student, this may include home, dormitory, classroom, design studio, and work. The *exosystem* refers to environmental settings that do not involve the person, but may affect them. For example, these settings might include college curriculum and graduation requirements, state legislative decisions regarding funding for higher education, and family finances. The *macrosystem* refers to consistencies that exist along with belief systems underlying consistencies. For example, most people in the United States share a belief that higher education is important for the benefit of income, career mobility, and status (Pew Research Center, 2011).

Aligned with Bronfenbrenner's theory, researchers found that human achievement depends on interactions between a student's behaviors, beliefs, ability, social connections, and environmental conditions (Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Mattern & Shaw, 2010). According to Lemery-Chalfant (2010), "Risk and protective processes operate at genetic, neurobiological, individual and social levels and do not act in isolation" (p. 71). This statement supports Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of human development that indicates personal growth comes from interactions with a broad number of environmental factors. In an effort to understand college-student resilience, scholars view the environment, protective factors, and processes that support student success (Mayer & Faber, 2010; Skodol, 2010; Luecken & Gress, 2010).

The literature indicates that the living environment of a student, who is raised by loving parents, attends quality schools, has financial security, high self-efficacy, and intelligence is at a clear advantage for student success (Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcan 2013; Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health [CSCMH], 2009; O'Dougherty Wright, Crawford, & Del Castillo, 2009). However, students born into poverty, with parents who abuse and neglect them, who do not have access to quality schools, but have the motivation and ability, can still achieve student success (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Despite greater difficulties, students who develop resilient protective factors and processes may still complete college (Clauss-Ehlers, 2008; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Rutter et al., 2013; Werner & Smith, 2001).

**Psychosocial Influences on Resilience**

According to Mayer and Faber (2010), resilience can be examined between an individual's health and personality, and in a psychosocial relationship between the individual and the social environment. Scholars do not agree on the role intelligence plays in resilience. Friborg et al. (2005) and Werner and Smith (2001) believe resilient individuals are not necessarily intellectually strong, but are skilled at using resources and protective factors that are available to them. Luecken and Gress (2010) disagreed, saying that having higher cognitive ability strongly predicts resilience. Friborg et al. (2005) reported the following:

Resilience was measured in college students using the Resilience Scale for Adults (RSA) in which participants responded to 33 questions in five key areas: personal strength, social competence, structured style, family cohesion, and social

resources. Students who scored high on the RSA were found to be "psychologically healthier, better adjusted, and thus more resilient." (p. 29)

A key question of this study is how art and design students fare when they who do not have a supportive family or strong social skills and resources. In an effort to understand what college students do to overcome social voids, financial problems, or unsupportive families, it is important to refer students to campus counselors, advisors, mentors and the financial aid office to provide support and gather information that will help them cope with these challenges.

**Resilient Outcomes**

Resilience has been studied in relationship to childhood abuse, neglect, poverty, individual trauma (family violence or abuse), natural disasters, war, and death (Bonanno, 2004; Johnson, 2012; Masten, 2001; Masten & Obradovic, 2008; Perry et al., 2005; Werner & Smith, 2001). These scholars have looked at the outcomes of adult life for who had experienced these difficult childhoods. Early studies on resilience in the 1970s focused on deficits, such as children who were at risk for poor social and educational outcomes based on early family-life experiences. In spite of very difficult childhoods, some young people have shown remarkable resilience and growth, developed into well-adjusted, productive adults, but these are the exception (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; Werner & Smith, 2001).

In a longitudinal study of residents on the island of Kauai, Werner and Smith, (2001) studied children who were born into poverty, had complicated births, uneducated parents, mentally ill or alcoholic parents, and were at risk of poor life outcomes. The

researchers studied participants at various developmental stages. Significant factors that contributed to resilience in the Kauai study were protective factors such as social maturity, scholastic competence, self-efficacy, and health status (Werner & Smith, 2001, p. 161).

> The most striking finding of the Kauai study was that in two follow-ups in adulthood at ages 32 and 40, most of the high-risk youths who developed serious coping problems in adolescence had staged a recovery by the time they reached midlife. (Werner & Smith, p. 167)

Most children who suffered from abuse and neglect do not have positive outcomes; an abundance of research exists on this topic. According to Werner and Smith (2001), "only 25% of women and 30% of men in the Kauai study managed to make satisfactory midlife adaptations by age forty" (pp. 144–145). According to Werner and Smith, "one out of six (16%) were doing poorly, struggling with chronic financial problems, domestic conflict, violence, substance abuse, serious mental health problems, and/or low self-esteem" (p. 37). Among the most potent forces for positive change for these high-risk youths in adulthood were strong support systems, often spouses or counselors (Werner & Smith, 2001, pp. 168–169).

A considerable body of research on resilience supports the protective factors with which students are either born, such as having loving caregivers, financial security, and access to the best schools, or protective factors students cultivate, such as finding a mentor, joining a spiritual community, or receiving counseling (Luthar et al., 2000; Pargament & Cummings, 2010; Werner & Smith, 2001; Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012).

**Protective Factors That Influence Resilience**

Protective factors buffer an individual's reaction to a stressful event, making the ability to bounce back to a healthier state easier (Luecken & Gress, 2010). Classified as external and internal, protective factors provide the individual with needed support to weather stressful events. Protective factors may vary from one individual to another, but the most resilient individuals share some common factors. Resilience is not a single trait that some have and others do not; rather, it is a combination of behaviors, mindsets, social skills, and genes that influence their ability to cope with stress (APA, 2014; Zautra et al., 2008). Positive emotions serve as a foundation for resilience (Ong et al., 2010; Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Block and Block (1980) asserted that ego-resilience is a personal characteristic of an individual. In contrast, Luthar et al. (2000) defined resilience as a dynamic developmental process. Findings suggest that personality resilience is generative of other assets, catalyzing or setting into motion a cascade of positive experiences. Compared to those low in personality resilience, high-resilient individuals appear to exhibit "greater engagement in, responsiveness to, and savoring of daily positive events" (Ong et al., 2010, p. 88).

Positive emotions serve as effective buffers against stress. Resilient individuals who use positive emotions to rebound from stress, are optimistic and energetic, and find meaning in negative circumstances (Luecken & Gress, 2010, Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). A successful, resilient student may not have all of these protective factors in place but is likely to have a combination of several protective factors and may be able to

acquire other protective factors as they mature. Other influences follow that explain the combination of factors that contribute to resilience in students and the general population.

**External protective factors.** External protective factors for resilience include having a social network of people who believe and encourage them. In addition, positive self-care, diet and exercise, adequate finances, and housing also support resilience. External protective factors fall under Bronfenbrenner's (1979) description of the microsystem (family, friends) and the macrosystem (relationships with institutions) as well as the exosystem, influenced by forces outside the individuals' environment but that affect it. The *chronosystem* consists of major life events that influence development such marriage, the birth of a child, divorce, and death of a loved one. The mesosystem refers to the relationships between the microsystems. Supportive family, friends, social climate at the college the student attends, and many other factors help bolster a student's resilience. This does not mean students without supportive family and friends are doomed to live miserable lives. These students may have to acquire other supportive relationships with counselors, mentors, a religious or spiritual guide, or an athletic coach.

*Faculty, mentor, and tutor relationships.* When students do not have a loving caregiver or individual who supports their goals and dreams, it is often a teacher, spiritual or religious leader, mentor, or other role model who provides the encouragement needed to persevere (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Tinto (1993) reported the more time students spend with faculty who engage and interact with them, the more likely students are to stay enrolled. Social integration, and student–faculty relationships strongly support student success (Lillis, 2011; Tinto, 2007). Researchers maintained the importance of

frequent informal communication with faculty as supporting greater emotional intelligence, motivation, collaboration with others, and leadership skills (Lillis, 2011). Strategies directed toward faculty-student interactions may be valuable interventions for improving student resilience (Lillis, 2011). The University of Chicago Study (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012) found that mentors played a significant role in helping students cope with the stress of the college environment. In addition, mentors helped students develop critical thinking and leadership skills (Wolniak et al., 2011). Tinto (1993) posited that "experiences on campus are, for most students, paramount to the process of persistence" (p. 129).

Academic tutors used in a study with third year film and media students provided students who had low self-confidence with crucial support for student success (Peck, Chilvers, & Lincoln, 2010). Students learn by modeling the behaviors of faculty, tutors, and mentors, a process called *observational learning* (Southwick & Charney, 2012). Students are likely to absorb the cultural values and beliefs of faculty, mentors, and others they admire helping them gain confidence.

***Family and social support.*** Having a strong, loving caregiver in early life is a recurring theme in resilience studies (Luecken & Gress, 2010; Perry et al., 2005; Werner, 1993; Werner & Smith, 2001). A mother's loving care in early childhood was positively linked to resilience adaptation at the age of 40, in addition to health, self-efficacy, and the ability to make realistic plans (Perry et al., 2005; Werner & Smith, 2001). Social networks enhance resilience and health when they bolster effective coping strategies,

reduce the degree to which dangers are seen as being insurmountable, and increase

feelings of self-worth (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

Parents who can afford to live in neighborhoods with low crime rates, good

schools and community resources, and have the assets to hire tutors if their children need

them, thereby provide a home life with fewer stressors (Masten, 2001, p. 228). Scholars

agree that the support of someone (e.g., parent, spouse, mentor, spiritual advisor, coach,

or faculty member) who believes in a person and offers encouragement influences

resilience and student success (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; S. Johnson, 2012; O'Dougherty

Wright et al., 2009; Werner & Smith, 2001). A strong social-support group of family and

friends provides significant benefits for cognitive, emotional, and positive life outcomes

(Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Luthar, 2006; Masten, 2001). Social anxiety and academic

stress ranks high among college students' worries (Seiben, 2011). Mason et al. (2014)

reported that close peer relationships also served as a resilient protective factor against

psychiatric symptoms among college students (p. 470).

*Financial support.* Students consistently report financial problems as

impediments to graduation (Angel & Connelly, 2011; Lipka, 2014; Wolniak & Gebhardt,

2012). Today's college students are having a difficult time paying for college. It is not

uncommon for students to work full-time while taking a full load of classes; others work

30+ hours in addition to a full class schedule and family obligations (Torres, Gross, &

Dadashova, 2011, p. 52). Students who are resilient and complete college with a

bachelor's degree often carry a great deal of student loan debt. According to the College

Board, "for-profit graduates with a bachelor's degree carry an average indebtedness of

$33,000, [that is] "$13,000 more than public-college graduates, and $5,000 more than those finishing at private colleges" (Angel & Connelly, 2011 p. 92).

The Horatio Alger Scholarships have provided need-based financial aid to students nationally who have overcome adversity through perseverance. Wolniak and Gebhardt (2012) reported that "almost a fourth of [scholarship] applicants mentioned having suffered some form of psychological distress (e.g., anxiety, feelings of helplessness, or depression)" (p. 22). In a study at the University of Chicago, nearly all Horatio Alger scholarship recipients had critical financial need; roughly half had experienced the death, incarceration, or abandonment of a parent or guardian; more than one-third had been exposed to addiction in their home; and roughly one-fourth had suffered abuse (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012, p. 29).

> The fact that the majority of Horatio Alger Association (HAA) scholarship recipients come from families earning less than $15,000 per year. That places these students at risk of following national trends which clearly show the disadvantages that students from low-income families confront in realizing postsecondary success. (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012, p. 29)

Despite these adversities, more than half of these scholarship recipients indicated adversity has been a motivating force in their lives and that their adversity made them more determined to succeed (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Some college students who were awarded Horatio Alger scholarships found the hardships they faced as children, such as poverty, incarcerated parents, drug abuse, death, and violence, strengthened their motivation to succeed (Hines et al., 2005; Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012; Wolniak et al.,

2011). As one student stated, "*I could choose to see adversities as obstacles. But I have chosen to view them as challenges and opportunities*" (italics in original, Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012, p. 22). The Horatio Alger Association described in the University of Chicago study on educational resilience was based on the premise that a combination of individual attributes, support structures, and financial aid support resilience and life success for vulnerable students (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Graduates required more than financial aid to complete their degrees. Study participants also shared internal protective factors such as perseverance, grit, tenacity, academic ability, optimism, and positive self-beliefs played significant roles in their resilience as well (Bandura, 1977; Duckworth et al., 2007; Schechtman, DeBarger, Dornsife, Rosier, & Yarnall, 2013; Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012; Wolniak et al., 2011).

*Peer Support.* A recent report on college freshmen found students feel more confident about their academic skills than they do about their social skills (Berrett & Hoover, 2015). Students rely on peers for support and many students select colleges based on the services colleges offer to enhance socialization.

In 1987, 37.9% of incoming college students socialized at least 16 hours per week with friends. By 2014, only 18% of students' reported spending 16 hours per week socializing with friends (an all-time low), but have increased their use of online social networks. (Eagan, et al., 2014, p. 11)

*Exercise and self-care.* Researchers supported the importance of engaging in positive self-care, developing good social skills, maintaining a healthy lifestyle, exercise, and meditation as factors that support resilience (Rutter et al., 2013; Skodol, 2010).

College students with high-stress levels and lower levels of self-esteem are more likely to engage in poor health habits and are at greater risk of suicide and depression (Wilburn & Smith, 2005). Numerous studies have shown that exercise relates to improved health and psychological well-being (Rutter et al., 2013). Participating in physical exercise can improve confidence and foster mental toughness (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

Lack of sleep, a common problem among college students, influences well-being and performance. Sleep duration and quality have declined among college students, with 50% reporting difficulty sleeping, sleeping fewer hours than needed, and having irregular sleep schedules (Kenney, Paves, Grimaldi, & LaBrie, 2014). Sleep deprivation can be observed in brain function and behavior and can lead to irritability and emotional volatility (Southwick & Charney, 2012). College students who report high levels of stress are also likely to report poor sleep quality (Kenney et al., 2014). Sleep problems and alcohol use are related among college students (Kenney et al., 2014).

**Internal protective factors.** Internal protective factors consist of personality traits and mindset beliefs that influence resilience. APA (2000) defined personality as the traits that influence how people think about themselves and the environment. Masten and O'Dougherty Wright (2010) studied optimism and reported on its influence to resilience. Duckworth et al. (2007) has researched tenacity, perseverance and grit in education. Researchers on resilience identified a number of personality traits, beliefs, and behaviors that bolster resilience. These traits include hardiness (Khoshaba, Maddi, & Kahn, 1982) and high levels of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Byrd & McKinney, 2012). Scholars of resilience theory believe the common factors that support resilience can be cultivated and

nurtured to enhance student success (Luthar et al., 2000; Ong et al., 2010; Wolniak, 2011).

*Hardiness.* What makes one hardy is tenacity, a toughness that some individuals have that help them cope with stress more successfully than others (Aptor, 2007; Duckworth et al., 2007; Dweck et al., 2011). Hardiness maintains or even "enhances health under stressful circumstances" (Maddi, 2007, p. 52). People need hardiness to accurately assess stressful events and be motivated to manage them effectively (Maddi et al., 2012). Hardiness has been shown to be a factor in resilience for college students (Maddi, 2007). Zolli and Healy (2012) indicate hardiness is a personality trait that is rooted in belief systems that allow one to "cognitively reappraise situations and regulate emotions, turning life's proverbial lemons into lemonade" (p. 127).

*Optimism.* Optimists tend to see situations in a positive way and believe they can influence events for good in their lives (Southwick & Charney, 2012). The display of positive emotions establishes an upward spiral of positive experiences that promote resilience (Ong et al., 2010). Research on optimism has shown that positive emotions broaden attention, open an individual's mind to new information, and enhance physical and emotional well-being (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Seligman, 2011; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Optimists increase resilience by reframing a stressful event, using active problem-solving, and believe that regardless of the problem, they have the skills to change things for the better.

If students are born into families where pessimistic thinking is the norm, and want to change from a pessimistic to an optimistic way of thinking, it is possible to make

changes. Intervention and training programs exist that help youth and adults change their attitudes and thinking patterns from pessimistic to optimistic (Yeager, Fisher, & Shearon, 2011). With intervention programs, such as the Penn Resilience Training (PRT) for college students, it is possible to retrain the mind to think and approach life with optimistic views. PRT helps support resilience and overall health by teaching students to replace negative thoughts with positive thoughts (APA, 2014; Reivich et al., 2003; Robertson, 2012; U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2007). PRT will be discussed more comprehensively under interventions in this literature review.

　　*Self-efficacy*. Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to plan and execute action that will lead to the fulfillment of one's goals (Bandura, 1977, 1995). An individual with high self-efficacy beliefs has self-confidence, a positive attitude to succeed, and persistence (Bandura, 1994; Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcn, 2013; Vuong et al., 2010). Becker and Gable (2009) studied career college students and found that self-efficacy beliefs "stimulated the goals students established, the amount of effort they were willing to put forth, and their resilience to adversity" (p. 6). Regardless of adversity, students with high self-efficacy perceived academic stress as part of the challenge of successfully completing a college degree (Becker & Gable, 2009).

　　A college student with high self-efficacy sees college work as a series of challenges to be accomplished, and these beliefs affect grade-point average and persistence rates (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Vuong et al., 2010). The strength of self-efficacy underlies self-regulated actions, expectations, goal setting, motivation,

perseverance, and resilience (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1997; Becker & Gable, 2009; Vuong et al., 2010).

Students often form opinions of themselves aligned with their successes and failures in previous academic settings and by comparisons with other students (Schunk & Meece, 2006). The most effective way of creating a strong sense of efficacy is through *mastery experiences* (italics in original, Bandura, 1995, p. 3). When a student masters an assignment, or even a partial step of the assignment, they attain self-efficacy. Likewise, if a student attempts a task and fails, self-efficacy is diminished (Bandura, 1995). Resilient students have high self-efficacy beliefs and trust they can achieve their goals (Bandura, 1995; Byrd & McKinney, 2012). When setbacks occur, these students trust in their skills, and talents to find solutions, resolve problems, and visualize their success. Students who regard themselves as highly efficacious attribute their setbacks to insufficient effort or adverse situational conditions, whereas those who regard themselves as inefficacious tend to attribute their failures to low ability (Bandura, 1995). Self-efficacy can be increased or decreased based on comments by others (Mattern & Shaw, 2010). Vicarious experiences can also strengthen self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1995). Vicarious experiences occur when students witness others like themselves who persevere (Bandura, 1995). The student develops the sense that they too can master the same task.

A third way of enhancing efficacy beliefs is through stress reduction and by eliminating negative emotional statements (Bandura, 1995). Students with low self-efficacy beliefs visualize failures and focus on what can go wrong, which can lead to depression or anxiety (Dweck, 2000). A fourth method of strengthening self-efficacy

beliefs is through social persuasion (Bandura, 1995). In this manner, an influential person encourages, coaxes, and supports the student as they attempt a challenging task. This support and encouragement underscores the importance of faculty-student relationships, mentors, tutors, coaches, spiritual leaders, and loving family and friends.

*Spirituality and religion.* Spiritual and religious beliefs appear to play a protective role in college resilience and serve as protective factors for a large number of students. According to the Center for the Study of Collegiate Mental Health (CSCMH) (2009) report, "28,000 college students from 66 colleges [nearly] 80% reported a religious or spiritual preference" (p. 19). Students who identified as spiritual or religious showed lower levels of suicide, depression, and substance abuse than peers who did not indicate spiritual or religious beliefs (CSCMH, 2009). College students who reported strong spiritual beliefs reported better health outcomes than students who did not report strong spiritual beliefs by processing the risks (e.g., binge drinking or unprotected sex) that could their affect health (Nelms, Hutchins, Hutchins, & Pursley, 2007). Harrell and Powell (2014) reported college students who indicated strong religious beliefs were less motivated to drink alcohol as a means of coping with college stress than their peers.

Burris et al., (2009) reported that "optimism, health, and religiousness were positively associated with well-being" and less distress among college students (p. 536). Hopefulness and trust that life will be better in the future influences resilience (Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010). Pargament and Cummings (2010) posited that "religiousness can be a powerful force for resilience among people grappling with the most traumatic experiences in life" (p. 207). Pargament and Cummings (2010), asserted

that relationships formed in a religious or spiritual community provide emotional support, social connections, financial assistance, and serve as a "catalyst for positive life changes and stress-related growth" (p. 207).

***Tenacity, perseverance, and grit.*** Researchers described the tendency to keep going in the face of adversity, setbacks, and failure as tenacity, perseverance, and grit (Shechtman et al., 2013). Grit, a construct and trait of perseverance in difficult tasks, has been a variable in self-efficacy studies, optimistic-attribution styles, and goal orientation (Bandura, 1977; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009; Elliott & Dweck, 1988). Duckworth and Quinn (2009) reported that grit was often more important than talent in student success. According to Duckworth and Quinn, "grit predicted achievement in challenging domains over and beyond measures of talent" (p. 166). Persistence in the face of setbacks is a key element for resilience and students need both "perseverance of effort and consistency to succeed in most domains" (Duckworth & Quinn, p. 172). Some students give up after the first major obstacle they encountered, while others persist relentlessly, demonstrating tenacity, grit, and perseverance (Duckworth et al., 2007). Educational resilience occurs when students overcome adversity and sacrifice immediate gratification to ensure future success (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Schechtman et al., (2013) posits to accomplish long-term goals in the face of challenges and setbacks, a student must engage psychological resources, academic mindsets, and perseverance.

**Biological Influences on Resilience**

As a result of advances in brain imaging, scientists have been able to study the biological underpinnings of genes and their influence on intelligence, personality, and

resilience (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010). Genetic alleles (or various forms of a gene) do not predict behavior or well-being, but can influence tendencies toward some behaviors and overall health behaviors (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010). Genes play a role along with the environment in personality and resilience. "Genes and the environment work together to promote resilience" (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 57). Three types of gene environments connect with human development: gene-environment interactions, gene-environment correlations, and epigenetics (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 60). Gene-environment correlations "affect lifestyle selection, dietary preferences and exercise habits" (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 61).

Caspi et al. (2003) investigated the impact of a gene named 5-HTT, which regulates the transmission of serotonin. The researchers "analyzed 847 participants for stressful events like the death of a loved one, job loss and romantic failure" (Zolli & Healy, 2012, pp. 130–131). Of the group that experienced depression following these stressors, "43% with two short alleles; reported experiencing depression versus only 17% for subjects with at least one long allele" (Moffit et al., as cited in Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 131). Researchers continue to find "correlations between 5-HTT and traits like optimism and happiness, suggesting long- and short-allele variants may play a role in resilience" (Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 132). Results from twin studies suggested that "only 30–50% of most personality traits are genetic, including optimism; and the other 50–70% depends on environment" (Southwick & Charney, 2012, p. 38). Scholars call this theory stress diathesis or genetic vulnerability, putting forth the concept that gene variants increase a person's likelihood for depression, anxiety, or other pathologies (Rutter,

Moffit, & Caspi, 2006; Zolli & Healy, 2012, p. 131). Different forms of alleles, may

influence differences in an individuals' personality. According to Lemery-Chalfant,

(2010), "many genes only have one form, or allele; heredity focuses on genes that have

different alleles that may influence individual variation in the observed trait, or

phenotype" (p. 56). Epigenetics is a third type of gene-environment interplay and "refers

to changes in the regulation of gene activity and expression due to the microenvironment

that result in changes in the phenotype" (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 63). Epigenetic traits

can be passed from one generation to the next and work in addition to a person's DNA.

Additional research on how genes interact with the environment is likely to provide more

information on human development. "Integrating the study of epigenetics with other

methods of gene-environment interplay holds great promise for elucidating mechanisms

of normal development, resilience, and complex diseases" (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p.

64). To understand resilience, it is important to look at protective factors, mindsets,

genetics, and the environment to see how these forces work in concert to create student

success.

**Academic Success and Mental Health**

A significant amount of literature exists on college-student stress and the mental

health challenges students face (ACHA, 2013; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; CSCMH, 2009;

Eisenberg, Hunt, & Spear, 2013; Hartley, 2011, 2013; Mistler et al., 2012) and can be

treated with medications and counseling. APA (2011) reported that the numbers are

rising for students struggling with eating disorders, substance abuse, and self-injury. The

College and University Counseling Center Directors (2012) report of 400 colleges and

universities indicated that "36.4% of students suffered from depression, 41.6% from anxiety, 35.8% from relationship problems, 9.9% from substance abuse/dependence, and 16.1% from suicidal thoughts or behavior" (as cited in Mistler et al., 2012, p. 5).

Students who struggled with depression and anxiety also reported struggling to meet academic requirements (CSCMH, 2009). In a study of "132 colleges and universities representing 95,000 students" on issues that influence a student's mental health while in college, the data reported academic distress related to childhood abuse, physical, sexual, and emotional abuse (CCMH, 2013, p. 2). These experiences had a significant influence on mental health: "2,967 report physical abuse, 2,641 report sexual abuse, 7,056 report emotional abuse, 2,572 report being mugged, beaten or stabbed, and 4,160 report being raped, stalked, attacked" (CCMH, 2013, p. 14). The use of psychotropic medications among college students is significant. Mistler et al., (2012) reported "On average, 24.5% of college students take psychotropic medications" (p. 9).

In a study of New York City college students, Bonanno (2009) asked students to list life events such as financial trouble, relationship problems, assault, or other traumatic events over the course of their 4 years in college. Students reported significant events as happening "once or twice each year", which was higher than previous surveys led researchers to expect (p. 53). Bonanno (2009) concluded that people forget disturbing events over time, so weekly online reports brought forth more traumatic events than if they have been recalled from memory. "While some events are forgotten, others are so intense, they change lives forever" (Bonanno, 2009, p. 56). A prior research found, the

effects of trauma can have life-long influences (Johnson, 2012; Perry et al., 2005; Van der Kolk et al., 2005).

Students from low socioeconomic groups who participated in the arts were more likely to apply to college and pursue professional careers than peers who had little art exposure. In four longitudinal studies on the arts and achievement in "71,610 at-risk youth and young adults, from five to 27 years old," reported that students with high arts participation "outperformed peers with low arts participation" (Catterall et al., 2012, p. 2). High arts participation "positively connected to test scores, grades, graduation, college enrollment, volunteerism, and participation in local and student government" (Catterall et al., 2012, p. 24).

Protective factors that supported resilience and were well-established can be compromised when an individual faces new challenges (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010, p. 58). When a student enters college, gets married, or moves into a place of their own, the environment changes significantly. These changes can challenge protective factors that were firmly in place. These findings may shed some light on why college students are vulnerable to drug and alcohol abuse, eating disorders, depression, and anxiety when they leave home to live on campus (CSCMH, 2009; Mistler et al., 2012).

**Stress and Trauma in College Students**

Stressful life events occur for everyone many times over the lifespan (Aptor, 2007; Zolli & Healy, 2012). Stress occurs when people feel situations are more than they can manage emotionally, placing them at risk for harm or threat (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 152; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Pierceall and Keim (2007) reported "12% of

college students were highly stressed, 75% [of students surveyed] experienced moderate stress, 13% experienced low stress" (p. 703). No significant difference emerged between traditional and nontraditional students in reports of stress; but women reported higher overall stress than men (Brougham et al., 2009; Pierceall & Keim, 2007). Lin and Huang (2014) found life stress and "academic burnout aligns with poor college academic performance" (p. 77).

Childhood traumas have been linked to an increase in college withdrawal (Duncan, 2000). Childhood abuse and neglect create significant changes in the brain that cause life-long effects, influencing a student's performance abilities (Johnson, 2012; Perry, 2006). Traumatic experiences, especially in young children, can contribute to a wide variety of problems such as memory and attention deficits, interpersonal-relationship problems, and issues with regulation of affect and impulses (CSCMH, 2009, p. 18; Van der Kolk et al., 2005). Research studies on children who were removed from neglectful environments and placed in consistent, nurturing environments showed significant improvement in behavioral functioning. Children raised in homes with minimal physical affection, neglect, abuse, and trauma develop deficits in brain development that influence learning abilities (Perry, 2008). Traumatic childhood events affect emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and social functioning (Perry, 2000, 2005, 2006, 2008). The home environment plays an important role in learning. Perry (2005) reported "significant increases in I.Q. of over 40 points" when children were placed in "nurturing, safe and enriching" homes (p. 101).

Some youth who experienced maltreatment (abuse and neglect) as children have been unable to overcome their childhood trauma (Hines et al., 2005). In a study of college students, aged 19–35 who were in the foster system during childhood, researchers identified these common goals: positive hopes and plans for the future, a sense of social responsibility, the desire for family, assertiveness, independence, and the ability to ask for and accept help (Hines et al., 2005). Concerns over being forced out of foster care at the age of 18 and having nowhere to live, as well as dreams of financial security, inspired the students in this study to pursue higher education. Students who had lived with abuse reported the school environment to be a haven, a place of support, and stability in their otherwise chaotic lives. These students looked forward to school for the encouragement they received from teachers and the structure school provided (Hines et al., 2005).

Students who arrive on campus with a history of abuse, neglect, or witness violence are likely to have trouble learning (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; Perry, 2006; Van der Kolk et al., 2005). "An adult learner with a history of trauma (therefore in a persisting state of arousal) can sit in a classroom and not learn effectively" (Perry, 2006, p. 25). A study of the most devastating trauma experienced by college students reported:

> The death of a friend or loved one (22%) [most frequently reported]. Other stressors included distress due to a natural disaster (8%), motor vehicle or other accidents (7.5%), assault, (1.5%), robbery (3%), witnessing domestic violence (6.5%), and sexual abuse (5.5%). (Rutter et al., 2013, p. 58)

In a study of grief and trauma victims, Bonanno (2009) interviewed participants after the loss of a loved one. Five themes emerged from participants in response to grief.

These themes appeared over time as the bereaved family member gradually gained resilience. First, people who were bereaved experienced chronic depression, followed by chronic grief. In time, participants showed some improvement in depression. The fourth stage in the process was recovery from grief, and last, resilience. The time needed for people who were bereaved to recover and gain resilience varied widely (Bonanno, 2004).

Social connections and mindsets are significant factors in building and maintaining resilience (Hartley, 2011; Luecken & Gress, 2010; Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010; Mason et al., 2014; Mayer & Faber, 2010). The time and methods used by students to return to a state of balance after an adverse event depends on many variables.

Traumatic life events, while experienced in college or earlier, may contribute to depression and posttraumatic stress disorder, characterized by loss of enjoyment in activities once found pleasurable, and the loss of motivation to engage in physical exercise (Rutter et al., 2013; Van der Kolk et al., 2005). Adult students who have experienced trauma such as abuse, neglect, or violence can experience trouble learning and storing information because of changes in the brain that influence emotions, behavior, cognition, and social functions (Perry, 1997, 2006). Traumatic events in childhood or later can cause psychiatric diagnoses such as posttraumatic stress disorder, anxiety, aggression, antisocial and paranoid behaviors, and deficits in self-regulation (Johnson, 2012; Van der Kolk et al., 2005). Van der Kolk et al. (2005) reported 17% to 33% of women in the general population report histories of sexual-physical abuse and, twice as many women report childhood sexual abuse than men (pp. 389–390). Female trauma survivors had "higher peer attachment, and satisfaction with social support",

whereas male trauma survivors had "higher scores on paternal attachment" (Banyard & Cantor, 2004, p. 213). The most frequent causes of trauma for men were accidents, war, assaults, and natural disasters (Van der Kolk et al., 2005).

Studies of assault, death, homelessness, and natural disasters have all aligned with poor mental health outcomes (Bonanno, 2009; CCMH, 2013; CSCMH, 2009). In a national survey conducted by Seery et al. (2010), researchers asked adult participants if they had experienced negative events such as death, assault, bereavement, combat, divorce, serious financial problems, or natural disasters at any time in their lives. Seery et al. discovered that it was common for some adversities to co-occur, making it hard to isolate the impact. For example, a job loss could lead to homelessness and the need to withdraw from college. Findings of the Seery et al. study demonstrated that although exposure to adversity predicts negative effects on mental health, adverse experiences may also foster subsequent resilience.

Social rejection, repeated task failure, slights, or insults serve as common stressors as well (Karoly, 2010). Students who have not faced trauma reported mild stressors in college such as juggling family and work commitments, poor self-esteem, difficulties in addressing institutional bureaucracy, finding appropriate advisors, and educational abilities as factors that challenge resilience (Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcn, 2013). Although some stress may result from a negative event outside of one's control, such as a natural disaster, illness, or assault, other stresses may have to do with a students' own behavior or goals, such as a happy event: a wedding, a new job, or a move.

Researchers consistently reported that a small number of young people who experienced adversity in adolescence demonstrated resilience by turning their lives around as they made the transition to adulthood (Werner & Smith, 2001). A commonly held belief is that academic success in adolescence and in social relationships forecasts adult success in life (Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010). Some students countered the disadvantages of their poor family circumstances by developing relationships with mentors, coaches, and counselors, demonstrating high levels of resilience (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012, p. iv).

A significant number of studies of personality traits have been conducted in relation to resilience, mental health, and coping strategies (APA, 2000; Mayer & Faber, 2010; Skodol, 2010). Campbell-Sills et al. (2006) investigated the relationships among personality traits, coping styles, and psychiatric symptoms to resilience in a sample of college students. In this study, resilience positively related to conscientiousness, and the capacity for closeness and high levels of social interaction (Campbell-Sills et al., 2006). Because "emotions tend to influence what is attended to in the environment … activation of an emotional memory" will influence the way one reacts to current situations (Philippe, Lecours, Beaulieu-Pelletier, 2009, p. 140). Consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) theory of the ecology of human development, researchers reported that many elements influence college-student health and success: individual, interpersonal, and institutional (Byrd & McKinney, 2012).

**Stress in Art and Design**

One of the goals of art and design education is to nurture innovative thinkers and creative problem solvers who are able to explore new ideas and create something unique (Danvers, 2003; Hargrove, 2011; Madoff, 2009). In studio courses for art majors, technical skills such as sketching, painting, drawing techniques, personal expression, and depicting responses to cultural and social environments are critical to academic success (de la Harpe et al., 2009). For architecture and design students, educators placed greater emphasis on "visual and textual communication skills, team work, collaboration," problem solving, and creative thinking in preparation for entry into the profession (de la Harpe et al., 2009, p. 46). Creative thinking and problem-solving techniques are key competencies for all art and design majors (Hargrove, 2011).

The purpose of studio critiques is to make the student produce better work, but occasionally, the remarks are not constructive and are perceived as personal attacks. Studio critiques are a central feature of art and design education, providing feedback and assessment of student work (Blair, 2006; Dannels et al., 2011; Dannels & Martin, 2008; Gray, 2013). In a critique, students present their ideas or drawings, floor plans, or models, explain their thinking process, and receive formative feedback from instructors and peers intended to strengthen their work (Blair, 2006; Gray, 2013). Critiques prepare students for the rigor of making successful presentations before employers and clients (Buster & Crawford, 2010; Dannels et al., 2011; Hargrove, 2011). Studio conversations, or desk "crits," are one-on-one meetings between student and instructor and one of the core elements of art and design education (Edstrom, 2008). Findings from several studies

showed students and faculty agreed that studio critiques are vitally important in art and

design education, even though many students found critiques to be stressful (Blair, 2006;

Buster & Crawford, 2010; Dannels & Martin, 2008; Edstrom, 2008; Koch et al., 2002).

Not all faculty critics provide helpful, supportive remarks (Blair, 2006; Koch et al.,

2002). Students reported critiques as being "scary and nerve-racking" (Blair, 2006, p.

87). Buster and Crawford (2010) noted that it is easy to become discouraged after a harsh

critique, underscoring the importance of developing resilient coping strategies (p. 102).

Given the nature of design studios, each presentation has the opportunity to

enhance or damage students' self-efficacy (Housley Gaffney, 2011). Students who find

critiques difficult and challenging, still feel they are an essential element of art and design

learning (Dannels et al., 2008; Eshun & DeGraft-Johnson, 2011). In a survey of "51

students attending a large land-grant institution enrolled in studio courses" such as

architecture, landscape architecture, art and design, graphic design, and industrial design,

students described the critique as "competitive, challenging, nerve-racking, stressful,

intimidating, tedious, and unsafe" (Dannels et al., 2011, p. 103). A harsh studio

environment produces stress and extinguishes self-efficacy (Koch et al., 2002). It is in the

students' best interest to listen to comments without becoming emotional or defensive in

order to hear suggestions that will strengthen their work (Buster & Crawford, 2010).

Students reported different responses to critiques. "Students talked about the critique as a

process of survival (32.4%), collaboration (29.05%), disclosure (20.11%), and

detachment (18.44%)" (Dannels et al., 2011, p. 103). In a study with 247 design students

"About 56% agreed that low marks could be a motive to work harder, while 44% disagreed with this statement" (Eshun & DeGraft-Johnson, 2011, p. 96).

Rejection is common in the arts as painters, writers, and performers will attest. Artists evaluate their work, reflecting on its quality of line, color, and appeal, which is subjective. Historically, artists and designers have suffered many setbacks and critical evaluations of their work. For example, Michelangelo's funeral monument for Pope Julius II went through five rejections over a period of 37 years before it was approved and finally constructed (White, 1982, pp. 28–31).

> In 1863, the [Paris] Salon rejected more than four thousand paintings with the pronouncement that the [new] flood of artists should be damned. The Emperor Napoleon III ordered a special exhibition of all the rejected artists and the show was a sensation. This exhibit showed the works of Monet, Manet, Degas, Pissarro, Sisley, Renoir, and Cassatt. (White, 1982, p. 40)

Today, paintings by these artists are exhibited in major world museums and sell for hundreds of thousands or millions of dollars at auction (Sotheby's, 2014). Schildkraut, Hirschfeld and Murphy (1994) studied abstract expressionists' artists from the New York School. Prominent artists such as de Kooning, Motherwell, Newman, Pollock, and Rothko showed some form of psychopathology, predominantly mood disorders (Panter, 2009). There is no evidence that artists have any more mental health problems than the general population.

Looking at the major challenges interior-design students face while in college, Smith (2013) "interviewed 38 senior students to determine what major barriers and

difficulties students faced" while pursuing their design education (p. 37). Findings from those interviews revealed that students experienced anxiety adjusting to the ambiguous nature of design projects (there are no correct or incorrect solutions). Some design solutions work better than others, but there are no wrong solutions. A second finding from Smith's study reported students had trouble managing the time needed to complete projects. Students reported "the workloads of studio design courses had a negative effect on their performance in other courses" because design assignments consumed most of their time (Smith, p. 46).

In a study with graphic design, industrial design, art and design, architecture, and landscape architecture students, conducted over a year-long period, Dannels et al. (2011) interviewed and videotaped students during critiques. Results of this study provided insights into the messages faculty give students and provided students with a blueprint to make sense of critics' feedback. Art and design students are encouraged to try different ways of doing, thinking, and making; but creativity and artistic expression can only thrive if the studio environment is supportive (Danvers, 2003). Students would benefit from feedback on their work if the stressful, tense atmosphere that exists in many design studios was replaced with a relaxed, encouraging feedback.

**Educational Bullying**

Bullying exists on campuses and in the classroom and has played a role in educational trauma (Shallcross, 2013). In an early study on college bullying with "a sample of 1,025 undergraduates, over 60% of the students had observed a student bully another student, and over 44% had seen a teacher bully a student" (Chapell et al., 2004,

p. 59). In a more recent study, researchers at Indiana University found that "15% of college students reported being bullied, while almost 22% reported being cyberbullied" (Shallcross, 2013, p. 1). College bullying can take the form of teasing, isolating, physical intimidation, and cyberbullying through text messages (Shallcross, 2013, p. 2). Van Brunt, senior vice president of the National Center for Higher Education Risk Management stated, "college-age bullies are motivated by the prospect of power and the urge to control others through fear" (as cited in Shallcross, 2013, p. 1). VanBrunt recommended that students who feel bullied seek counseling at the college campus counseling center (Shallcross, 2013, p. 3).

**Financial Stress**

Students and their parents are concerned about the costs of an art education and the career opportunities after graduation. The Pew Research Center (2011) reported that (70%) of college students go to college mainly for a job with good income, a factor likely with art students as well (Witham, 2012, p. 298). The average art and design student debt at graduation is "consistent with national averages, about $34,000, compared with $29,400 nationally. Thirty percent graduate with no student debt" (Carlson, 2014, p. A 8).

Employment opportunities for art and design students exist in a range of areas. According to Gioia (2008), "almost two million people in the U.S. describe their primary occupation as artist" (p. 1). The Association of Independent Colleges of Art and Design (2015) listed over 50 careers that are open to artists and designers such as arts management, arts therapy, film, animation, game design, and historic preservation (p. 2). "Designers [fashion, graphic, furniture, interior design, toy, product design] comprise the

largest group of artists at 39%, performing artists 17%, fine artists, art directors, and animators 11%, architects 10%, writers and authors 9%, photographers 7%, producers and directors, 7% (Gioia, 2008, p. 4).

**Campus Counseling Centers**

College counseling centers are experiencing an increase in students requesting help with issues such as stress management, depression, anxiety, eating disorders, substance abuse, and self-injury (APA, 2011). Mistler et al., (2012) reported "that 67% of college students surveyed reported counseling services helped with their academic performance" (p. 9). The National Survey of Counseling Center directors report a sharp increase in the numbers of students who requested assistance with severe psychological problems (APA, 2010). The Association for University and College Counseling Center Directors reported increased demand for services and waiting periods of up to 4 weeks to see a counselor (Mistler, 2014, p. A14).

Despite the increase in students seeking counseling, some students still resist getting help. "The most commonly reported barriers for not seeking professional help included perception that treatment was not needed (66%), lack of time (26.8%), and preference for self-management (18%; Czyz, Horwitz, Eisenberg, Kramer, & King, 2013, p. 398). Stigma was mentioned by only (12%) of students (Czyz et al., 2013).

Some resilient trauma survivors expressed a measure of gratitude for a traumatic event, feeling that the ordeal has enriched their lives. The CSCMH data indicate "about 31% of students who seek services from college counseling centers report having experienced a traumatic event either before or since coming to college" (Mistler et al.,

2012, p. 18). Anderson and Anderson (2003) reported that some individuals who suffer a traumatic crisis later describe the crisis as having affected their lives positively. Some trauma survivors reported better coping skills, empathy for others, closer family ties, improved self-esteem, wisdom, and a healthier life-style (Southwick & Charney, 2012, pp. 172–173). Resilient individuals can not only recover from adversity, but can grow and be strengthened by it (Anderson & Anderson, 2003; Bonanno, 2004; Campbell-Sills et al., 2006; Southwick & Charney, 2012).

## Coping Strategies

Even though one cannot control all the stressful events in one's life, one can control responses to them with effective coping strategies. Coping refers to the thought processes and behaviors individuals use to manage a situation, relationship, or problem in their environment (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Stress will always be part of one's life, but one may have some freedom in choosing the way they cope with stress (Aptor, 2007). Personal control and resilience regarding one's destiny and successful adaptation to life events is an important buffer against depression (Hermann & Betz, 2006).

*Emotion-focused* and *problem-focused* coping are common methods of addressing stress (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985, p. 152). People address stress in three stages: initially, people appraise the stressful event; second, they evaluate the many possible ways the event can be managed; and third, they execute the coping response (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Successful students see failure as something within their control, but unsuccessful students see failure as out of their control (Perry et al., 2005). Students performance can be affected when they undergo stress. According to Dweck, (2000), "students' confidence

in their intelligence is a good predictor of their academic achievement *when they are not facing difficulties"* (emphasis in original, p. 52). When students feel it is impossible to meet the expectations their environment requires of them, they often feel overwhelmed.

Problem-focused coping strategies and emotion-focused strategies are two ways of managing stress. Problem-focused coping consists of taking action to alter the stressful situation. Steinhardt (2007) reported increased resilience and productivity when students used problem-focused coping. College students' problem-focused coping plays an important role in student success in motivation and performance. Campbell-Sills et al. (2006) found that task-oriented or "problem-focused coping related positively to resilience" and emotion-focused coping with low resilience (p. 585).

Emotion-focused coping involves managing the distressing emotions of the stressful event, including seeking emotional support (Folkman & Lazarus, 1985). Struthers et al., (2000) reported that emotion-focused coping is not as effective in reducing stress. Concerned that students struggle on their own with anxiety and do not use counseling services when they need them, Bergen-Cico, Possemato, and Cheon (2013) integrated a mindfulness stress-reduction program into an undergraduate course (p. 348).

The most common coping strategies used by college students in the Pierceall and Keim (2007) study included students first talking to family members and friends to vent about their problems. The next most used coping mechanism was participation in leisure activities; and last, students used exercise to manage stress (p. 703). Li (2008) reported the most effective predictor of active coping among college students were "resilience and

secure attachments" (p. 1). These findings agree with those of other scholars (Banyard & Cantor, 2004; Kumpfer, 1999; Luthar et al., 2000). According to Misra, McKean, West, and Russo (2000), college students often attempt to reduce stress through religious and social support, and avoidance (stop attending class).

Campus wellness centers, counseling offices, and health services have increased the use of meditation, as educators seek ways to reduce emotional distress and anxiety at levels that affect academic and social functioning (Bergen-Cico et al., 2013).

Tension stress is a feeling of discomfort, and indicates some action needs to be performed to address the problem and relieve the tension (Aptor, 2007). Students in a telic-dominant state are serious-minded and tend to see the completion of their goals as the step to the next goal. In the paratelic state, life is seen as a game. What one does is lighthearted, fun loving, and done for its own sake (Aptor, 2007, p. 41). In three studies on stressful encounters reported by Aptor (2007), researchers found that telic-dominant participants were significantly more likely than paratelic participants to use problem-focused coping strategies involving action against the source of the stress. Paratelic-dominant participants tended to use a variety of other strategies, such as wishful thinking or distraction (Aptor, 2007).

Everyone responds to the hassles of daily life in different ways. Some individuals thrive on high drama and manage major stressors quite effectively, "but many people enjoy and seek out such problems. … a diet of threats and difficulties and crises is one on which some individuals thrive and flourish" (Aptor, 2007, p. 190). Early research suggested that positive reactions are one reason individuals can cope with stressful events

(Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). To increase resilience, Lyubomirsky and Della Porta (2010) studied the relationship between "happiness, positive emotions, and resilience [to] consider what can be learned from happiness interventions" (p. 450). Findings showed that expressing optimism, gratitude, and being autonomous, generated more positive thoughts and experiences, which in turn increased happiness and resilience (Lyubomirsky & Della Porta, 2010, p. 455).

Although stress can be helpful in stimulating new ideas or ways of thinking, stress can also interfere with a students' concentration (Perry, 2008; Large, 1999). Students cope with stress and depression in different ways. Some students fail to attend class, party the night before an assignment is due, and generally do not do the work. This strategy, called avoidance, allows students to have a valid reason to explain their failure. If a student does not do the assignment, they can blame their failure on lack of effort (Dweck et al., 2011). Tenacious students, even though they may be miserable or depressed, force themselves to attend class and push themselves to stay current with assignments, so that when the depression lifts, their prospects for graduation are not ruined (Dweck, 2006; Dweck et al., 2011).

In response to academically stressful events, students can daydream or dissociate from the event. When students dissociate from feedback, they may daydream. According to Perry (2006), "daydreaming is an example of a dissociative event" (Perry, 2006, p. 24). Dissociation is a process that causes a lack of connection in an individual's memory and sense of identity. A mild form of dissociation would be "not remembering several

minutes of instructions" given by the instructor for the classroom assignment (Mental Health America, 2015, p. 1).

Sovic (2008) compared stress levels between international art and design students and local students who studied in the United Kingdom; all the students experienced stress, regardless of language or ethnicity. Language problems and the transition to a new way of learning, rated as highly stressful for international students. These stressful feelings were particularly related to performing group work, presentations, and studio critiques. For international students, however, the consequence of these stressful activities indicated isolation (the failure to establish friendships and relationships with teachers) and influenced retention (Sovic, 2008, p. 153).

Many students engage in maladaptive coping strategies that do not serve them well and likely add to their problems. Maladaptive coping strategies include abuse of drugs, alcohol, self-harm, night eating, smoking, avoidant coping, and social withdrawal (Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012; Pierceall & Keim, 2007). The use of alcohol and heavy drinking to cope with stress is common among college students. College students are more likely to consume alcohol than like-aged emerging adults who do not attend college (Harrell & Powell, 2014). A significant amount of research exists on college students use of alcohol as a coping strategy. "College students' self-reports of drinking have found that students aged 18–24 report heavy drinking (16.4%) and binge drinking, (40.5%); [which] is significantly higher than the drinking rates among non-college students" (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2009, p. 15). College students with religious beliefs have been consistently linked to fewer alcohol-related

problems and less alcohol consumption (Harrell & Powell, 2014). Researchers also found high levels of stress lead to night-eating behaviors (Wichianson, Bughi, Unger, Spruijt-Metz, & Nguyen-Rodriquez, 2009). Alcohol consumption and night eating add further problems such as weight gain and poor performance.

According to an abundance of literature, students rely on supportive relationships with peers who encourage and support them, thereby reducing stress (Holinka, 2015; Kuh, et al., 2006; Luecken & Gress, 2010). Isolation and weak social integration are key elements for student withdrawal for all college students (Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2007). Efforts to connect students with mentors and peers have shown important benefits for students. Consistent with the Luthar et al. (2000) analysis, these data support the importance of strong human relationships in strengthening resilience.

Research on the use of social media has worried educators regarding its use to form meaningful relationships. In a recent study of "153,015 first-time freshmen at 227 institutions, students reported confidence in their academic abilities, but less confidence in their interpersonal skills" (Eagan, et al., 2014, p. 11). Face-to-face relating with peers "has been replaced by an average of six hours per week on Facebook, Twitter and other social media sites…students seem to realize that their ability to relate to other people may be suffering" (Berrett & Hoover, 2015, p. A16). The use of social media has been blamed for procrastination and having a negative effect on grades (Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011; Wang, Chen, & Liang, 2011).

Perfectionism (the tendency to set stringently high standards for one's performance), is a maladaptive behavior assumed by some students. Perfectionism adds

pressure to perform perfectly on all assignments (Klibert et al., 2014). Perceived pressure "produced anxiety and depression" in students who identified as perfectionists (Pirbaglou et al., 2013, p. 477). This was confirmed by Klibert at al. (2014) who examined the relationship between resilience, distress, and perfectionism and reported that "perfectionism was associated with greater reports of depression and anxiety" (Klibert et al., 2014, p. 75).

Resilient students find control is especially important for coping with stressful life events because such events can threaten basic needs for maintaining greater well-being (Frazier et al., 2011, p. 749). Bromley, Johnson & Cohen (2006) found that adolescents who were confident, optimistic, engaged in productive activity, and demonstrated strong social skills by age 16 were less likely to develop psychiatric disorders, engage in criminal behavior, have educational or occupational problems. Dienstbier (1992) argued that when one is exposed to stressors, a positive toughening effect can occur when exposure is limited. Stress is inevitable in all stages of life, but students who develop effective coping strategies in college will find those strategies will be useful throughout their lives. The next section of this literature will address interventions that have helped students build resilience.

**Interventions**

Interventions build resilience by training students to develop healthy mindsets, optimism, better problem solving skills, and coping skills (Coutu, 2002, Reivich, et al., 2003; Seligman, 2011; Steinhardt, 2007). Workshops may support students who are at risk for depression and anxiety (Seligman, Schulman, & Tryon, 2007). The Penn

Resiliency Program (PRP) was developed to influence resilience, prevent depression, anxiety, and promote optimism and effective problem solving skills among middle school children; it was later revised for college students, (Seligman, 2011, pp. 81–84). The college program focuses on recognizing self-blame, identifying and evaluating unhelpful core beliefs, preventing unrealistic worry, and developing resilient coping strategies (Seligman, 2011).

Researchers at the University of Texas-Austin administered a program to college students during the final weeks of courses when students were experiencing high levels of academic stress. Students who participated in the 4-week resilience intervention during finals week, "had greater resilience and more effective coping strategies than the students who did not receive the resilience intervention" (Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008, p. 451).

Much resilience literature considers vulnerability, poor mental health outcomes, and reactions to adverse events, but more current research considers happiness and the pursuit of well-being in fostering resilience. Well-being is a state most people pursue in their attempt to live a happy life and is the focal point of positive psychology (Seligman, 2011). Positive psychology looks at the strengths of an individual. Seligman (2011) reported these elements as important for well-being: "positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships, and accomplishment" (p. 16). Steinhardt and Dolbier (2008) found that stress-management and stress-prevention interventions were effective with college students in building resilience. Steinhardt (2007) suggested that when students experience stress and disruption, they are fragile and vulnerable; but this vulnerability allows the student to transform a stressful situation into personal growth (p.

6). Steinhardt suggested a three-step program to build and regain resilience: taking responsibility, finding a way to solve the problem and thereby making students feel powerful, and creating meaningful connections.

Adaptive Learning Systems is an organization that provides training programs for businesses and educational institutions to help individuals change their mindsets for greater resilience (Becker, 2013). The Adaptiv Learning Systems' program addresses seven factors of resilience that include emotional regulation, impulse control, self-efficacy, optimism, empathy, causal analysis, and the ability to seek new challenges (Becker, 2013). Coutu (2002) suggests "more than education, more than experience, more than training, a person's level of resilience will determine who succeeds and who fails" (Coutu, 2002, p. 1). Everyone experiences adversity, testing their resilience. One's best defense is to develop health-promoting behaviors that provide coping strategies to promote resilience (Reeve, 2009, p. 441).

**Implications**

College art and design students need effective coping strategies and resilience factors to complete a bachelor's degree. The data derived from this study adds to the body of literature that supports resilience for college students in general, and art and design students in particular. Qualitative studies carry two implications. First, what is important to know is what people experience and how they interpret the world (Patton, 2002). The second implication is methodological. The only way for one to really know what another person experiences is to experience the phenomenon as directly as possible for oneself (Patton, 2002, p. 106).

Students cannot change their genetic composition, but do have control over how they react to stress and cope with it. Talking about problems with family and friends, counseling, drawing on resources from mentors, faculty, and student peer groups, exercise, healthy living, and a supportive religious or spiritual community are elements that can relieve stress and build resilience.

Findings from this study's interviews identified resilience-building resources and protective factors. These resources and factors are unique to art and design students. The data derived from this study provides greater awareness for college counselors, faculty, and mentors in understanding the important role they play in supporting resilience.

## Phenomenology as a Research Methodology

As a philosophy, phenomenology derives from Plato and Aristotle as "the desire to wonder at things being the way they are" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 182). German philosopher Husserl, is considered the founder of phenomenology. Husserl's phenomenological approach intends to grasp how one interprets emotions and ideas in the life world by the individual and others. Phenomenology asks, what does it mean to speak of fear, sadness, or resilience? (Ricoeur, 1967). Phenomenology intends to help an individual understand themselves and others.

Components of the phenomenological approach to research are "epoche, phenomenological reduction (bracketing), imaginative variation, and data synthesis" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). *Epoche* is a Greek word meaning to refrain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994). This suspension of judgment is important to glean the phenomenon under investigation. "Phenomenological reduction is presented as the explication of the

method practiced in the description of phenomena" (Ricoeur, 1967, p. 9).

Phenomenological reduction is the process of returning to the nature of the experience to

derive the inner structure or meaning of participant's lived experiences (Merriam, 2009,

p. 26).

Horizontalization is a term used to give equal weight to all pieces of data in the

early stages of inquiry (Merriam, 2009). Horizontalization occurs after transcripts have

been typed. After laying out the data, researchers organize them into themes. Imaginative

variation is a process that attempts to see the object of study, resilience, from several

perspectives. Husserl stated that imaginative variation refers to the setting and

perspective of the individual (Ricoeur, 1967, p. 129). Individuals see things through their

own eyes and experience them from where they stand. Imaginative variation permits

examining the phenomenon from different perspectives. Moustakas (1994) referred to

imaginative variation as a way to seek possible meanings resulting from approaching a

phenomenon from different positions or functions. Interviews with students and alums,

faculty, and counselors allowed me to examine student resilience from different

perspectives. Husserl used the term "noematic sense" as "a certain person, object event,

[or] state of affairs which presents itself" (Husserl, 1913, as cited in Gurwitsch, 1966,

p. 61). Data synthesis refers to the lessons learned or extrapolated from the research

(Patton, 2002).

Heidegger, Husserl's student, had interest in ontology or the study of being.

Heidegger (2014) also used phenomenology to reveal the nature of things. Van Manen

(1990) described phenomenology as the study of the life world as one experiences it.

Moustakas (1994), a humanistic psychologist and phenomenologist, described three processes for conducting a phenomenological study: "Being-In, Being-For, and Being-With"; immersing oneself into the world of another (p. 84). When the researcher intends to understand and accept perceptions of the interviewee, the researcher is Being-In. I worked to understand and accept perceptions of the students I interviewed. Being-For means the researcher is on the interviewee's side, against all others who would minimize the interviewee's opinion (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). I did not intend to minimize the interviewee's opinions. Being-With also involves listening to the interviewees' thoughts, but includes the researcher offering their own views (Moustakas, 1994, p. 84). I did not attempt to offer my own views.

This phenomenological study explored the nature of the lived experiences of university seniors or recent alums majoring in art and design; specifically, the ways in which students manage the high points and low points of their college experience. Phenomenology differs from other social sciences because it focuses on the meanings individuals give to their everyday lives whereas other methods focus on statistical relationships among variables or the occurrence of behaviors (Van Manen, 1990). This phenomenological study sought the meaning and significance of certain factors of the phenomenon of resilience. The lived meanings of an experience described the nature of a situation as only the person who has lived it can express (Van Manen, 1990). In phenomenological research, how an individual describes and experiences life provides perceptions that help the researcher make sense of the world (Husserl, 1970). A

phenomenological study allows participants to share the uniqueness of their lives by telling their personal stories.

The faculty interviews added a perspective and depth to the student interviews. The transcripts from these interviews allowed me to gather and compare data students generated when they discussed the high points and low points of their university education, with faculty perspectives.

Campus counseling centers are committed to helping students overcome adversity. In individual counseling, skilled counselors guided students through difficulties that would likely have a negative effect on their academic performance. In this study, I interviewed two campus counselors regarding their perceptions of art and design students' stress and low points. I maintained a journal before and after each interview in which I noted any prejudices or viewpoints I had regarding each participant and what they shared.

The qualitative in-depth interviews by Hines et al. (2005) were helpful in guiding the processes of interview questions for this study. In the Hines et al. (2005) study, "14 college students who had been in foster care for most of their childhood" discussed the processes underlying the development of resilience in college (p. 382). A dissertation by Moore (2013) on stress, coping strategies, and resilience in teachers used a cross-sectional survey design combined with a hermeneutic phenomenology design to investigate teacher burnout and resilience. The cross-sectional survey was used to collect information about the resilience methods used by public school teachers who participated in the study. Researchers used hermeneutic phenomenology to investigate the lived

experiences, beliefs, and resilient attitudes of public school teachers who experienced emotional exhaustion (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994; Van Manen, 1990). Many differences arose in Moore's and my study, but the information in Moore's study provided guidelines for research questions and references for the literature review.

**Summary**

In the foregoing chapter, I explained the literature-search strategy, explored the conceptual frameworks that support this study, and reported on what research has been conducted regarding the psychosocial, biological influences on resilience. Stress, trauma, and the mental health of college students in general have been reported. I reported the services that support students who experience challenges such as positive coping strategies, campus counseling centers, and interventions available to build resilience. With help from campus counselors, orientation programs, and resilience training, positive mindsets can be developed and enhanced. Interventions that support positive thinking, resilience training, and healthy coping strategies indicate behaviors are malleable. Phenomenology is further expanded from Chapter 1. I proposed factors that work in concert to develop and strengthen resilience, rebuilding academic success when it wavers.

A student does not need all the protective factors mentioned in this literature review to be a resilient, successful student. Having a cluster of protective external and internal factors is likely to bolster resilience and support academic success. For one student, protective factors might include a supportive family, a growth mindset,

hardiness, and high motivation for success. For another student, resilience might be supported by a devoted mentor, coach, high self-efficacy, optimism, and financial aid.

This chapter identified the complex cluster of protective factors that are needed to build and sustain resilience along with effective coping strategies that help students attain academic success. The next section details the research approach, methods for selecting participants, role of the researcher, and the data collection process.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to examine resilience and academic success among university art and design students. In this chapter, I provide a detailed description of the procedures I followed in conducting the study. The goal of this study was to understand the supportive relationships, behaviors, and attitudes university art and design seniors used to bolster resilience and achieve academic success. I restate the research questions and report on my role as the researcher. Next, I describe the methodology of the study and the rationale for selecting it. Participant recruitment and selection, instrumentation, and the analysis of data plan follow. Last, I report issues of trustworthiness and ethical concerns.

The research questions explored in this study were:

- Research Question 1 (RQ1): Which external protective factors of resilience (e.g., family, faculty, peers, counselors, coaches, finances, and religion) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question 2 (RQ2): Which internal protective factors (e.g., mindsets, hardiness, motivation, optimism, self-efficacy, and spiritual beliefs) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question 3 (RQ3): What stressors present the greatest challenges for college art and design students with regard to persistence?

- Research Question 4 (RQ4): What coping strategies and resources do successful art and design students use to sustain resilience through their college experiences?

These research questions were designed to address the phenomenon under investigation: resilience and academic success among university art and design students. Scholars named in the literature review identified external and internal protective factors as significant elements for bolstering resilience among the general student population (Luecken & Gress, 2010; Ong, Bergeman, & Chow, 2010; Skodol, 2010; Zimmerman & Brenner). I used responsive interviews to explore past stressful events that challenged students and the coping strategies that helped them build and sustain resilience. I interviewed three distinct groups: students, faculty, and campus counselors. I chose to focus my research on graduating seniors and recent alums because they had managed obstacles during their university years and succeeded in graduating.

## Research Design and Rationale

I selected a qualitative phenomenological approach for this exploratory study so that categories and themes could emerge to form the basis for later examination, as suggested by Merriam (2009, p. 15). The central phenomena of the study were the supportive factors and coping strategies that students had used as they interacted with their environment to complete their academic program. For researchers to understand the lived experiences of a person or group, they must listen to the experiences from the perspectives of the individual being interviewed. The reason for this is "to capture the complexities of their individual perceptions and experiences" (Patton, 2002, p. 348).

In keeping with Husserl's approach, all data were recorded from a first person point of view to ensure that what was described is exactly as it was expressed by participants. Moustakas (1994) stated "there is an interweaving of person, conscious

experience and phenomenon" (p. 96). Student interviewees shared their experiences and addressed ways in which they coped with stress and regained resilient functioning. Faculty and campus counselor interviewees reported the stress and difficult situations students reported to them during office hours and counseling sessions. It is likely to selectively hear or see comments that confirm a particular point of view. I used the recordings and careful reading of the interview transcripts to analyze data that is verifiable by anyone who listens to the recorded interviews. Husserl suggested researchers study the units of consciousness that the respective speaker discusses. Husserl called the units of consciousness *intentionality* (Husserl, as cited in Ricoeur, 1967, p. 8).

Husserl stated that the main characteristic of consciousness is always intentional. Intentionality is a mental phenomenon and is directed at an object. This directly contrasts with physical phenomena that have no intentionality. Examples of intentionality revealed as conscious experiences could include working hard or feeling confident or overjoyed. Husserl also identified unintentional units of consciousness, such as feeling pain, exhaustion, or embarrassment (Husserl, as cited in Ricoeur, 1967). In this study, I attempted to capture intentional and unintentional units of consciousness of graduating seniors and recent alums who challenged and supported resilience and academic success.

Professional networking with the Southeastern Educators College Art Conference provided the opportunity to engage with colleagues and request access to a research site. Student interviews provided the primary data, supplemented by data from faculty and campus counselors. The design I chose for this study was a phenomenological approach intended to explore the lived experiences of university seniors and alums. My inspiration

for selecting this topic was based on two past experiences. First, as a college professor of interior design for 15 years, students occasionally approached me with reports of distressing personal problems that influenced their ability to perform well academically. The literature supports the detrimental effects of stress on academic performance (APA, 2014; Bonanno, 2004; Burris et al., 2009; Cicchetti, 2010; Hartley, 2011, 2013; Henderson & Dweck, 1990). Each of these events (e.g., death of a loved one, illness, natural disaster, or drug addiction) required empathy and special action. To meet these needs, I recommended counseling, tutoring, and extended deadlines to allow students more time to complete assignments.

Second, as a doctoral student, my own resilience and coping strategies to perform academically were challenged over the last 4 years. When life was going smoothly, I was able to work full-time and progress in courses reasonably well. However, several years later, I noticed my work was muddled, my writing disorganized, and my concentration poor. It was difficult to stay focused. During that period of poor academic performance, I was under extreme stress. I was caring for my terminally ill husband, and experienced a lack of sleep and high levels of stress, grief, and depression despite the help of hospice, nursing aides, and medication. An aide stole morphine, cash, and jewelry and forged checks during this period, adding to my stress. At the time, I thought I was coping well, but clearly I was not. Three years after my husband's death, I noticed a gradual return to more optimistic attitudes, better sleep, and clearer thinking. This resilient outcome demonstrates how distress can affect academic performance and daily functioning. It is

for these reasons that I selected the phenomenon of resilience among art and design

students for this study.

## Role of the Researcher

As the sole investigator in this study, I created the data-collection instruments and

conducted all interviews. I obtained IRB approval before any data were collected. The

host institution granted approval to conduct the study on March 10, 2015. Walden's IRB

approval for this study (#04-28-15-0091964) was granted on April 29, 2015. The

following day, I started the lengthy road trip to the state university. This urgency was

required, as it was finals week and seniors were graduating in 10 days; if I did not

interview students and alums that week, I would miss the opportunity for many months.

Before conducting the interviews, I reflected on my own experiences, as

suggested by Merriam (2009). I take to heart Van Manen's (1990) advice to researchers:

"be interested in the subjective experiences of the study's participants, but also report

[your] own personal perspective on the phenomenon" (pp. 62–63). My own experiences

in bolstering resilience have influenced how and what I heard from students, but I

attempted to eliminate personal viewpoints and assumptions through the use of the

journal. To reduce bias, I maintained a journal of my thoughts and concerns that

addressed bias, writing journal entries before and after each interview. The interview site,

hereafter referred to as State U (pseudonym), and all of the study participants were

unknown to me prior to this study. My only visit to State U was to conduct the

interviews. Therefore, I report no conflict of interest.

## Methodology

The data collected for this study were obtained from interviews with a total of 15 participants: 11 art and design seniors, one recent alum, one faculty member, and two campus counselors. I interviewed all participants individually and face-to-face in a conference room or classroom at the host site.

### Participant Selection and Procedures for Recruitment

As a qualitative research methodology, phenomenology does not require large numbers of participants because large numbers of participants do not necessarily produce more insight into the phenomenon (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Patton (2002) stated, "There are no rules for sample size in qualitative inquiry," and instead emphasized the importance of having rich responses" (pp. 244–245). The validity of the data found in qualitative research comes from the richness of the participants' responses The richness of the data collected from students and alumnae has provided a deep understanding of the challenges students faced and the factors that bolstered their resilience.

The setting for this research study was the campus of a university in the eastern United States that offered bachelor's degrees in art and design as well as many other concentrations. The department chair at the host institution played a vital role in data collection. Criterion for selection included graduating seniors or alums who had graduated within the last three years in any art and design major. The department chair invited alums to participate (see Appendix E); and invited students by e-mail (see

Appendix F). The department chair had access to student records and contact information and determined which students were in good standing to graduate.

Graduating seniors provided the primary source of study data. I selected college seniors as the primary population under study because they were close to reaching their intended goals of graduation and entry into professional careers in art and design. Although recent alums had already achieved their diplomas, they were also included if they had graduated in the last three years as it was likely to recall the challenges, rewards, and ways they coped with stress as an undergraduate student.

I met the department chair briefly at a professional conference, but knew none of the students, faculty, or campus counselors. The week interviews were conducted was the only time I had been on this campus; therefore, there was no conflict of interest.

The department chair sent an e-mail to graduating seniors asking them if they would like to participate in a research study on resilience and student success. If interested, students and alums were asked to reply to ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu with answers to two questions: "What is (was) your undergraduate major?" and, "Are you willing to discuss some of the highs and lows you have experienced while in college?" Individuals who were interested in participating in the interview responded in one of two ways: by e-mail or by sign-up sheet taped to the door of the classroom where I was assigned to conduct interviews. When I received replies indicating interest in participating in the study, I contacted participants by e-mail to schedule an interview. This manner of scheduling interviews became problematic because the students and I would go back and forth by e-mail until we arrived at a convenient day and time to

conduct the interview. After observing the difficulty of scheduling in this manner, I

placed a sign-up sheet (see Appendix D) on the door of the classroom I was assigned for

interviews. The department chair asked participants to sign up for an interview at any of

the open time slots.

My goal was to interview 10 students or alums as primary data sources. One alum

and 11 students volunteered, so I interviewed all 12 participants ($n = 12$). Supplementing

data from that group were the data from interviews with a faculty member ($n = 1$) and

campus counselors ($n = 2$). This was an ideal time to conduct the student and alum

interviews given that students had completed all coursework and were about to graduate.

On day four of my campus visit, the department chair sent a follow-up e-mail invitation

to students and recent alums (see Appendix I) to remind students of openings still

available for interviews.

Criteria for selection of art and design faculty from the host institution were that

they interacted with students on a regular basis (at least weekly), taught part-time or full-

time, and taught from freshman to senior levels. The department chair invited faculty

who teach undergraduate art and design students by e-mail (see Appendix G). My

original intention was to interview faculty in small focus groups. However, because it

was finals week and faculty were busy administering final examinations and submitting

grades while I was on campus, only one faculty member volunteered to be interviewed.

The faculty member signed up on the door sign-up sheet. The department chair continued

to recruit faculty during my week on campus with no results. I offered to bring in lunch

for faculty, take faculty out for tapas, or conduct a phone or Skype interview the

following week. These options were extended to the faculty by e-mail from the department chair. I did not conduct any additional faculty interviews. Although I was unable to conduct interviews with four to five faculty as I had hoped, I left campus knowing I did everything I could do to recruit them. The interview with the faculty member provided valuable data because faculty have the opportunity to observe students in one or more courses over a period of weeks or even several years.

The interviews with two campus counselors provided me with the third data source. Criteria for selection of campus counselors were that they work with undergraduate students in all majors including art and design and counsel students one-on-one. Campus counselors see students of all majors and all levels from undergraduate to graduate students. To recruit campus counselors, I contacted the director of the campus counseling center by e-mail (Appendix H). Of the six counselors the director contacted, two counselors volunteered to participate in the study. The counselors contacted me by e-mail to schedule interviews at their convenience. I sent each counselor participant a confirmation of the interview time and an attachment of the consent form for campus counselors (Appendix M) by e-mail.

Both campus counselors have master's degrees; one in counseling and one in social work with 12 years of combined experience counseling college students. One counselor graduated from State U, and was familiar with programs and policies as a former student and as a counselor. Counselors have spoken with, observed, and helped students manage the challenges they encountered in one-on-one sessions. Counselors had a unique perspective and compared challenges with which art and design students

struggled to challenges with which students in other majors struggled. Some challenges were the same for students in the general population, such as effort required to manage college-level work, relationship conflicts, and parental challenges.

In the field of qualitative research, the goal for sample size is that point at which redundancy occurs; when the data become repetitious and new perceptions no longer emerged, I reached saturation (Merriam, 2009; Patton, 2002). Interviews with 11 students and one alum participant (of a total of 55 seniors majoring in art and design) was a suitable size. The sample size of student and alum participants was appropriate to yield the information I was seeking to answer the research questions. However, although many remarks by faculty and campus counselors confirmed the experiences of students, researchers would require more data from these two groups to reach saturation.

**Instrumentation**

According to Van Manen (1990), in phenomenology, the interview serves two purposes. First, the interview is a way to gather a deep understanding of the phenomenon. Second, the interview allows the researcher to develop a conversation about the meaning of an experience with the interviewee (p. 66). Moustakas (1994) explained that the epoche process allows the researcher to understand participants' unique experiences through a new way of looking at a phenomenon; freeing the mind to see new perspectives without bias by setting aside one's prior judgments. Each group of participants had their own list of interview questions. During the interviews, I asked questions that followed the list for each group: (see Appendix A) for student and alum interview questions, (Appendix B) for faculty interview questions, and (Appendix C) for campus counselor

interview questions.  I allowed for an easy conversational exchange between me and the participants When needed, I asked questions to clarify the participant's responses.

Responsive interviews and ordinary conversations differ in several ways. In responsive interviews, the researcher encourages participant replies that explain in depth the lived experience of the phenomenon under investigation. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), most "conversations take place in the context of an ongoing relationship" (p. 99). This style of interviewing led to a reciprocal conversation between the participants and me that felt natural. Responsive interviewing left opportunities for students to expand on experiences that were relevant to their university experiences. Conducting individual interviews allowed participants to speak freely and share feelings and emotions that might not be shared in a group of peers or faculty.

**Procedures for Informed Consent**

I developed consent forms for each group of participants: I asked students to read and sign a consent form (see Appendix J) and alums to read and sign a different consent form (see Appendix K). I asked the faculty member to read and sign an appropriate consent form (see Appendix L) as well as a separate one for campus counselors to read and sign (see Appendix M). I sent the consent forms to each participant by e-mail after scheduling the interviews by e-mail. This e-mailed consent form was the participants copy to read and retain. Participants who scheduled an appointment using the sign-up sheet were given two copies of the consent form prior to the interview. They signed one copy and returned it to me; participants retained the other copy for their records.

The consent form provided an overview of the study, time involved, procedures, the risks and benefits to participants participating in the study, and other relevant information. I asked participants to sign the consent form and state they understood the information and agreed to participate fully under the conditions listed. I included a statement of confidentiality and contact information for questions on the consent form. Participation was voluntary and participants could withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. No repercussions would occur for participants who ended the interview early, but all participants who showed up for the interview stayed for the allotted time. The interview began after the consent form was signed. I retained the confirming e-mails and signed consent forms. I gave all participants a list of key terms used in the study at the beginning of the interview (listed in Chapter 1). I followed the American Counseling Association's code of ethics regarding confidentiality and privacy (ACA, 2014). I also followed the State Board of Examiners Guidelines in Counseling to protect participants. Here, I discuss the protocol for each group: student and alum, faculty, and campus counselors.

## Data Collection

I functioned as a key instrument in this study and scheduled and conducted all interviews. The IRB approval came during the last week of classes at State U; as a result, I conducted interviews on campus during finals week and up to the day before graduation. I transcribed the interviews verbatim and analyzed the data. I used pseudonyms in place of actual names for all participants and the university. I complied with all mandated requirements to protect the confidentiality, safety, and welfare of

students, faculty, administrators, museums, and well-known artists who were mentioned in the interviews. Before I started the interviews, I provided an overview of the study and answered any questions participants asked. When an interview was about to begin, I placed a sign on the door stating there was an interview in progress. All interviews were audio recorded using Sony and Olympus digital recording devices and my iPhone. I also took handwritten notes in the event of a poor recording. I took steps to ensure the accuracy of the data collection by checking notes taken during the interview, listening to recorded interviews multiple times, typing transcripts, and asking participants to review their own interview transcripts.

I interviewed all participants individually and face-to-face. The order in which I interviewed participants was based on their availability. I interviewed two students first and one campus counselor; which provided me with a better understanding of the college and its students. Then I interviewed two more students, the faculty member, and one additional counselor. The remaining days were spent interviewing students. Preliminary themes that emerged from the first few student interviews helped direct questions posed to the faculty member. This allowed me to connect and compare student and alum data and add one question. I added this question to student interviews: Have you ever used the services of the campus counseling center? I did not see the need to revise other questions.

**Student and Alum Interview Protocol**

Opening statements before each interview began informed potential participants why this study was being conducted. The first question I asked student and alum participants was to indicate their major area of study. Following, I asked participants to

share the best, most rewarding experiences and accomplishments of their university years. Participants were free to recall academic and personal situations that added satisfaction to their lives. I followed a logical sequence of questioning that was recommended by experts in the field from easy, nonthreatening questions at the beginning of the interview to higher intensity questions, and back to lower before closing the interview (Rubin & Rubin, 2011, pp. 114–121). I gave participants a list of key terms used in the study. I reported the protective factors, mindsets, and social relationships that were significant.

Before and after each student interview, I made brief notes in a journal regarding participants' demeanor, affect, body language, and openness to sharing life stories. Most participants were open and talkative about their college relationships and challenges; only one participant seemed guarded in her responses. I then asked participants to share the most challenging, stressful times of their university years. Probes and follow-up questions encouraged participants to expand on lived experiences. Occasionally, participants needed encouragement to share information, but for the most part, participants were open and spoke without inhibitions about personal issues. Participants shared personal and deeply emotional explanations of the people and events that challenged their academic success. Student and alum participants shared advice they would give to high school students attending a college or university and who were considering a major in art and design.

Maxwell (2013) suggested that a study participant may eagerly participate, but not reveal deeply personal information during the interview. I did not find this to be the case,

but it is possible that participants gave me an edited version of issues and coping strategies. Other factors that could influence data collection might be the reluctance of participants to share personal information with a stranger, a woman, or a person older than their peers. In only one interview, did I feel it was necessary to probe for more information about specific challenges. The participant did not feel comfortable sharing more details with regard to her depression, so I did not probe further and respected her privacy.

Using the logic of intensity sampling, I found rich examples of the phenomenon of resilience. Students and alum were very open regarding the high points and low points they experienced while in college. The face-to-face interviews were retrospective, meaning participants reported experiences that had already occurred in their lives. There was minimal risk to participants, but some topics were sensitive and brought up tearful memories. The face-to-face interviews with students and the alum lasted 60 to 75 minutes.

When each interview ended, I thanked participants for their time and information. Students and the alum participant were each given a bookstore gift card for $25 in exchange for their time and information. After I presented the gift card and reviewed the interview protocol (see Appendix N) to be sure all steps had been taken, I asked participants to sign it. The interview protocol served as a checklist to ensure I followed the steps on the list.

After all student and alum interviews were conducted, I typed transcripts verbatim from the recording devices. I sent the interview transcript to each participant to check

their own interview for accuracy. I gave participants 10 days to review their transcripts and make corrections by e-mail. Only one participant made minor corrections. After the 10 days, I considered all remarks to be accurate and truthful. I uploaded all interviews to NVivo10 software and stored the transcripts as internal sources.

**Faculty-Interview Protocol**

During the proposal stage of the study, I anticipated interviewing faculty in small groups; however, given the lack of availability of faculty during finals week, this did not occur. One faculty member responded affirmatively to the e-mail invitation sent by the department chair in which the subject line contained this question: "Will you participate in a research study on student resilience?" (see Appendix G). First, I provided Hadley (pseudonym) with two copies of the faculty-consent form (see Appendix L); she signed and returned one to me and kept one for her records. Second, I gave Hadley a list of key terms used in the study. I did not provide her with interview questions in advance (see Appendix B). Hadley teaches art history in lecture and writing-intensive courses covering art and design. Hadley also taught freshman seminar and senior capstone, which provided her with exposure to students during all four years, freshman to senior. In her four years with the university, she witnessed students who struggled with academic and personal challenges. At the end of the interview, I thanked Hadley and reviewed the interview protocol (see Appendix N) to be sure I followed all the steps planned.

On my last day at State U, I left the department chair with the understanding that if any faculty member would agree, I would interview them by phone or Skype after

graduation. I presented the list of faculty questions by e-mail and the department chair

agreed to forward the interview questions to faculty. I did not receive any responses.

**Campus-Counselor Interview Protocol**

I contacted the director of campus counseling by e-mail with the subject line,

"Will you participate in a research study on student resilience?" I sent a sample e-mail

letter to the director of the campus counseling center that she could send out on my behalf

asking for volunteers (see Appendix H). Participants replied directly to me by e-mail,

indicating their interest in participating in the interview. I scheduled one face-to-face

interview at the beginning of the week and one face-to-face interview midweek. When

the counselor and I scheduled the interview by e-mail, I sent the consent form as an

attachment to the reply e-mail (see Appendix M). The counselor consented to participate

by e-mail and retained a copy of the consent form. I provided each counselor with a list

of key terms used in the study and interviewed each counselor face-to-face in her private

office. At the end of each interview, I thanked each counselor and asked them to sign the

interview protocol (see Appendix N). I listened to each interview several times and

transcribed each verbatim. I did not send counselors a copy of their interview transcript

and did not compensate them for their time.

**Journal Protocol**

I maintained a journal of reflections before and after each interview. The purpose

of the journal was to examine possible bias in gathering data and to provide a self-audit

of the study process. My journal entries reflected observations and experiences during

this research process. The next step was the data analysis.

**Data Analysis Plan**

After participants approved their transcripts, I loaded all interview transcripts into NVivo10 as internal sources. Next, I began selecting key words and phrases that emerged during each interview for analysis. When a word, phrase, or expression was mentioned by 50% or more by participants, it became a code. Using NVivo10 terminology, "codes are gathered material, by topic, theme, or case and are entered as nodes" (QSR International, 2013, p. 21). I recorded notable quotations that supported themes and entered them as nodes. Each key word or phrase was stored under a name as a node, such as coping strategies. NVivo10 coding software has stored all data.

In the early stages of data analysis, I gave each node equal value. After all interview transcripts had been entered into NVivo10, more rigorous data analysis began. The software allowed me to gather materials in one place so I could look for emerging patterns. As these nodes or themes were listed, I revised the initial set of themes. I bracketed my own perceptions of codes and kept an open mind to hearing and interpreting responses that were free from bias. After searching all transcripts for remarks on a particular topic, I listed each node and words and line numbered phrases under that node. NVivo10 kept track of how many participants reported on each node and the number of responses under each node. For example, the theme identified as low points, challenges, and stressors had words and notable quotations that I partitioned into subthemes. Subthemes included academic stress, critiques, educational trauma, bullying, sophomore review, roommate problems, nonsupportive relationships, lack of acceptance, physical health, mental health, and family stress.

I read transcripts four or more times. I listed the words and phrases under each node and examined the data more carefully. Categories came from the literature review on educational resilience and from looking at themes that emerged during the interviews. The final list of themes included (a) high points and accomplishments; (b) external protective factors; (c) internal protective factors; (d) low points, challenges, and stressors; (e) coping strategies; (f) health; and (g) advice for future students. These themes came from participants' data and were found to be relevant and discussed by other scholars. I removed irrelevant conversation (weather, lunch plans, or driving conditions). As I reviewed the transcripts, it became apparent that some nodes required separation. For example, I separated the theme node, coping strategies, into subthemes—positive coping strategies and negative coping strategies—based on the literature.

I separated data from each group (students and the alum, faculty member, and campus counselors) and reported them separately from each other. In the next section of the data analysis, I compared the responses made by students and the alum with that from the faculty member and counselors. Responses from the faculty member and campus counselors followed themes and subthemes identified by students and the alum and included a brief year-by-year explanation of relevant issues the faculty member and counselors observed among students. The assumption was that the stressors and challenges freshman face are not the same as the stressors and challenges seniors face, as they progress through the degree program.

I conducted "member checking" with reviews of transcripts with students and the alum (Merriam, 2009, p. 217). My dissertation chair, Dr. C. Marienau, and committee

member, Dr. Johnson, provided peer review by reading transcripts and nodes lists to

validate the interview data. I relied on my committee to read transcripts, to discern if I

had missed any themes. In this process called member checking, people compare

interview transcripts with text and lists of node themes to ensure that all data were

reported accurately. During the process of reduction of the data, I removed statements

and expressions that were repetitive and kept only relevant statements. To make study

results as transferable as possible, a range of different majors in the art and design

department were represented. Confirmability occurred by rechecking the data and reading

and rereading the transcripts and peer review. Dependability was ensured by keeping

complete records of transcripts, signed consent forms, and interview protocols (see

Appendix N). If any sections of these interviews are quoted, I will maintain the

confidentiality of the identity of students, alum, faculty, counselors, and the institution.

The last step in this phenomenological study required integration of interviews in

text and provided the description of the interview responses, synthesizing the themes of

the experience (Moustakas, 1994, p. 144). I describe the specific relationships and

protective factors that served to build resilience. I described the challenges and stressors

students faced while at the university. The rich data I collected from participants provided

data that addressed each research question. The resilience of study participants is

illuminated by students who have experienced stressful events, coped with them, and still

managed to graduate. No single protective factor was sufficient to bolster resilience; a

group of protective factors helped participants move forward with their coursework and

graduate. In a graduating class of 55 seniors, the sample size was sufficient to explore the

phenomenon of resilience. The data saturation indicated that all of the participating students experienced high points and low points, developed external and internal protective factors, and coped with stress.

I retained paper copies of the signed consent forms that were signed in my presence. The signed interview protocol, the interview transcripts, journal entries, and digital recorders were locked at all times in my vehicle, hotel room, or home office when not in use. When I quoted sections of these interviews, I used pseudonyms to maintain the confidentiality of the students, alum, faculty, counselors, and the institution. All documents have been stored in my home office and will be destroyed after 5 years.

## Issues of Trustworthiness

In an effort to contribute knowledge to the field of higher education, I have made every attempt to provide trustworthy data and analysis. Participants in my study met the criterion established for students, alum, faculty, and campus counselors. Strategies listed below contributed to the validity, reliability and ethical concerns. The data are trustworthy because they represent the exact statements made by participants in their interviews regarding their lived experiences. Common themes emerged after recording interviews, listening to them four or more times, transcribing them, and rereading each interview transcript for significant data. Participants responded fully and at times emotionally to the interview questions as they recalled their life experiences at the university.

I obtained IRB approval to conduct this study from Walden University (#04-28-15-0091964) and from the host institution in a Letter of Agreement.

**Credibility**

Credibility was enhanced because I assured participants their identities would be protected and that they could leave the study at any time. Credibility in qualitative research lies in the rigorous methods for conducting field work, the credibility of the researcher, and the philosophical belief in the value of qualitative research (Patton, 2002, p. 584). As a novice researcher, I called upon the expertise of my committee to uphold the intellectual rigor and methodology of this study. No serious problems occurred during the time of the campus interviews. I acted with integrity, honesty, and respect toward all participants. My dissertation committee has carefully monitored this process through e-mail, telephone conversations, and the review of transcripts. Dr. Marienau and Dr. Johnson conducted peer review, reading through actual transcripts and node lists.

Internal validity refers to whether the data are meaningful or useful. Creswell (2014) defined validity as one of the strengths of qualitative research and posited that it is based on "the accuracy of findings from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant, or the readers of an account" (p. 201). Internal validity, and enriched findings are the result of responses from several data sources I interviewed. By gathering data from students, faculty, and counselors, I was able to explore issues that students struggled with and listen to their accounts of factors that supported their accomplishments. I was able to identify the multiple factors that motivated and inspired students, (high points) as well as the factors that challenged them (low points). Accuracy in collecting data was aided by digital recordings of interviews, written transcripts, and, in the case of students and alums, accuracy checking of their own transcript. I bracketed my interpretations, raw

data, and preliminary themes. All data were peer reviewed by my committee chair and committee member.

**Transferability**

External validity or transferability was established with the rich, thick description and variation in participant selection. Transferability of this study was supported by the diverse range of art and design majors represented among participants. Of the 11 students and one alum interviewed, interviewees came from different majors: fine art, graphic design, photography, printmaking, sculpture or visual arts. Participants provided details that reflected the high points, low points, external and internal protective factors, and coping strategies they used to remain enrolled. Significant descriptions of study responses have helped determine the extent and reasons for accomplishments and positive experiences, as well as stressors and negative experiences. Responses from faculty and counselors were compared to responses from students and the literature. In the journal, I reflected on my own experiences as an interior design major and as a graduate student. I noted my own experiences and perceptions in order to interpret participants' responses without bias. This process is called bracketing and requires the researcher to "suspend their own beliefs in reality to study the reality of everyday life" (Taylor and Bogdan, 1984 as cited in Patton, 2002, p. 111).

**Dependability**

Triangulation of data sources of information included interview questions that were unique to each group: students and alum, faculty, counseling-center interviews, and journal entries. By asking participants to review their own transcripts, I was confident

that the data collected provided an accurate and comprehensive representation of the participant's lived experiences. Preliminary themes and categories were peer reviewed by the chair and member of my dissertation committee.

**Confirmability**

Maxwell (2013) recommended member checking for added accuracy, because it allows for further examination of data by persons in addition to the researcher (p. 111). After the transcripts were typed, I was able to listen to the recordings and check them for accuracy. Member checking occurred when students and the alum were sent their individual transcripts by e-mail to review. Observations of emotional expressions of laughter, tears, sighs, and excitement when participants talked about important experiences were noted in the journal. I was fortunate to be able to listen to some deeply emotional descriptions of events in college and earlier that challenged students' resilience.

The data are trustworthy because they share the participants' experiences, beliefs, and attitudes verbatim regarding their accomplishments, challenges, stressors, and coping strategies to gain and maintain resilience. Faculty and counselors report data based on working with hundreds of students over their years at State U. The concept of reliability refers to whether the results are replicable, internally consistent, and stable over time (Creswell, 2014, p. 247). I believe the findings from my study are reliable. Merriam (2009) advised the confirmability of data is supported by reading and rereading interview transcripts (p. 219). I followed this advice on confirmability with every interview transcript.

**Ethical Procedures**

Ethical considerations were addressed in this study by my use of the consent form, restating the confidentiality agreement, voluntary participation, option for withdrawal, and stating the risks and benefits to participants of being interviewed for this study (Patton, 2002, pp. 407–409; Rubin & Rubin, 2011, pp. 101–103). Each study group had a consent form: students, recent alums, the faculty, and campus counselors.

Consent forms gave permission for relevant excerpts to be quoted. My contact information was noted on the consent form along with contact information for Dr. Marienau, my committee chair. I acted with honesty and integrity in recruiting participants, collecting data, and analyzing data.

## Summary

In this chapter, I reported the procedures for conducting this study: the research design and rationale, my role as the investigator, the procedures for recruiting participants, data collection, the data-analysis plan, and issues of trustworthiness. Data were collected from students and recent alums who majored in art and design, one faculty member who taught undergraduate art and design courses, and two campus counselors who work with students of all majors, including undergraduate- and graduate-level students. The protocol for students and alums, faculty, counselors, and journal entries was discussed in this chapter.

The chapter includes the rationale for selecting this design, my role as a researcher, participant selection, and the methodology for conducting this study. I addressed validity and issues of trustworthiness. I report the lived experiences of student

and alum participants as they were shared with me. I report the responses from faculty and campus counselors. I maintained a journal of interview observations and experiences. In this study, the goal was to illuminate the multiple challenges and stressors art and design students face while pursuing a bachelor's degree. In addition, I examined how students coped with stressors to bolster resilience. When students looked back on their freshman year and saw how much they had improved as artists and designers; as well as how much they had matured as individuals while at the university, many felt proud. Student and alum study participants indicated that participating in the interview was a positive experience that gave them an opportunity to reflect on their accomplishments over the years. In Chapter 4, I report the setting for the study, demographics of participants, data analysis, results, and evidence of trustworthiness. In the following chapters, I report the findings and implications of the study.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to examine resilience and academic success among university art and design students. It was specifically designed to identify and document the supportive relationships, behaviors, and attitudes that university art and design seniors used to bolster resilience and achieve academic success. I collected data from community members of a single university in the United States: undergraduate seniors and one recent alum who majored in art and design, a faculty member who taught undergraduate art and design courses, and campus counselors who work with students of all majors, including undergraduate-level and graduate-level students. I describe in detail below the collection and analysis of the data and report the findings as themes and subthemes, supported by illustrative quotations. I also present evidence of the trustworthiness of the data and findings, as well as related activities and reflections such as describing my journal of interview observations and experiences as the researcher.

Family, faculty, and peer relationships were significant external protective factors in developing and maintaining resilience (Luecken & Gress, 2010; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). Internal protective factors such as positive attitudes and beliefs were significant elements in this study (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, et al., 2011; Skodol, 2010). In this study of graduating seniors, I sought to identify the factors that bolstered student resilience and helped students to persist to graduation. The research questions centered on relationships, events, behaviors, and attitudes that participants reported as they progressed through an undergraduate degree in art and design. How students coped with

stressors and challenges successfully during their years in college and the factors that

helped students build and sustain resilience were at the heart of this inquiry. The

following research questions framed this study:

- Research Question (RQ 1): Which external protective factors of resilience (e.g.,

  family, faculty, peers, counselors, coaches, finances, and religion) do successful

  art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question (RQ 2): Which internal protective factors (e.g., mindsets,

  hardiness, motivation, optimism, self-efficacy, and spiritual beliefs) do successful

  art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?

- Research Question (RQ 3): What stressors present the greatest challenges for

  college art and design students with regard to persistence?

- Research Question (RQ 4): What coping strategies and resources do successful art

  and design students use to sustain resilience through their college experiences?

  In this chapter, I first report on the university setting and the demographics of

participants. Second, I present findings from the primary data source: interviews with

university seniors and one recent alum. Third, as supplements to the data from students

and one alum are the observations of one faculty member and two campus counselors. I

report the analysis of the data and the evidence of why the data can be trusted for each

group. Then, I analyze data across participant groups. The literature informed categories

on external and internal protective factors, supported by the data. The themes and

subthemes emerged from thematic analysis of the data, supported by illustrative

quotations from participants. To maintain confidentiality, I imposed pseudonyms rather than actual names for all participants and the university.

## Setting

The setting for this study was a state university in the eastern United States, hereafter referred to as State U (pseudonym). Interviews took place in the art and design building using either a private classroom or conference room. I conducted interviews during the week of final examinations; all interviews were completed the day before commencement.

## Demographics

I conducted a total of 15 interviews with members of the State U community: 11 with students, one with an alum, one with a faculty member, and two with counselors. At the time of the study, State U's graduating class of 55 seniors who had majored in art and design represented a large portion of the target population and was deemed sufficient for an exploratory phenomenological study. All students and the alum were traditional-aged students who majored in graphic design, photography, printmaking, sculpture, or visual arts. Of the 11 students and one alum interviewed, eight students had entered as freshman and four students had transferred from other colleges. All of the participants reported experiencing a variety of high points and low points while working toward graduation. The participants reported coping with these events in different ways. The student and alum participants comprised nine women and three men; all were single and had no children, and all except for one African American student were Caucasian.

The faculty participant had been with the university for four years and taught art history, freshman orientation, and senior capstone, as well as advised students in all art and design majors. The two campus counselors advised students of every major in the college including undergraduates, graduates, and medical students. The counselors identified both key issues for all students and issues that they saw as unique to art and design majors, drawing on their combined 12 years of college student counseling experience at State U.

## Findings

For each interview, I used an interview schedule prepared for each specific group: students and alums (Appendix A), faculty (Appendix B), and campus counselors (Appendix C). I recorded these interviews using digital devices and I transcribed each interview verbatim. I then sent students transcripts of their individual interviews to check for accuracy. I also read through each transcript several times and selected words and phrases that might constitute themes. After I saw the same word or phrase at least five times I created a node that I entered into NVivo10 software. A node in NVivo10 software is a container or holding place for words and phrases that emerged as potential themes. Five major categories addressed the research questions: (a) high points and accomplishments; (b) external protective factors; (c) internal protective factors; (d) low points, challenges, and stressors; and (e) coping strategies. An additional category provided advice for future students from student participants and the alum. The number of times participants mentioned a theme or subtheme is shown next to each theme statement in parenthesis.

## Student and Alum Responses

After making opening remarks about confidentiality, I explained the purpose of the study, and told participants they could withdraw from the interview at any time without repercussions. Then I asked participants to share the high points, the best experiences, and the most rewarding accomplishments of their university years. The participant responses included 43 highpoints that I divided into three areas. All 12 current and former students had high points to share from their years at State U. This topic elicited a wide range of shared information. The numbers following categories and themes reflect the number of responses I received under each title.

### Category 1: High Points and Accomplishments (43)

This category was preset by the nature of the first interview question posed. For this category, three themes emerged, with each theme containing subthemes. Students discussed high points with these themes: (a) academic accomplishments, (b) artistic accomplishments, and (c) personal accomplishments. All participants reported a number of high points, experiences, and accomplishments they considered significant. Subthemes under academic accomplishments included (a) selecting a major, and (b) senior capstone and graduation. A range of themes for artistic accomplishments included internships, awards, and acknowledgements. Subthemes under personal accomplishments included (a) developing independence, and (b) making friends and establishing romantic relationships.

**Theme: Academic accomplishments (15).** All student participants could point to accomplishments that demonstrated their academic growth and success. Two subthemes

were (a) selecting a major and (b) senior capstone and graduation. Academic accomplishments ranged from selecting a major in the sophomore year to the senior capstone project and earning the degree.

**Subtheme: Selecting a major was an important decision for many student participants (8).** Some participants stated that they knew exactly what they wanted to choose as their major as entering freshman. Others stated that they had struggled with that decision, changed majors more than once, and felt relieved once they declared their major. Once declared, the students reported focusing on the courses needed to fulfill that degree. Some participants who selected an art and design major found that their parents were supportive of the decision. For other students, however, the choice of major did not please their parents. This lack of support is further discussed under the category entitled low points, challenges, and stressors. As Alex noted, he needed time to explore different fields before he could commit to a major: "My second major accomplishment was finally finding my major. My first two years I majored in liberal arts. I took three photo classes in high school and liked them. In my third year, I focused on my major."

The next two participants described the experience of changing majors. Emily stated,

I was a pre-health major. I spent 1 full year taking other classes and even did an internship. I worked at a hospital back home. My happiest moments were when I switched to graphic design. It's just exciting to me.

Peter also described a nonlinear process stating:

I was an accounting major before … I came here and I didn't really like that. …

[In my sophomore year] there was a lot of stress because of switching majors,

trying to figure out what I want to do with my life. Then I switched to graphic

design. I've always had a background in drawing. I've always been interested in

art.

For one student who started an art degree, then transferred to another college and

majored in pre-medicine, then transferred again and resumed her art degree, stated these

transfers lengthened her time to graduation and resulted in enormous stress. Kelsey

stated:

I went to three different colleges. I started at [name withheld] as an art major.

Then I switched my major to nuclear medicine and went to [another university]

for 2 years. Then I took a year off and decided to come here to finish my art

degree.

***Subtheme: The senior capstone project and graduation were the ultimate high***

***points for many students (7).*** The senior capstone project and graduation were the high

points many students mentioned as their best university experience. Participants

described their senior year as filled with a sense of satisfaction and pride for the work

they accomplished. In addition, seniors were excited about their future. The senior

capstone project included art work from the junior and senior years. Each senior

displayed their best work in a solo show in the campus art gallery. Students gave an oral

presentation to faculty and peers and discussed the inspiration for the work, materials

used, and techniques selected to create the finished art work. Students felt considerable

satisfaction about their capstone final projects, as seven students reported. Holly and Justin described their capstone projects. Holly stated,

> My other great accomplishment was the capstone, the final project. It was some of my best work. I actually sold three pieces. It was very abstract. It turned out great. I got the most compliments from my professors that I've had in any year.

Justin expressed,

> Making art for the sophomore review and the capstone were my highlights. For the capstone, I made a collection of six sculptures in stone, alabaster, and wood. I was really proud of them. They were my best work. They were all animals that are either endangered or protected. I really wanted to make a social statement. I wanted to draw attention to the risk of losing these animals.

Speaking for other students, Peter stated that his "biggest accomplishment is getting the degree."

**Theme: Students described artistic accomplishments that ranged from receiving awards, scholarships, interesting internships and gaining recognition (12).** Student participants discussed with excitement their happiness at being recognized for their artistic talent and potential. Andrea stated, *"I got two pieces accepted [for] my first juried show. I got an internship at the [name withheld] museum this year. Things have been going really well."* Another student, Chloe, explained, "I modeled for two famous artists. One even flew me out to San Francisco. Here's a painting of me [showed painting on iPhone]. Holly noted,

One of my greatest accomplishments was in sophomore year. A photo I had

entered was selected for a Hallmark card. I designed a graduation card and

entered it into a competition. I won and they actually used my photo to make the

card. I had to come up with the text for the card too. That was pretty cool and I

felt good about that.

Justin and Kelsey described interesting internships that allowed them to apply what they

learned in the classroom to actual design projects. Justin stated,

I got a job working for a well-known furniture designer [name withheld]. I helped

sand and finish some of his pieces. It didn't pay much, but I did it for the

experience. Then my car died and I had to quit. It was a long drive to his studio. I

really enjoyed that.

Kelsey explained,

We also did another thing for an online game that one of the medical students

here is doing. [We designed] an icon for this medical game. So that's another

thing I can put on my resume. … [It's for] a medical trivia game.

Peter reflected on the ways he has improved as an artist and designer since his first

classes in graphic design:

[I have improved in] a lot of ways, so I would say in terms of balance, continuity,

how to incorporate everything. I used to draw something in the middle of the

page. … Balance and scale, perspective, depth, value, pretty much everything. …

There's really not one area that I haven't improved.

**Theme: Students related important personal accomplishments (16)**. Students shared examples of how they started new chapters in their lives when they came to the university. They spoke of these personal accomplishments in terms of building self-esteem, gaining self-confidence, and establishing important personal relationships; all factors for resilience.

*Subtheme: Gaining independence from parents and unhealthy relationships was an important accomplishment for some student participants entering their freshman and sophomore years (4).* Alex and Jessica discussed feelings of independence in their freshman year. Alex described his accomplishments:

My first big accomplishment was getting my own apartment after being here a year. I got a job at a pizza place and I've been working there for 5 years. I feel pretty self-sufficient. … There's a big difference between 18 and 23. There are some big changes during that time.

Andrea explained her achievements:

I was working at Walmart; I was in a relationship with a guy for three years; a guy who treated me like shit. I kinda felt like it at the time. I gained a lot of weight. [Then] I got into the whole groove of school. I got my own place. I broke up with the guy. I guess that's my biggest accomplishment, but since then I've had a lot of great moments.

Jessica stated,

I would say achieving independence. Finally figuring it [the art world, university, life] out and graduation. Freshman year I had to stay home and attend a

community college. I couldn't come here because my mom was really sick. My dad worked, so I was home for a year and a half.

***Subtheme: Making friends and establishing relationships were also mentioned as significant accomplishments (11).*** According to the literature, when students establish relationships with fellow students they are more likely to remain enrolled (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Tinto, 1993). Students expressed appreciation for the friendships and supportive culture at the university. Chloe and Kat developed long lasting relationships in their first 2 years. Chloe noted, "The other good thing is getting to know people here at the college. Jack, my friend and I got together on day one and we have been friends ever since." Kat explained, "I met my boyfriend here. We had a class together. … We've been together for 3 years. He's a bio–chem major. This summer we're going to get an apartment together."

**Category 2: External Protective Factors (53) (RQ1)**

This theme was established by the literature on resilience theory and was formed by the first research question. According to the literature, external protective factors of resilience include social connections to friends and family, teachers, coaches, counselors, mentors, and religion (Luthar et al., 2000; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Werner & Smith, 2001). When confronted with risk, people rely on protective factors to overcome adversity, increase competence, and resilience (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). In this study, participants noted these themes as making major contributions to their academic success: (a) family relationships, (b) faculty relationships, (c) financial resources, and (d) peer support. Subthemes for family relationships included (a) parents,

(b) mothers, and (c) sisters. All students relied on combinations of these factors for their university completion. Students identified parents, especially mothers and sisters, as most often supporting them in their goal to graduate from the university.

**Theme: Students reported family relationships were the most important supportive factor for academic success (20).** Parents and other family members were identified most often as supporting students in their goal to graduate from the university.

*Subtheme: Parents played a significant role in academic success by providing emotional, physical, and financial support (7).* The support of both parents was noted by seven participants in this study as important for university completion. These students described how their parents' support helped them succeed. Holly explained,

> I have great parents. There are four kids in our family. I'm the youngest. …
> Whatever we wanted to do, they just supported us 100%. They always wanted to
> know what they could do to help. … I wanted to have my own show and they
> helped me. It was expensive, but I sold some work and paid them back.

Kat stated,

> My parents, essentially. My mom went [to State U]. This was her college. My
> dad, because of the GI Bill. … They've both been supportive of me ever since I
> was a kid. [My dad] always liked my drawing and artwork.

Another student, Bailey, mentioned, "I think my mom and dad are more excited [about graduation] than I am."

Kelsey received conflicting messages from her parents, but decided to pursue the degree that brought her the most satisfaction.

[My parents] are proud of me, but at the same time, they said. "You're too smart

to go to art school, you should go into medicine." So then when I got into that,

they said, "You're so good at art, why did you quit?

Nearly all student participants had the support of their mothers. Jessica's mother was not

supportive of her daughter's art degree initially, but later came to support her. Suzanne's

mother supported her daughter's education, but not her sexual orientation.

***Subtheme: Mothers were mentioned most often as supporting their student at***

***the university (11).*** Researchers reported that a mother's loving care in early childhood

linked positively to resilience adaptation in addition to health, self-efficacy, and the

ability to make realistic plans (Perry et al., 2005; Werner & Smith, 2001). Students noted

the support they received from their mothers was critical for attending college and

graduating. Andrea explained,

My mom. We have a very good relationship. My mom has always been my best

friend. When she was a student, she wanted to be a journalist. She's a fantastic

writer, but my grandparents never supported her. So she's *really* supported me in

whatever I wanted to do.

Emily expressed that "Most of my life, I've depended on my mom. … She's the only one

who really cares about me."

***Subtheme: When mothers' support was not given, students reached out to other***

***family members for support (2).*** Mothers were mentioned most often as being supportive

of the student's goals and success in college. Alex and Suzanne mentioned that the

support they received from older sisters was important to their academic success. Alex

stated, "My mom was the driving force for me; then she passed away." When asked who

has been most important in supporting her to finish her degree, Alex replied, "My sister,

for sure. My dad does help me. He's very proud of me and understands what I've been

through." Susanne claimed, "My sister. She's my hero, my best critic."

Most parents were supportive of the pursuit of a bachelor's degree, but not all

were supportive of their children's choice of an art and design major. However, students

who did not have support from both parents to pursue an art degree managed to graduate.

Relationships with family members who were not supportive are discussed later in this

chapter under the category of low points, challenges, and stressors. Students were

assigned faculty mentors, but did not mention them in the interviews. Although

researchers identified religion as a supportive factor for resilience, only two students

described religion as a supportive factor.

**Theme: Faculty relationships had a significant impact on students' ability to**

**produce work by challenging their skills and artistic expression (10).** The more time

students spend with faculty who engage and interact with them, the more likely students

are to stay in college (Tinto, 1993). Relationships with faculty provided guidance for

techniques and use of materials. Faculty members are important role models for students,

shaping their values, skills, and intellectual growth (Tinto, 1993). Alex and Chloe felt

that faculty pushed them to produce better work. Alex noted,

> When you produce a good piece of work, [the faculty] give you credit. There is
>
> just enough struggle. Professors always challenge you. They can be hard on you.
>
> They tell you if you're headed down the right path. That's needed now. I have

produced some really good pieces of work, but when I just throw something out

there, they know. They know when you just haven't put in the time.

Chloe explained, "The sophomore review went pretty well. … I got an "A." [Regarding

critiques]: I love talking. [Critiques are] subjective, enlightening. Professors are never

hurtful, but one digs at me. I can't make anything right."

Holly and Kat felt the professors really cared about their success. Holly said, *"*We

got a new professor this year for web design. He is very encouraging. He really cares

about your future." Kat reflected on the faculty with this remark: "The teachers are very

good. … They'll let you go back and redo your work if you want to get a higher grade, as

long as you turn it in before the finals are due." Justin shared a different opinion

regarding artists who taught at the university:

> The professors are supposedly successful. I think they are all failed artists that
>
> resorted to teaching. They teach because they've failed to make it in the art world.
>
> Some of them don't know how to teach. If they were successful, they'd be out
>
> producing their art.

**Theme: Students reported financial assistance was essential for their**

**education (12).** Students consistently report financial problems as impediments to

graduation (Angel & Connelly, 2011; Lipka, 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005;

Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Findings from this study indicated that student participants

attended class full time and relied on employment, scholarships, loans, and parents to pay

tuition, housing, and expenses. Financial aid was critical for 10 of the 12 participants. A

combination of community and academic scholarships, tuition waivers, the GI Bill, and

student loans made graduation a reality for these students. Several participants reported they would never be able to make it through college without financial assistance. Subtheme (a) reports on the many ways student cobble together the financial help they need. Subtheme (b) reports the work students do in addition to full-time enrollment.

*Subtheme: Students were proactive in obtaining financial aid to cover tuition and housing expenses (10).* Andrea and Emily rely on waivers, loans, and scholarships. Andrea noted, "I get a tuition waiver. I've had that the last 3 years. I don't have to pay that back. They take off $800–$1,000 a year. I get loans. I pretty much pay for it all myself." Emily explained that "Just this year I got an art and design scholarship because I have an excellent portfolio; and I got a tuition waiver."

*Subtheme: Students work many hours in addition to full-time enrollment (2).* Alex worked full-time while taking a full course load. Chloe and other participants had part-time jobs in addition to carrying a full-time load of courses. Alex noted, "At first I worked 15–20 hours; now it's more like 35–40 hours a week. Cutting back my hours is not an option. I have to work." Chloe stated,

> I have three jobs now. I teach yoga … work here in the gallery, waitress, and I babysit for one of the professors' daughter. That's four. ... In the sophomore year I was awarded a scholarship based on my portfolio. I also had a scholarship and my first years' tuition at [State U] was paid for. I graduated from high school with honors. I was in the National Honor Society, had a high GPA. I took AP classes and gen ed in my senior year.

Ten students indicated they would have to repay student loans after graduation. Only two students indicated their parents made too much money to qualify for assistance. Participants expressed gratitude for the financial help they received. Some parents were unable to provide support at all. Eight students reported receiving multiple scholarships; Jessica remarked,

> I got the Promise scholarship, the Witherspoon scholarship; I got four or five other scholarships. I got an Energy express and AmeriCorps scholarship; plus, I worked as a [resident assistant] in the dorm. That helped a lot. So I've had a lot of support.

Peter explained,

> I got the Promise scholarship. … I never had a problem with getting close to the line when I might lose it. I kept my grades up. That was based on my ACT score. ... I had a thing like from ERA and it lasted for the first couple of years. Also, I got a few other scholarships from Hometown Sportswear and the Barnes Agency.

**Theme: Students reported peer support contributed to their resilience and success (11).** All but one student reported having good relationships with peers in their major area of study. Students in this study reported a warm, friendly, family-like culture among students, especially in each major discipline. Alex noted, "It's interesting too, how people work together. Classmates share ideas. They are very supportive." Andrea stated,

> I have a good group of friends here. All my art friends are really good. … They are the reason I made it the last 2 years in school. The students respect each other.

Everyone's artwork is vastly different, but they still respect you. That's something

that [State U] really has going for them.

Holly expressed,

The photo majors who started here in the freshman year are like a big family to

me. We support each other. We build each other up. We help each other out. The

other students who came later have their own group. They stick together.

In addition to the external protective factors for resilience students reported, each student

had a combination of personality traits and behaviors that supported their academic

success.

**Category 3: Internal Protective Factors (66) (RQ2)**

Resilience and academic success are the result of combined external and internal

protective factors (Reich et al., 2010; Werner & Smith, 2001). This category was

established by the research question. Students identified a combination of factors that

were critical to their academic success. The literature review identified internal protective

factors that promote beliefs and behaviors that buffer individuals from adversity and

promote resilience (Garmezy, 1991; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010).

Six themes emerged from the interviews as central to academic progress:

(a) hardiness, (b) motivation, (c) mindsets, (d) optimism, (e) self-efficacy, and (f) tenacity

and perseverance. Mindsets had two subthemes: (a) artistic talent and (b) intelligence

beliefs. Findings from this study indicated participants possessed strengths in these

internal factors and demonstrated examples of these characteristics throughout the

interviews. Students reported confidence in their skills, were highly motivated, and

demonstrated perseverance and the willingness to do whatever it took to complete their degree.

**Theme: Students demonstrated their hardiness by taking responsibility for their successes and failures (12).** What makes one hardy is the motivation and courage to see challenges and to address them appropriately (Maddi et al., 2012). Students demonstrated their hardiness by picking themselves up after disappointing results. Hardiness comprises the feeling a student has that they are in control of their destiny; not helpless in determining their success (Frazier et al., 2011; Skodol, 2010, p. 115). Alex recognized some projects did not always represent his best abilities: "You're not going to create great work right off the bat. You're going to mess up. Some [photographs] good, some not so good. You're not an art student unless you've had a failure and been stressed out."

Emily and Jessica expressed stressful times, but managed to address them. Emily explained, "I take on a lot of stress, but I usually deal with it. There's no way to go around it." Jessica noted, "Why didn't my parents tell me being an adult was so hard?" Kat stated, "The teachers are very good. … They'll let you go back and redo your work if you want to get a higher grade; as long as you turn it in before the finals."

**Theme: Students were highly motivated to do the work required to graduate (12).** Motivation involves those processes that give behavior its energy, direction, and drive (Dweck et al., 2011; Reeve, 2009). Motivation is an internal protective factor for resilience and is indispensable for academic success (Dembo & Seli, 2008; Karoly, 2010; Sternberg, 2005). Most scholars on motivation distinguished between intrinsic motivation

(the push that comes from deep within oneself) and extrinsic motivation (grades or rewards) as two distinct forces (Bain, 2012, p. 20). Motivation to succeed was evident in all study participants, but students gave different reasons for motivation to persist with their education. Alex reported that the positive encouragement he received from peers (external motivation) motivated him to persist: "When you come up with an idea and can ask a friend, "Hey what do you think?" They say, "Great!" and that can give you the extra motivation to carry on." Holly indicated she was motivated to please her parents (internal motivation): "I'm really motivated to make my parents proud. They've been totally supportive of whatever I wanted to do."

Another student participant, Suzanne, was motivated to persist when she received negative feedback (external motivation):

> One professor gave me a "C" in the review, but all the other feedback was good. I fell out with one of my teachers. I was motivated to work hard even though I was upset. I don't know who gave me the "C" but I suspected who it was and I didn't take any more classes with him. The bad grade kept me motivated.

Kelsey wanted to feel successful, (internal motivation) but expressed her motivation as not wanting to fail: "I just don't want to feel like a failure." Peter acknowledged that it was up to him alone (internal motivation) to produce work that reflected his best abilities: "Motivation. You have to be motivated. You have to take it upon yourself to get the results you want."

**Theme: Students expressed optimism regarding their future careers in the arts (6).** Research on optimism has shown that positive emotions broaden attention, open

an individual's mind to new information, and enhance physical and emotional well-being (Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Seligman, 2011; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Optimists increase resilience by reframing a stressful event, using active problem-solving skills; and believe that regardless of the problem, they have the skills to change things for the better. For example, Justin is confident he and his fiancé will be successful in a new city where they plan to begin their careers. He stated,

> My fiancé and I are moving to [city name withheld]. We looked at a list of cities
> we would consider moving to and considered the art scene and job market. We
> made a list of places and talked about them. We decided on [city] because it has a
> good art scene and is still close enough that we can visit family.

**Theme: Students have varied mindsets regarding the origins of artistic talent and intelligence (12).** Findings from this study indicate student participants do not have unified beliefs regarding artistic talent and intelligence. The mindset a person adopts regarding intelligence, artistic talent, and personal success is likely to influence resilience and college completion (Bandura, 1997; Dweck, 2000; Dweck et al., 2014; Skodol, 2010). Students' beliefs about themselves, their feelings and self-control matter more to resilience than academic ability (Dweck et al., 2014; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Students either have a *growth mindset* or a *fixed mindset* (Dweck, 2006). Students with fixed mindsets believe that intelligence and artistic talents are characteristics with which someone is born. Students who have growth mindsets believe that practice and hard work are required to develop intelligence and artistic abilities. Findings from this study

indicated participants have mixed opinions regarding the origin of artistic talent and intelligence.

*Subtheme: Some students believe artistic talent is a trait with which one is born, but requires practice to develop further (11).* Students who believe they were born with artistic talents emphasized the importance of practice to enhance their artistic skills. For example, Chloe believes she was "born with it. It's a gift; you are just wasting it if you don't do it. You can't teach taste." Holly and Kelsey agreed and emphasized the need to practice. Holly expressed, "I think it's both. I know we're born with certain talents. I think you can be born with talent, but it increases with practice." Kelsey noted,

> I think people might be born with an inclination to be artistic, but what they really
>
> need is practice to make that talent come out. I don't think that's something
>
> you're automatically born with. You have to put the effort in. I think it's mostly
>
> 80% hard work and 20% genetic. A combination of nature and nurture.

Justin added another perspective on talent: *"*I believe you are born with certain attunements to rhythms in life. You transfer those skills into knowing what brings you happiness and fulfillment."

*Subtheme: The majority of students felt intelligence was determined by birth and was influenced by parents and the environment (12).* Only three participants believed intelligence was formed at birth. Five students stated that they believed intelligence is both something with which one is born, and requires work to improve. For example, Bailey, Chloe, and Suzanne believed their mothers and their environment influenced their intelligence: Bailey stated, "You're born with it, but it can be developed

over time. My mom told me I could do anything I want; you just have to choose to pursue it." Chloe believed "everyone has a base, depending on how your life goes, the supports are there. It's really influenced by environment." Emily revealed she was placed in special education classes in elementary school, but now does very well in college-level work.

> There may be a select few geniuses. Not everyone is the smartest. You need to put the time in. In elementary school, I was put in special ed. It took years and now I not only do the best in all my papers, I'm educationally fit. Better than most people.

Kat and Kelsey believe intelligence is formed at birth, but still requires work to develop. Kat said that intelligence is "a little bit of both. You can't start out gifted. You work through that and develop study habits and focus." Kelsey agreed that intelligence is formed at birth, but requires work: "I think it's both, probably 50/50. You can have intelligent genes, but you still have to work at it." Suzanne claimed,

> I think everyone is born smart. My mom worked with me reading and writing before I went to school. I think a lot has to do with what you are exposed to as a child. A lot of kids don't get that at home.

Justin added, "I believe you are born with certain attunements to rhythms in life. You transfer those skills into knowing what brings you happiness and fulfillment."

**Subtheme: Religious/spiritual beliefs were mentioned by two student participants who gained strength from their beliefs (2).** Two students reported the support they received from their religious beliefs was important for resilience. Although

the literature reports that students' spiritual and religious beliefs appear to play a protective role in college resilience and serve as protective factors for a large number of students (Pargament & Cummings, 2010), few students in this study mentioned religious or spiritual beliefs. Students who identified as spiritual or religious showed lower levels of suicide, depression, and substance abuse than peers who indicated they did not have spiritual or religious beliefs (CSCMH, 2009).

Justin and Peter expressed deep feelings of being spiritually connected to God and believe their faith has made stronger, better people. Justin explained, "I have made a transition in my life. I'm more devout in my faith. I wanted to be a different person, a better person. I had to step back and reevaluate my faith. I'm not super preachy or annoying." Peter elaborated,

> I grew up Baptist and at the end of high school and the first couple years of college I doubted my faith and beliefs and things. I looked at different religions and philosophies. I'm very driven by the word of God. And everything that Christ wants us to do, that he died for us, that he was resurrected. That God gave us his son, as a way back. … Church is good, but [a] persons' relationship with Christ is more important than fellowship.

**Theme: Students expressed high self-efficacy and confidence in their ability to succeed (10).** According to a large body of literature, self-efficacy beliefs include self-confidence, a positive attitude to succeed, and one's persistence and ability to succeed in reaching personal goals (Bandura, 1977, 1994, 1995, 1997). In addition, self-beliefs are internal protective factors that influence academic success, social success, and resilience

(Dweck, 2000). One subtheme for high self-efficacy reflected doubts two students had regarding their abilities. Jessica, Justin, Kat, and Peter showed high self-efficacy beliefs Holly noted, "I was pretty confident. I always got good grades in school." Jessica explained, "I was confident that I could manage the work. I love school, I've always loved school." Justin expressed, "I'm very confident about my abilities. I do good work." Emily stated she gained satisfaction in completing her assignments: *"I'm kind of an educational nerd. I love just turning my assignments in."* Kat agreed, "I was pretty confident because [State U has] all the tools and resources I don't have at home. Plus, I'm close to the classes, so I can work on my own time or on my lap top." Finally, Peter stated, "I do pretty good quality work usually. I still get some feedback where I need to change things."

*Subtheme: Some students reported doubts about their ability to succeed* **[2].**
Andrea and Suzanne indicated they were doubtful in their freshman and sophomore years about whether they would be able to complete college, but persisted in spite of their doubts. Andrea said, "I was not very confident at all. I hadn't taken a math class. I just assumed when I got here, I'd but persisted in spite of their doubts." She added,

> I was not very confident at all. I hadn't taken a math class. I just assumed when I got here, I'd be struggling with that kind of stuff. Honestly, I have anxiety pretty bad. … Finals week is pretty rough. You know, a lot of things within this field of fine art, I'm not really decent at. It's a lot more work for me than it is for a lot of people.

Suzanne confessed her worries about passing courses she needed:

I didn't think I was going to make it. I never thought I'd pass typography. I

worked so hard. … I was terrible at drawing. … I got bad critiques, but I kept

working. There were a lot of challenges to keep my grades up. I've been

persistent and hardworking. I'm actually graduating!

**Theme: Students demonstrated tenacity and perseverance (12).** Perseverance

is defined as the ability to stay with a difficult task until it is completed (Duckworth &

Quinn, 2009). Perseverance is an essential predictor of resilience and academic success

(Duckworth et al., 2007; Duckworth & Quinn, 2009). The statements made by Andrea

and Suzanne regarding their doubts are examples of tenacity and perseverance. Tenacity

refers to the stubbornness of holding firmly to one's goal (*Merriam Webster*, 1996).

Synonyms for the words tenacity and perseverance, such as persistence and

determination, often described the attitudes and behaviors that supported academic

success for students in this study. Alex and Bailey discussed their reasons for staying

focused on their goals. Alex said, "I just need to finish this. I've put so much time and

money into it. I can't stop now. If I stop now, I'll have nothing to show for it. Just

$30,000 down the drain." Bailey stated,

I gained a really thick skin throughout my life experiences. There have been times

when I've said, I'm not going to let [teachers who believe I am not smart] win.

I'm going to prove that I can [succeed in] college.

**Category 4: Low Points, Challenges, and Stressors (71) (RQ3)**

Students identified relationships and events that challenged them academically

and personally. This category was also preset by the research questions. All participants

identified multiple stressors and events that challenged them beyond the work load required to complete assignments. Crum, Salovey, and Achor (2013) found that individuals who believe stress is enhancing reported fewer symptoms of depression and anxiety as well as higher levels of energy. When students are stressed over meeting big deadlines, the stress response can lead to a positive focus and high energy to meet the deadline. The stress response can improve functioning when faced with deadlines or survival; and when faced with adversity, the stress response can lead one to focus on addressing the situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Stressful life events occur for everyone many times over the lifespan (Aptor, 2007; Bonanno, 2004; Zolli & Healy, 2012) and college is no exception. Three themes emerged from student interviews: (a) academic stress, (b) family stress, and (c) personal stress. Family stress had two subthemes: (a) poor relationships with fathers, (b) lack of support for art and design major, and (c) lack of support for sexual orientation. I partitioned the personal stress theme into these subthemes: (a) roommates, (b) physical and mental health issues, (c) financial concerns, and (d) death of a loved one (Table 1).

**Theme: Students experienced stress related to academic issues (30).** A significant amount of literature exists on college-student stress and mental health challenges (ACHA, 2013; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; CSCMH, 2009; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Hartley, 2011, 2013; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Mistler et al., 2012). Academic stress had four subthemes: (a) selecting a major, (b) sophomore review, (c) critiques, and (d) bullying and educational trauma.

***Subtheme: Selecting a major was easy for some students, but others struggled to find their major (8).*** Initially, Emily and Kelsey majored in health studies, but found they did not enjoy the course work or internship and changed their majors. Emily stated,

> I was a pre-health major. I spent 1 full year taking other classes and even did an
>
> internship. I worked at a hospital back home. I was studying to be a cardiology
>
> major. The environment I worked in was a terrible experience. … It was pretty
>
> awful. … Doing my internship made me realize I didn't want to do that forever.

Kelsey explained, "I went to three different colleges. I started in art [at another college].

… Then I switched my major to nuclear medicine, then I took a year off and decided to

come here to finish my art degree." Kat decided on graphic design instead of veterinary

science after she realized how many years a veterinary science degree would require to

complete:

> So my freshman year I went to a local community college. I originally wanted to
>
> become a veterinary major. I took care of all my core courses. … Then I decided
>
> to get a graphic design degree rather than a vet degree. That would take 10 years.

Alex majored in liberal arts and decided on his major in his junior year: "My first 2 years

I majored in liberal arts. In my 3rd year I focused on my major. Once I finally decided on

photography, I felt good. I still absolutely love it."

***Subtheme: Sophomore review was a stressful experience for some students (*5*).***

In the sophomore review, students put their work from freshman and sophomore year up

for evaluation. They are required to discuss the materials used and techniques. Faculty

grades the work and determines whether the student passes or fails. Holly and Kat

received negative feedback from professors during their sophomore review, but decided to stay with their declared majors. Holly explained,

My sophomore year was one of the toughest. The end of the year review did not go well. … My professor actually tore me apart. My professor told me: "You don't belong here. I could buy the shittiest camera at Walmart and take pictures that look better than this." I wanted to quit right then. I did not cry in class, but did when I got back to my room. I called my parents and told them I was leaving. … They were very supportive and suggested I look around for other colleges. After thinking about it, the encouragement I got from my advisor convinced me to stick it out.

Kat stated,

My most stressful time was my sophomore year when we had the sophomore review. We had to show all our work from the foundations courses and talk about it. I was told I should not be in graphic design. … That was a real low blow to my pride and I became depressed for a while because of this. … I saw that I was half way through my degree and I didn't want to change majors, so I didn't know what else to do. I'm not good at anything else. … But this year I took graphic design courses and I've been able to build up a more professional portfolio with graphic design concepts in mind.

***Subtheme: Students experienced critiques as stressful events* (12).** Studio critiques are a central feature in art and design education, as they provide feedback and assessment of student work (Blair, 2006; Dannels et al., 2011; Dannels & Martin, 2008;

Gray, 2013). In the critique, students put their work on display before the entire class and

explain the methods and techniques used, as well as their inspiration for the work.

Critiques are intended to be learning experiences (Blair, 2006; Dannels & Martin, 2008).

However, for many students in this study, critiques were very stressful events. Students

reported harsh remarks made from faculty and peers in every interview.

Critiques prepare students for the rigor of making successful presentations before

employers and clients (Blair, 2006; Buster & Crawford, 2010; Dannels et al., 2011;

Edstrom, 2008; Hargrove, 2011). Students reported critiques were stressful experiences

in classes at every level from freshman to senior year. Although students acknowledged

that the purpose of the critique was to improve their work, many participants felt some

remarks made by faculty and peers left them feeling attacked. Alex felt students must be

strong to handle critiques:

> I think you have to have resilience to deal with critiques. There are some hoity-
> toity students here who, when someone shoots down their idea, are completely
> obliterated and drop out, never return. … Every student in art school understands
> how it works. You have to be hard headed enough that you can continue with
> your ideas, but open enough for change.

Andrea described her experience during critiques: "We had a teacher that ripped

drawings off the wall and threw them out the window." Justin said, "Critiques are the

worst. My head was always on the chopping block. Lots of negative remarks. …

Critiques are torture." Peter remarked,

Some students will take offense to [critiques] and be real hurt. The reason why we're here is to learn how to become good designers, so if I get some criticism, I don't take it personally. Okay, I need to do this and this to make my work better. I really appreciate professors who don't fluff it up. … Pretty much all the professors I've had have been respectful. Even though someone's work is bad, doesn't mean you can be cynical or hateful or disrespect that person. It's one thing to tell them, it's a craft. It isn't like this is a Jerry Springer show. We're not here to make a big scene. We're here to talk about design and make peoples' work better. And ripping up someone's work crosses the line; disrespecting their character. It's not about the person, it's about the work!

Suzanne described her experience:

One professor tore it down. [He said,] "This sucks." … I took the criticism. He was really a jerk. It wasn't the best, but there's a way to say something and he was harsh. … You really get hammered in critiques. We had an outside critic who talked to us like we were dogs. [He said,] "This looks like shit." We should learn to handle harsh criticism. Some professors try to scare you to the point of crying. I think it would be better if they said something like: If you did this and this your piece would be better. That would be helpful. I'm persistent, I keep trying. It wasn't my best work, but he didn't have to be such a jerk.

Emily and Jessica shared their experiences when harsh remarks were given by peers. Emily stated,

In critique, one girl decided to demoralize my vase. She called it a vagina. She said, "She went to class and started laughing." I had a panic attack for 3 hours after that. Now I can't deal with her in class. She's abusive and manipulative like my first roommate. I keep away from her.

Jessica commented,

I did have a nemesis, a fellow student. I would get constructive criticism that seemed very harsh. … She was jealous of me, I think. She would say, "This isn't a strong piece. … This is terrible. Why are you in the program?

Kelsey experienced critiques at another university and felt critiques were less stressful at State U than at her previous college:

Critiques here [at State U] are much better [than at the other college attended]. The students here are much more friendly and noncompetitive.

Some student participants in this study who managed critiques well reported witnessing peers being humiliated and brought to tears during critiques. All participants in this study shared an observation of a harsh critique of a fellow student's work or a harsh critique of their own work. A few study participants understood the purpose of the critique was to make the work better, but still felt uncomfortable with the feedback.

Andrea expressed her thoughts:

Critiques really make you better as an artist, they're really important. You can always get better. … [One professor said] "You really need to step up your game, you really need to change this." My photo teacher is very supportive of me. He's

had his moments in critiques as well and he's been positive about my work, then

not so positive. In his own way, I've come to realize that over the past year or so,

he just wants me to get better. Sometimes he really pushes me. Sometimes I think

he doesn't appreciate my work. It's his way of making me better.

Jessica reported what she believed to be a problem with critiques. That is,

students don't fully understand what peer and faculty critics mean by their remarks. She

noted, "When I walk away from critique, I want to make sure I fully understand. That's

where I think a lot of students *hear* what is being said, but they don't actually *understand*

what was said." Individuals who have experienced trauma have difficulty concentrating,

are more anxious, and may feel overwhelmed, angry, or helpless (B. Perry, 2006).

Absorbing what is being said during critiques can be difficult under these circumstances.

***Subtheme: Some students experienced bullying and educational trauma (5).***

Bullying exists at all levels of education and frequently results in verbal insults that can

leave scars that last well into adulthood (Chapell et al., 2004; U.S. Department of

Education, 2014, p. 1). Students who received negative remarks and harsh critiques from

faculty have a hard time defending themselves. Faculty are in control of whether a

student passes or fails a course and are often asked to provide letters of recommendation

for jobs and internships. Some students reported educational trauma from teachers in

elementary, middle, and high school that diminished confidence in their abilities. Bailey

commented, "A lot of teachers I've had have said, "You're not that smart. You'll never

make it." Kelsey stated,

A professor in my sophomore review at [name of another college] told me I was

the worst artist he had ever seen. I broke out in tears. That also had something to

do with me wanting to change my major.

Jessica experienced educational trauma when her best friend died in middle school:

At a very young age, when I was 12, I saw my best friend die. She had a heart

condition. One of her valves ruptured in class. … We were 45 minutes from the

closest hospital. … I remember exactly what happened. We were in gym, she fell,

we tried to get her up, and she was unresponsive.

When asked about university stressors, some students went back to their

childhood and related earlier traumatic experiences that have had lingering effects on

their performance. Even though these early childhood events occurred in elementary and

middle school, they were significant to participants and stood out as painful, adverse

events. Emily explained,

I always have a hard enough time trusting people. I was bullied a lot in school.

Bullied, severely beaten, from kindergarten to late middle school. In kindergarten,

I had my head bashed into the table by a girl who was much larger than me. After

that everything kind of went downhill. There were times on the merry-go-round,

they took my shirt and tied it to the merry-go-round, then pushed it. I would get

dragged.

Jessica remarked,

I was bullied in [middle] school and I've been through a lot of tough things, so

when you have enough bad things said to you, you learn to deal with it. … I

didn't come from a rich family. I didn't wear the right clothes. I never fit into a

clique.

**Theme: Students reported family stressors that challenged their ability to**

**stay focused on course work (12).** Although most participants spoke of support from

one or both parents, family support was not consistent or absolute. Some students

reported support overall for attending the university; but less support for majoring in art.

Stressors ranged from death to criminal activities, health problems, and lack of parental

support (see Table 1). Family stress encompassed a range of worries that had impacted

student success. I partitioned family stress into three subthemes: (a) lack of support from

fathers, (b) lack of support for an art and design major, and (c) fears of sharing their

sexual orientation.

Table 1

*Students Major Low Points, Challenges, and Stressors*

| Participants | Sophomore review | Critiques | Selecting major | Family stress | Roommate problems | Bullying & educational trauma | Physical & mental health problems |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alex | — | X | X | — | X | — | X |
| Andrea | — | X | — | X | X | — | X |
| Bailey | X | X | X | — | X | X | X |
| Chloe | — | X | X | X | — | — | — |
| Emily | — | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Holly | X | X | — | — | X | — | — |
| Kat | X | X | X | — | X | — | X |
| Kelsey | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Jessica | — | X | — | X | X | X | X |
| Justin | — | X | — | X | — | — | — |
| Peter | — | X | X | — | X | — | — |
| Suzanne | X | X | X | X | X | X | X |
| Total | 5 | 12 | 8 | 7 | 10 | 5 | 8 |

**Subtheme: Some students' fathers, did not support them as children or as university students (4).** Andrea, Chloe and Emily shared the stressful relationships they have with their fathers. Andrea stated,

My dad really isn't in the picture. He's a drunk and a drug addict. When I was little, I sat by the door all night waiting for him to come home. [We were supposed to go rock hunting]. He stood me up. … He came home about 3:00 a.m. and he kissed me on the forehead. I could just smell the alcohol (crying). … I just forgot about him as a father figure. He's never really been there. … He's in his

50's. … He still lives with his parents. … My mom has remarried. This is her fourth husband. I have a father figure now.

Chloe explained,

When I was a sophomore, I saw my dad walking down the street with another woman, not my mother. It was really disturbing. Sophomore year I missed a lot of classes, I just could not sit still. I was disinterested, didn't participate. It was the most angry time of my life. I told my mom, but she kind of knew. I really struggled that year. My dad has all kinds of stuff like mountain bikes, motorcycles, sports equipment. … Everything is on lock-down in the house. He hides his car keys. One day we found them and we searched his car. We found bottles of American honey, weed, and guns. He works, but he's not there all the time. He grows pot and he's dealing too. He sees us as a burden. One day my mom called me back to her bedroom. She found all kinds of guns and had them on the bed. There were more guns under the bed. Some were the same kind. … I can't blame my home life for my lack of drive.

Emily added,

My parents are still married, but my father and I have a god-awful relationship. … [Dad] calls me a bitch a lot. He said he "feels sorry for whoever marries me because they're going to have to deal with a whole lot of shit.

***Subtheme: Students reported a lack of support for a degree in art and design***

*(5).* Students often remarked that parents did not respect their choice of major. Parents

who were opposed expressed concerns about employment after graduation and tried to steer students into medical careers. Jessica explained,

> My mom kind of never understood that I wanted to major in art. … My parents wanted me to go into something more secure like medicine or teaching. "You need security," she said. She encouraged me to go into the medical field. I told her I was going to go into art education to be an art teacher. Then after the first semester, I transferred out of that. To a certain degree, I fibbed. I told them I was going to get two degrees: first my art degree, then my teaching degree. … Now I'm teaching an art-appreciation course for non-art majors.

Justin said,

> My father is always on my back. He did not want me to major in art. He's always on me about radiation therapy. I have no interest in the medical field. I plan to prove to him I'll be successful. It will be nice to move away.

Peter remarked, "So when I switched [from accounting to graphic design] they were worried I'd waste my time. I wouldn't be able to find a job." Kelsey struggled with conflicting messages from her parents:

> They're proud of me, but at the same time, they said, "You're too smart to go to art school, you should go into medicine." So then when I got into that, they said, "You're so good at art, why did you quit?" … They're really overprotective, since I'm an only child. They don't seem to realize that I need peace and quiet to get things done. They don't understand that I need time to do my work. They always

want me to go somewhere with them. … It's hard to get things done when they

keep the TV turned up to 100.

Table 2, identifies the categories, themes and subthemes students reported in this study.

Table 2

*Categories, Themes, and Subthemes*

| Categories | Themes | Subthemes | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. High points and accomplishments | Academic<br>Artistic<br>Personal | Selecting a major<br>Senior capstone & graduation<br>Awards<br>Scholarships, waivers<br>New friends | 43 |
| 2. External protective factors | Family relationships<br>Faculty relationships<br>Financial support<br>Peer support | Parents<br>Mothers<br>Sisters | 53 |
| 3. Internal protective factors | Hardiness<br>Motivation<br>Mindsets<br>Optimism<br>Self-efficacy & self-beliefs<br>Tenacity & perseverance | Artistic talent<br>Intelligence | 66 |
| 4. Low points, challenges, and stressors | Academic stress<br>Family stress<br>Personal stress | Selecting a major<br>Sophomore Review<br>Critiques<br>Bullying & educational trauma<br>Fathers<br>Lack of support for major<br>Fears of parent's reaction<br>Roommate problems<br>Health problems | 71 |
| 5. Coping strategies | Positive<br>Negative | Talking with family & friends<br>Exercise & sleep<br>Food, soda, caffeine | 63 |
| 6. Advice | Academic<br>Social" | | 15 |

***Subtheme: Students reported stress related to revealing their sexual orientation***

***(4).*** Four students indicated stress around coming out as lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender to their parents. Suzanne was the only student who told her parents about being a lesbian. That revelation resulted in several years of rejection and alienation. Suzanne commented,

> I came out last year. My mom kicked me out. She didn't believe it. I guess she was embarrassed. It hurt for a while, but it made me stronger. The stress of school and my mom was hard. The Society of Black Scholars had an award ceremony and I was given a Kenta cloth. I wore a tie and dress shirt. This is who I am. I'm comfortable. I've learned to stand up to my mom. I've learned to be strong from my sister. My mom really wants me to wear a dress for graduation. I told her I'm wearing pants, a dress shirt and tie. She's proud of me [as a university graduate], but also embarrassed [by my sexual orientation].

Bailey explained,

> Only my sister and two of my cousins know I'm gay. I don't want to be that obvious. … I feel like [my parents] know. It's just like "don't ask, don't tell." I've had my hair short since freshman year in high school. I'm not wearing a dress. … [My mom] wants me to wear a dress for graduation. I told her that's not happening. It's my day and I'm going to wear what's in my closet. I'm still a girl, I have all the parts. I'm just more comfortable this way.

**Theme: Students reported personal stress with relationships, health, finances, and dealing with the death of a loved one (29).** Stressful life events occur for everyone many times over the lifespan (Aptor, 2007; Bonanno, 2004; Zolli & Healy, 2012) and college is no exception. As students matured and adapted to the college environment, the stresses students experienced changed. Personal stress with roommates, romantic partners, physical and mental health issues, and finances were managed, but took attention away from course work. Subthemes included (a) roommate problems, (b) physical and mental health problems, (c) financial problems, and (d) grief following the death of a loved one. Pierceall and Keim (2007) reported "12% of college students were highly stressed, 75% [of students surveyed] experienced moderate stress, 13% experienced low stress" (p. 703). Participants in this study reported personal stress in addition to academic and family stress.

*Subtheme: Students reported problems with incompatible roommates (10).* Students noted the most common stressors in their freshman and sophomore years were problems with roommates who had different lifestyles and values. Roommate problems were mentioned by 10 participants who did not live at home and were described in great detail by most participants as having a negative influence on their academic focus. A safe living environment and financial resources are considered protective factors for resilience (Wolniak & Gebhardt, 2012). Students indicated a comfortable, harmonious living environment was essential for well-being, allowing them to concentrate on their work and get adequate sleep. When students had roommate problems and could not resolve them,

they coped by moving to an apartment of their own or requesting a private dormitory room. Alex lived with roommates who partied too much:

> In my freshman year I got an apartment with some friends in a big house. …
> There were some illicit things going on. Lots of parties, drugs, drinking. So I
> found a studio apartment and lived there on my own until I found my current
> girlfriend. Ever since then, it's been me and her.

Emily and Holly had trouble with roommates whose behavior they could not tolerate. Emily stated,

> I was assigned to a roommate my freshman year. She was nothing like me. She
> was a prostitute and drug dealer. One night I was asleep and a rapist came into the
> room because she gave him the keys. My [resident advisor] beat him with a bat. I
> screamed. He came into the room and wasn't aware that I was there.

Holly remarked,

> I had a terrible roommate my freshman year. She wanted to fight me. She was
> "mean mugging" me whenever I saw her. She told everyone in the dorm that she
> was going to fight me. … That's when I decided to take self-defense classes. One
> day she was caught with alcohol in our room. I reported her. She got kicked out of
> the dorm.

Jessica found herself absorbed with her roommate's lifestyle and drama:

> I did have a friend. After I got my own apartment she got herself in an abusive
> relationship. Her boyfriend beat the crap out of her. They were living together and
> I invited her to move in with me. [When that lease ended] we chose to get

[another] apartment together. She had a string of guys come over. One left and

one came over, one left and another came over. I asked her if she was charging,

because we really needed to pay rent. … She got pregnant. … She didn't know

which one was the father. Just last year she had a paternity test done. … He's

three now. So there was lots of drama. Our lease was up in July, then one day in

March, she said she was moving, so I had to find another place to live.

Kat had roommates who were very messy:

The roommates I had one semester were difficult. Housing was very stressful. …

[My roommates] contributed to some depressing times. … I got a very messy

roommate. I went to my boyfriend's [apartment] on the weekends and during

finals so I could focus on my projects. He has his own apartment.

### *Subtheme: Physical and mental health issues challenged students (8).*

Participants revealed physical and mental health issues as posing difficulties in course

work and occurring throughout the years. The College and University Counseling Centers

report of 400 colleges and universities "indicated 36.4% of students suffer from

depression, 41.6% from anxiety, 35.8% from relationship problems, 9.9% from substance

abuse/ dependence, and 16.1% from suicidal thoughts or behavior" (2012, as cited in

Mistler et al., 2012, p. 5). Students reported health issues such as learning disabilities,

mononucleosis, cataracts, and attention deficit hyperactivity disorder that challenged their

academic progress. Bailey, Justin, and Suzanne reported their struggles with learning

disabilities and health problems that challenged their academic process. Baily stated,

One of the reasons I picked this college is because of their help program. I have a learning disability. I was worried at times and I did struggle, but I had that support system. … Sophomore year I had mono[nucleosis] the first half of the year. I didn't get my energy back until after Christmas break. … I just wanted to sleep all the time. [When asked if she took medical leave or dropped out she replied] No, I just went with it. My throat was so sore, I could not really breathe, so they gave me steroids.

Suzanne explained, 'I worked so hard. I'm dyslexic and I have cataracts in both eyes. I was like this since I was born. I wear contacts."

The literature reported mental health problems are prevalent among university students at higher numbers than at any time in the last 2 decades (Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010). Researchers report "that a third of student populations have a mental health problem" (CCMH, 2013; Mistler et al., 2012; Zivin et al., 2008, p. 184). Kelsey has several mental health issues and managed them with prescription medications and counseling. Students reported the following mental health conditions: anxiety, bipolar disorder, borderline personality disorder, depression, and panic attacks. These issues challenged students' academic performance; but students addressed the symptoms and dealt with them in some way. Researchers reported that "one in three undergraduates reported 'feeling so depressed it was difficult to function'" (ACHA, 2008; CCMH, 2013; Howard, 2015; Mistler et al., 2012; Hunt & Eisenberg, 2010; Zivin et al., 2008, p. 184). Students who struggle with depression and anxiety also reported struggling to meet

academic requirements (CSCMH, 2009). Kelsey had several mental health issues and

managed them with prescription medications and counseling:

> Last year, right around Christmas I had a mental breakdown and had to go to the
>
> psych ward. So that was the worst. I also have depression. I think college would
>
> be easier if I didn't already have these issues.

Suzanne noted,

> I went to the counseling center. They said I have bipolar disorder. They
>
> prescribed meds. I was zoned out, not in the conversation. I did not laugh. I felt
>
> like I was losing my personality. I got mood stabilizers; they pushed medication. I
>
> went [to the counseling center] for 2 weeks. My friends and family noticed how
>
> my personality had changed. I stopped taking the meds.

Emily has problems that she was trying to manage on her own:

> I'm kind of strange. That's why I have so many psychological problems, I guess
>
> … I was diagnosed with symptoms of borderline personality disorder and major
>
> depressive disorder. It still kind of goes on. This summer I'll go to therapy to see
>
> if I can find a way to better deal with it, especially in school because I don't want
>
> it to ruin my education. Kat indicated she suffered from depression and panic
>
> attacks, but did not want to talk about them.

Kat expressed,

> I've had depression. I usually lock myself away. I'm not suicidal or anything. … I
>
> refused to see anyone. … I just stayed in bed. Earlier this semester, I had really
>
> bad depression. … I didn't eat at all. I refused to see anyone. … I just stayed in

bed and drank water. … I essentially did my own form of self-therapy after that. … I'm not a big fan of talking to people about my feelings, especially in those situations. … I'm not a big fan of meds. I don't want to be dependent on them.

***Subtheme: Seniors worried about finances and paying student loans after graduation (7).*** Students indicated finding a job and paying loans after graduation were the most significant stressors in their senior year. Students reported these worries brought them to the point of anxiety. Alex stated,

> When I sat down to work out my schedule with the dept. chair, he put me in four studio courses and one art-history class. He told me I'd have to quit my job. No way could I do that. I work 38 hours a week, plus I've got loans. I have to work. I'm self-sufficient.

Bailey worried when her father lost his job that it would prevent her from completing her capstone project: "My dad lost his job in October. You know I was getting ready to spend a lot of money on my capstone." Kat and Kelsey worry about their future and getting jobs after graduation. Kat said, "I've had a few panic attacks about not having any money, and worries about my future. Kelsey shared her worries, "Dealing with stress, worrying about the future, whether I'll get a job."

***Subtheme: Students struggled with grief after the death of loved ones (4).*** The most frequently reported trauma experienced by college students was the death of a friend or loved one (Rutter et al., 2013, p. 58). Alex and Jessica reported the deaths of loved ones before they attended the university that has had lasting effects. Alex explained, "My mom passed away when I was younger. She put me in the right direction.

She gave me my good work ethic. My mom was the driving force for me; … now it's my sister." Andrea and Emily reported the death of loved ones that were distressing during their time at the university. Andrea stated,

When we first moved here … my grandmother passed away. … Then my grandpa had to go into surgery. … We had to put him in a nursing home. That was a rough time, juggling that and school. He was pretty much on his death bed. … Now he's living on his own. That was a pretty rough time.

Emily expressed,

I had [a] brother who died at 24. He had a drug and alcohol problem. It's still pretty much in my mind. He died and my mom lost her mind that day. I remember the day, the time. I wish she had taken us to therapy. Instead she took us to church. That didn't help at all.

**Category 5: Coping Strategies (61) (RQ4)**

Coping strategies are ways individuals attempt to manage stressful, adverse events in their lives (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This category was preset by the research question. Students reported a combination of positive and negative coping strategies they used to manage stressful events. Students demonstrated the ability to focus on problems when they arose, discuss them with family and friends, and arrive at a solution. Supportive relationships, innate abilities, and practice dealing with manageable challenges helped students' cope with stressors. Alex stated,

Who you are now will change every semester. Be ready to adapt. There's a new situation every day, every semester. Life gets better, you just have to deal with

things as they come up. … When it comes to resilience, it's ingrained in your life

in little bits. You come to compile skills. Maybe when someone is sheltered in

life, they don't have the mental capacity to break it down and realize these are just

small things that can be fixed.

**Theme: Students employed a range of positive coping strategies to manage**

**stress (45).** Positive coping strategies bolster resilience and include counseling, exercise,

meditation, yoga, prescription drugs, spiritual guidance, tutoring, and discussions with

family, friends, and faculty (Beasley et al., 2003; Brougham et al., 2009; Lazarus &

Folkman, 1984; Steinhardt & Dolbier, 2008). Two themes emerged from student

interviews: (a) positive coping strategies, and (b) negative coping strategies. Students

reported these subthemes under positive coping strategies: (a) talking with family and

friends, (b) exercise and self-care (c) moving to a different dormitory or apartment,

(d) taking prescription medications and counseling, and (e) other miscellaneous activities

(see Table 3).

*Subtheme: Talking with family and friends was most often reported as a coping*

*strategy for managing stress (22).* Students called on family members and friends when

they felt stressed as Andrea, Peter, and Suzanne reported. Andrea said, "I go to my mom

when I have panic attacks. She's really good at bringing me back. … My mom is my

stress reliever, my medication." Peter said, "I like to fellowship with other people. If it's

financial, I go to my parents." Suzanne spoke with two important people in her life, "I

talk to a friend who I've known since the 6th grade … [and] my sister, she is genuinely

proud of me. She's genuinely interested in what I'm doing."

***Subtheme: Students reported that exercise and sleep helped them cope with stress (8).*** Exercise relates to improved health, psychological well-being, improved confidence, and mental toughness (Rutter et al., 2013; Southwick & Charney, 2012, p. 157). The National Sleep Foundation suggested college students need 7 to 9 hours of sleep per night (Myers, 2011, p. 87). Eight students reported getting sleep was one method they used to cope with stress. A lack of adequate sleep can weaken the immune system, cause depression, headaches, and irritability (Clevenger, 2013). Students reported that exercise played a role in their lives and helped them cope with stress. Andrea explained,

> [When I first moved here] I didn't have any friends. I used that as a good reason to go to the gym. I was highly overweight, practically obese. I would go to school, come home, go to the gym, workout.

Peter stated, "[I] sleep. I'm not really an active person. Now that it's summer, I'll run. When it's cold I don't have the motivation to work out." Chloe commented, "I teach yoga, I'm a certified instructor. Yoga has helped me a lot." Bailey added, "Well, I just walk around … get some fresh air, clear my head." When Holly's roommate threatened to fight her, Holly decided to take self-defense classes and get a private dorm room. Holly said, "I cry … take walks, sit with my friends or family. I take self-defense classes."

***Subtheme: Students who reported a lack of compatibility with roommates chose to find quieter living environments (10).*** When students had a problem living harmoniously with roommates, they used problem-solving techniques to resolve it. Alex,

Jessica, and Holly coped by moving to an apartment of their own or requesting a private

dormitory room. Alex stated,

> The next year I got an apartment by myself. I found a studio apartment and lived
>
> there on my own until I found my current girlfriend. Ever since then, it's been me
>
> and her. We've been together for 2 years.

Holly commented,

> The next year [after roommate problems] I had my own room. That was so much
>
> better and I've had my own room the rest of the time here. I could sleep when I
>
> wanted and not be bothered. I can keep my things organized.

Jessica explained,

> I moved back to a one-bedroom apartment. I'm much better in a quiet
>
> environment. I'm pretty much a lone wolf. I'm most productive when I'm alone.
>
> … I listen to music. I have the sound track to one of the Rocky movies. It's like
>
> come on, let's assess the plan. Figure out the plan. If you had a plan, how did it go
>
> wrong? So I guess I rely on myself a lot.

### *Subtheme: Students take prescription medications and go to counseling (3).*

Kelsey spoke about her experiences: "[I take] prescription meds, Lexapro, Wellbutrin,

and Xanax. I got put on Wellbutrin, and I think that one has been helping the most. I have

my own counselor at home, so I go see her." Justin and Suzanne reported taking

medications for a while, but stopped them because of the side effects. Justin stated,

I used to have ADHD and I took antidepressants. … Being off the meds I feel a lot better. I'm not as defensive. … I thank my fiancé for that. Being off the drugs helped a lot. I was really sensitive and super defensive on the meds.

Suzanne spoke of her experience:

I did take meds. I sleep. I take walks. I talk to a friend. I went to the counseling center. They said I have bipolar disorder. They prescribed meds, but I was zoned out, not in the conversation. I did not laugh. I felt like I was losing my personality. I got mood stabilizers, they pushed the medication. I went for 2 weeks. My friends and family noticed how my personality had changed, [so] I stopped taking the meds.

***Subtheme: Students used other methods to manage stress including playing music, listening to music, prayer, cooking, and crocheting (5).*** Jessica used a number of activities to manage stress. Jessica explained,

I get over things quickly. … I give myself a pep talk. … I'm very self-reliant. When I say I don't know what to do, I need to figure out where I'm at, what needs to be done. … When I figure those things out, then I can turn to somebody. I find that sometimes I don't always need to be with the same person; and sometimes they are not the right person to handle a situation. I crochet like a fiend, cook. [I do] something that's productive, but something I can do that's meaningful and I don't have to think about. Crocheting doesn't require a lot of brain power. I listen to music. I have the sound track to one of the Rocky movies. It's like, come on,

let's assess the plan. Figure out the plan. If you had a plan, how did it go wrong?

So I guess I rely on myself a lot.

Justin found music was helpful in coping with stress. Justin said, "I listen to music. I play nine instruments. I love music." Peter relied on prayer and reading the bible. "When it comes to personal issues, I go to God for that. I read the bible and pray."

Table 3

*Positive Coping Strategies*

| Participants | Talk with family | Talk with peers | Exercise & sleep | Counseling | Prescription drugs & medications |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alex | X | X | X | — | — |
| Andrea | X | X | X | — | — |
| Bailey | X | X | X | — | — |
| Chloe | X | X | X | — | — |
| Emily | X | X | X | X | — |
| Holly | X | X | X | — | — |
| Kat | X | X | X | X | — |
| Kelsey | X | — | — | X | X |
| Jessica | X | X | — | — | — |
| Justin | — | X | — | X | X |
| Peter | X | X | X | — | — |
| Suzanne | X | X | X | X | X |
| Totals | 11 | 11 | 8 | 5 | 3 |

*Other positive coping strategies include prayer, listening to music, playing music, taking self-defense class, crocheting and cooking.

**Theme: Students used negative coping strategies to cope with stress (17).**

Negative coping strategies are less effective in managing stress and include avoidance, social withdrawal, binge eating or drinking, alcohol or drug abuse, and self-harm (Burris et al., 2009; Mason et al., 2014; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Alcohol and drug abuse are

obvious negative coping strategies, but students in this study did not reported using

alcohol and drugs as coping strategies. Students often combined positive coping

strategies with negative coping strategies. Although many students used negative coping

strategies to manage stress, many more employed positive coping strategies (Table 4).

Table 4

*Negative Coping Strategies*

| Participants | Eating sweets & junk food | Overeating food | Soda & caffeine | Avoidance & withdrawal | Other* |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Alex | — | — | — | — | — |
| Andrea | — | X | X | — | — |
| Bailey | — | — | X | — | — |
| Chloe | — | — | — | — | — |
| Emily | X | — | — | X | — |
| Holly | X | — | — | — | — |
| Kat | — | — | — | X | — |
| Kelsey | X | X | X | X | X |
| Jessica | X | X | — | X | — |
| Justin | — | — | — | X | X |
| Peter | — | — | — | — | — |
| Suzanne | — | — | — | X | X |
| Totals | 4 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 3 |

*Other negative coping strategies include playing video games, not eating.

**Subtheme: Students used negative coping strategies that included overeating,**
**eating sweets and junk food, drinking soda, and caffeine (10).** College students, who

reported high levels of stress reported difficulties with concentration, increased rates of

depression and anxiety, consumed junk food, were less likely to exercise and get

adequate sleep (Hudd et al., 2000, p. 217). Self-harm means deliberating hurting one's

own body by cutting, scratching, or burning, and links to depression, eating disorders,

and borderline personality disorder (Mayo Clinic, 2012, pp. 1–2). Students did not report binge drinking alcohol, drug use, or self-harm as coping strategies, but students tended to eat sweets and junk food, overeat, drink soda, and use caffeine to cope with stress. Andrea remarked, "I have a really bad eating habit. All food. I lost all that weight. I sometimes go to food for comfort. It's a bad thing. I stress out tremendously." Bailey and Kelsey eat junk food, and drink sodas and caffeine. Bailey said,

> I am the worst. I did not work out this semester, [but] I do work out. I drink a lot of Mountain Dew. I'm going to die from what it's doing to my insides, but I'm going to die someday anyway.

Kelsey confessed, "I over eat junk food, sugar. I have a big problem with soda and Frappuccinos. It doesn't help that Starbucks is across the street."

***Subtheme: Some students used avoidance and withdrawal to cope with stress (6).*** Avoidance coping is a behavior based on trying to escape particular events, activities, or thoughts and is common among individuals with panic disorder, eating disorder, and fear of abandonment (Leeming & Boyle, 2013). Emily stated, "I'm one of those people who, if you try to embarrass me in public, of course I won't do anything about it. I'll just walk away. I get mad. When I get mad, I start crying." Kat explained,

> I've had depression. In sophomore year, I would usually lock myself away. … I didn't eat at all. I refused to see anyone. I just stayed in bed and drank water. … I essentially did my own form of self-therapy. … I'm not a big fan of talking to people about my feelings, especially in those situations. I'm not a big fan of meds. I don't want to be dependent on them.

Kelsey said,

> I took a year off and decided to come here to finish my art degree. … I just didn't
>
> like [the nuclear medicine degree]. I didn't like the job. I didn't like the people
>
> running the program. I didn't feel safe. I didn't like the idea of working with
>
> radiation for 40 years.

Peter commented,

> Junior year-- that was a pretty rough year. … I dropped out and went to another
>
> school for a semester. … It's just a lot of personal stuff that came up. I was
>
> broken. I was conflicted with where I was in my life. … I doubted my faith and
>
> beliefs. … I looked at different religions and philosophies. It's God and Jesus
>
> Christ served, it's more personal to me. I'm very driven by the word of God. I
>
> resisted really giving him everything. It was a really tough point in my life. I had
>
> a lot of shame in my life. I'm not like a terrible person, but there was sin in my
>
> life that I could not deal with anymore. I was pretty much broken before God.

**Category 6: Advice for Future Students (15)**

Students offered advice to future students who were considering attending college or a university and majoring in art and design. Participants' shared advice they would offer prospective students in two key areas (a) academic advice, and (b) social advice.

**Subtheme: Students gave academic advice to future students [10].** Chloe suggested students explore courses that interested them and be open minded about changing their major. She advised, "Take any class you have an interest in. This is prime time. Go to class, don't be so closed minded against professors you may not like." Holly

encouraged students to keep producing art and not be discouraged if things did not go well at first: "Don't take anything your professors say to heart. Your ideas and skills are always evolving. If something doesn't work out the first time, don't give up on it. ... Keep making art, keep making art."

Jessica, Kat, and Kelsey offered advice on skills that have helped them build their portfolios. Jessica explained,

> I would ask them why [they want to study art] and then I would educate them on the possibilities, because when I came here, I didn't know what the possibilities were. I mean an art degree is great, because I can almost do anything. … I am currently a manager at a store, a retail art center. … I'm qualified to make a lithograph or do Photo Shop. It's surprising how I use the things I learned here in the art program in other applications that aren't art.

Kat recommended, "Build up your portfolio, even if you are not an art student. Build up your references starting freshman year." Kelsey said, "I would say take anatomy and physiology. When you get to life drawing, it will really help you." Justin and Peter suggested students look at career options in their major. Justin advised, "Consider every option for your life. What jobs are you going to get with your major?" Peter advised, "Stay on top of your classes. Make sure you meet deadlines for assignments. Pick a major you're going to love working in when you graduate."

**Subtheme: Students felt developing a social group was important [5].** Social networks enhance resilience and health, bolster effective coping strategies, and reduce the degree to which dangers are seen as being insurmountable (Southwick & Charney, 2012).

Students felt developing a social network was a key element for academic success.
Andrea stated,

> I think making friends is very important. Try new things. If you're set in your
> ways, you're never going to learn anything. When you push it through, you
> overcome those things [you fear], the feeling that "I did it." Just push through it.

Bailey said, "Have fun. Enjoy life. Be grounded. Don't let the parties get in the way.
Work hard, have a good mix." Holly explained, "I became a peer mentor in my
sophomore year and I would encourage other students to do it. It really helps to have
support from your family and friends."

The next section of this chapter contains data from a faculty member who teaches
and advises students in the art and design department.

## Faculty Responses

The more time students spend with faculty who engage and interact with them,
the more likely students are to stay in college (Tinto, 1993, 2007). Social integration and
student-faculty relationships strongly support student success (Lillis, 2011; Tinto, 2007).
Further, frequent informal communication with faculty supports greater emotional
intelligence, motivation, collaboration with others, and leadership skills (Lillis, 2011).
The department chair invited art and design faculty to participate in this study by e-mail
(see Appendix C). My goal was to interview four or five faculty members; one faculty
member volunteered. It was the week of final examinations and final grades were due,
making cooperation difficult.

**Faculty Profile**

The faculty volunteer, Hadley (pseudonym), is an assistant professor of art history who teaches all of the study site's students in lecture and writing intensive courses, covering art and design. As a faculty member, Hadley taught and advised undergraduate students from freshman to senior year. Over the years, she met with and observed students who appeared to be managing course work effectively and those who were facing challenges that might affect their academic progress. Hadley also taught freshman seminar for 2 consecutive semesters, giving her an opportunity to observe and guide entering freshman. Teaching freshman seminar is a shared responsibility with other faculty on a rotating basis.

Hadley reflected on the experiences of art and design students as she observed these students in the classroom and during one-on-one meetings in her office. The faculty interview provided descriptions of protective factors and stressors for students from freshman to senior year. Hadley also taught the senior capstone course, so she had the opportunity to observe seniors who were planning their capstone project. The senior capstone course provided students with the opportunity to focus on their final project, a solo show of their work in the student gallery. In addition, students developed a resume, artists' statement, and refined skills needed to successfully complete their senior year and prepare to move forward with a career in the arts.

The data collected from this faculty member provided a perspective that added depth to this study and confirmed remarks about issues students reported as challenging. All statements below are restated verbatim from the one-on-one interview. The faculty

interview used the responsive interview techniques indicated earlier and lasted 70

minutes. I used the interview questions (Appendix B) for faculty. Hadley was asked to

sign the interview protocol (Appendix N) to be sure I followed all the steps as planned.

The faculty participant did not receive a copy of the interview transcript and was not

compensated for her time with a gift card. Where faculty data supported or contrasted

replies made by students, I used the same titles for categories and themes that emerged

from the student data. Hadley did not address every theme or subtheme students reported.

**Findings**

Faculty support is an external factor for resilience and is critical for student

success (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, 2010; Tinto, 1993). Hadley reported her role as

professor, advisor, and mentor to art and design students. She stated, "As an advisor, of

course my job is to make sure they're taking the right courses, but I always let them know

they can talk to me about anything."

**Theme: Faculty offer support in the classroom and in private office meetings.**

Faculty members are important role models for students, shaping their values, skills, and

intellectual growth (Tinto, 1993, pp. 69–70). Students must visit their academic advisor

to enroll for courses and discuss academic issues, but Hadley reported students came to

her about personal issues that affected their academic performance as well as academic

issues:

> I require they come to me to discuss plans for their research. Of course, some
>
> come more than once to discuss their plans for research. … Last year, there were
>
> a lot of breakups; this year a lot of divorces. Many students come to me when

they feel that things are impacting their work. I get the sense that [the students]

feel supported; they feel like they have a family here. Some colleges are very cut-

throat. There's a lot of tension. [State U is] a very nice college environment.

Hadley also reported the sophomore review, writing research papers, and critiques posed

significant stress for students:

One of the biggest [challenges] is time management, understanding the time they

need to spend outside of the class. That varies wildly. Last semester, the majority

of them did really well. They exceeded my expectations. This semester, I have the

exact opposite. Some are really struggling to keep up. Another is writing and

writing involving research. Understanding what it means to plagiarize. It's a

struggle to get students to write.

***Subtheme: The faculty member confirmed the sophomore review is a stressful***

***event for many students.***

The sophomore review was stated by students and faculty as a stressful event.

Hadley stated, "Sophomore review, that's tough for some students." The

exhibition is supposed to reflect work from their foundation classes. So it's a

collection of their first two years of work. They exhibit 8 or 10 or as many as 15

pieces. At the end of the week, they … they do a PowerPoint. They have to talk

about the work, the methods, the materials they used, basic form and content.

That's a stressful thing for students. [Students who changed majors or transferred]

feel they are not ready to do this …and do this at the beginning of their junior

year. The capstone experience is senior year. It's a course where they figure out

what they want to show, the ideas they want to show. Artists' statements,

resumes, and cover letters are [assigned] to fill some of the gaps that students

don't get in their other classes. Students are not required to start a whole new

body of work, but are expected to build on that body of work they started during

the junior year and senior years. Some students panic. [There are] meltdowns, yes

definitely. So far everybody's come through to the end.

*Subtheme: Critiques are stressful events for many students.* The literature

reports that formative feedback has been used in art and design studios for hundreds of

years (White, 1982; Buster & Crawford, 2010). In this study, Hadley reported that

"feedback with only numbers on a rubric do not give students much useful information."

Hadley confirmed that some faculty gave harsh feedback that students find disturbing:

For the assessments of the capstone, faculty evaluate the exhibitions using a

rubric. Then I meet with students to go over their assessments. … Sometimes

they're getting numbers. These can lead to tears sometimes. Everyone passed this

year, but some of the comments have been very harsh. One evaluation yesterday

was really harsh. [The student] felt like he might throw up. His evaluation was so

negative and harsh.

*Subtheme: The faculty member reported that parental support is important to

students and can be positive as well as negative [3].* Some parents fully supported their

offspring majoring in art and design, but not all parents felt these majors were a wise

choice. Fears of poor job opportunities after graduation worried parents and some

students. Hadley stated,

Lots of parents are very opposed to [their children] being an art student. [The

students] are determined to succeed in spite of parents; they have a supportive

culture here. We have a career center at the university, but in the area of art and

design it's really weak. I met a high school art teacher who was discouraging her

students from going into art and design because there was no work. There *is* work

in art and design. Many parents worry about what they're going to do when they

graduate. They could manage galleries, work for an institution that produces art,

they could teach, there are options.

### Campus Counselor Responses

The campus counseling center offers counseling for undergraduate and graduate

students in all majors including undergraduate, graduate, and medical students. Two

counselors of six volunteered to be interviewed for this study. On average, each

counselor saw 25–30 students each week. The two counselors who agreed to be

interviewed had 12 years of college student counseling combined and have met with

thousands of students. One counselor was an alum of State U and was very familiar with

student culture. The counselors were able to identify key challenges for art and design

majors that threatened their academic success and discussed how these challenges

differed from students in other majors.

I asked counselors questions from the interview guide (see Appendix C).

Interviews used the responsive interview techniques indicated earlier. Campus counselor

interviews lasted from 40 to 75 minutes. I thanked counselors for their time and asked

them to sign the interview protocol (see Appendix N) to be sure I followed all the steps as

planned. Although I transcribed interviews with campus counselors, I did not send them to participants. I did not compensate counselors for their time. Responses from the counselors follow the categories that were developed from the student and alum data and the literature review on resilience and academic success. The counselors' observations and interview responses add a third data set to the data collected from students, the alum, and faculty. Not every category and theme is reported in the counselor interviews.

**Theme: Counselors Identified the Programs and Services Offered in the Campus Counseling Office.**

Counselors provided information on the orientation programs the counseling center offers to help freshman, nontraditional students, and veterans. Counselors also shared information about the training provided to resident advisors (RAs) who live in the dorms. RAs are often the first people students contact when difficulties arise. Campus counselors provided a third set of data.

Counselors provide one-on-one counseling to all students. The campus counseling office provides special programs on social issues such as sexual assault, domestic violence, women's outreach, and other topics that connect students with professionals and peers. Some challenges are common to students in all majors, such as time management, making a successful transition from home to dormitory living, and relationships with peers. One such counselor, Lindsey, stated,

> We also offer counseling using Blackboard. We provide counseling by computer screen. It has had some success, but didn't really take off the way we expected. Students will have to go to a secure site. Someone has to unlock the room for

them. We couldn't have them logging on at a Starbucks talking about their problems where other people could hear.

**Subtheme: Few students in this study had counseling appointments at the campus counseling center.** Among the group of students', I interviewed, only three made any visits to the campus counseling office; and then only one or two visits. One participant had ongoing sessions with the campus counselors. One participant met with a psychiatrist and counselor monthly at a facility in her home town.

## Theme: Campus Counselors Are One of the External Protective Factors Students Use to Bolster Their Resilience

Counselors provided information sessions for student groups on campus to acquaint them with the services they offer. Based on private counseling sessions, the counselors were able to identify key issues that threatened the academic success for students in general and art and design majors in particular. Counselors reported challenges and stressors they have seen over the years working with hundreds of students.

**Subtheme: Campus counselors provide training to resident advisors (RAs).** RAs in the dorms are often the first persons' students will speak with if they are having problems. Lindsey reported on their training program:

We meet with the resident advisors when they're going through their orientation over the summer just to give them an understanding of [services we provide]. … We want them to know that we're here. … Sometimes [RAs] like to take on everything, and sometimes they like to call us for everything. So the point we

really try to make is to let them know we're here, because they're not really trained. … They also don't have the confidentiality we have either.

**Subtheme: Campus counselors recognize the importance of orientation to academic success.** Incoming freshmen are required to attend orientation, but transfer students with 26 credit hours or more are not required to attend orientation. Lindsey explained,

> The research has shown that if we can get students more acclimated to the college, it will help retention rates. We offer an Intro to College course that covers how to register for classes, find advisors, develop study skills, manage time, and generally make [students] feel more connected to the campus. Students get credit for the Intro to College course, but it's not a required course. It's just to make connections with each other and learn about campus services. A few days before fall semester starts, the freshman come early and we do campus tours, we walk downtown.

She continued,

> There's a group for veterans; the person who is over Veterans Affairs teaches the course. So [veterans] have someone they are personally connected with. The whole foundation is to answer questions and to connect them with the campus. There's a group for nontraditional students. We do not group them by majors. There is no orientation for transfer students. We know students will make friends with people in their majors.

Sophia stated,

We provide one-on-one counseling for all students: undergraduate, graduate and

medical students. … We do a lot of programming that is designed to address

social issues, inform and educate students, and engage them and give them an

opportunity to get to know new people. Sexual assault is always a hot topic on

campus. As far as I'm aware, everybody orients at the same time.

**Subtheme: Counselors report that parental support is important to students**

**and can be positive as well as negative.** Parental support was noted by the literature

(Masten, & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Werner & Smith, 2011), students, faculty, and

counselors as an important factor for resilience. Counselors reported students had strong

relationships with parents and grandparents. One counselor, Lindsey, indicated many

students talked to their parents daily:

Many students complain about their parents not being supportive. They question

who they are. Finally, there's this freedom to be more expressive. Not all of them

come from families or communities that are supportive. What sometimes can be

overwhelming is this "Who am I?" "Am I wrong for being who I am?" ... "What

if I have different religious beliefs than my parents?" There's also, [from parents]

"Why did you pick that major? That's not something you can really make a career

out of."

Sophia noted,

Lack of parental support. … Those things are true for a significant number of

students who come into our counseling center. They may get the support, but the

follow through is not there. Parents constantly monitor their progress. [Parents

ask:] "What are you going to do now?" As they get closer and closer to

graduation, they feel the support they may have had now feels like pressure.

**Subtheme: Counselors sometimes hear complaints from students about**

**faculty.** Students spent more time discussing their difficult relationships with faculty than

the positive experiences they have with them. Counselors are familiar with the

vulnerability of students and the challenges they face when presenting their work in

formal critiques.

Lindsey stated,

> The art and design students pretty much feel supported by their teachers. Even
>
> with the professors who are maybe a little difficult, they understand why the
>
> professor is being difficult on them. I don't see a lot of tension with professors.

Sophia added,

> There is ego involved between performers, singers, artists. There's kind of a
>
> hierarchy of those who have the best abilities; and the professors are among that
>
> population. I think artists are expected to project that confidence, strength, no
>
> self-doubt. And [students] try to project that themselves, but they don't feel it on
>
> the inside.

**Subtheme: Counselors reported a warm supportive culture among students**

**in art and design majors.** The literature supports the importance of peer relationships to

academic success (Tinto, 1993; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). Counselors confirmed the

good relationships students reported. Friendships with fellow student's cement

relationships that provide support and give students information about the institution

(Tinto, 1993). Although some students reported difficulties with roommates, overall their friendships with fellow students created an environment that bolstered resilience. Lindsey remarked, "Many of the art students talk about the art program as being like a family. Art and design students talk about being in a close family. The students seem to support each other." Sophia stated, "I think with art students, there tends to be that very tight relationship they have with one another. They're a tight knit group."

**Subtheme: Counselors reported the local business community supports the arts and encourages students to participate in activities.** Lindsey described some of the local art events:

There is a lot of encouragement to get involved with the community art activities. There's an arts and crafts fair in the town square. [There's a community art project where] each business supports an artist. The business buys all the supplies and sponsors the artists. The artists paint a sculpture that is displayed [on sidewalks] around town. There's been a lot of effort to make this town more inviting over the last few years.

**Theme: Counselors Reflect on the Internal Protective Factors They See in Students**

Counselors report students are vulnerable and often lack the confidence they need to be successful in forming friendships and managing the critiques required to be successful.

**Subtheme: Counselors report self-efficacy is not evident in all students.** Counselors report challenges students face as they find their way at the university. Lindsey said, "In this age where everyone gets a trophy, many freshmen come to college

thinking they are special. Everyone has told them they are special. The shining star in high school is just one of many in college." Sophia noted,

> I talk to students a lot about the relationship they have with themselves; the primary relationship. They are so baffled by that. I think if a person can trust what's going on inside of them, if they're aware and they can trust their evaluation of themselves. I think that has a lot to do with resilience. You see the kid who comes from the perfect home environment who has no ability to make a decision, who has no ability to know what he or she thinks about a decision, because it's all been top down [From the parents, "This is what we're doing. This is our outward image."] There's been no real ability to connect with themselves. They have no sense of self.

**Subtheme: Students resist managing mental health symptoms and coming to the counseling center.** The demand for counseling services has increased nationwide, but some students resist seeing a counselor (Czyz et al., 2013, p. 398). "Students tend to avoid counseling because they perceive treatment is not needed (66%); a lack of time (26.8%); and a preference for self-management (18%; Czyz et al., 2013, p. 398). Students gave these same reasons in this study for not visiting the campus counseling center. Lindsey stated,

> One thing I have seen with some of these creative majors is, there is some resistance to managing the symptoms. A lot of them feel like their creativity stems from these systems. It's like, okay, I know this isn't healthy, but if I better manage these symptoms I will no longer be creating this art, painting, sculpture,

or writing. Some art and design students know they have certain issues they should deal with, like depression, but they think if they lose the depression, they'll lose their creativity. It's like they ask, "I know this isn't healthy, but what if I lose my ability to create art?" That's what I have seen with art majors compared with other majors.

Sophia added,

The student who can take [critiques], they understand who they are. They have a strong relationship to the self. They understand their weaknesses; they know their strengths. The other person doesn't have that strong relationship and is so heavily dependent on approval to affirm who they are that if they don't get the approval, they don't know who they are. They don't know where to go. To me, that's the resilience factor right there.

## Theme: Campus Counselors Are Familiar with Students' Low Points, Challenges, and Stressors

As students' progress from freshman to senior year, personal and academic stressors emerge forcing students to address them in some way. The stressors differ with each student and differ as students' progress through their years at the university. The literature review in Chapter 2 identified common challenges for all university and college students. Interviews with campus counselors highlighted low points specific to art and design majors at State U. The following subthemes emerged: (a) freshman struggled to manage a range of stressors, (b) sophomores struggled to select a major and sophomore review, (c) juniors worried about summer jobs and internships, and (d) seniors worried

about employment after graduation and repaying student loans. Subthemes for freshman

included (a) managing their independence, (b) academic issues such as time management,

and (c) making friends. Students sought help with issues that campus counselors reported

changed over the years as students matured and became more comfortable at the

university. Relationships with parents, faculty, and peers can be challenging in all four

years at the university.

   **Subtheme: Counselors report freshmen struggle to manage a range of**

**stressors.** In the freshman year, the most common stressors reported to counselors were

articulated by Lindsey and Sophia. Lindsey stated,

> Freshman are more about finding their place in the world. At last they have
>
> freedom from their parents, but that's not always good. Finally, there's freedom to
>
> be more expressive. Do they want to follow the same religion? Some parents are
>
> not supportive of the students' choice in majors. Not all of them come from
>
> families or communities that are supportive.

Sophia explained,

> The big problem freshman have is the transition. Freshman year, it's the transition
>
> from being under their parent's watchful eye. I found that many students don't
>
> mind being under their parent's watchful eye. Many are still closely connected to
>
> their parents. They talk to their parents daily, and I think that lack of connection,
>
> that [reduced] proximity to their parents, is a stressor for them. Just not having
>
> that adult there to bounce ideas off of, to go to for some problem solving advice.
>
> [Another problem for freshman is] partying too much; sometimes consequences

come with that. The other big thing is socialization, fitting in, finding the right

group. Just acceptance into some group, making friends. Sometimes managing

their freedom. If they're struggling to find a peer group, they may find one that is

counterproductive to the school goals.

She went on to say,

Managing their course load: I think a lot of students are shocked by the level of

reading and work; even the students who did well in high school: the studying,

what's required of them on a day to day basis in order to maintain an advantage

over the work load itself. If they don't study daily, they get behind. And students

really have a hard time negotiating that reality. Avoidance is probably the biggest

stressor. They'll procrastinate, they'll pretend it doesn't exist, they'll wait it out.

**Subtheme: Counselors report sophomores struggle with declaring a major**

**and the sophomore review.** In the sophomore year, the reasons art and design students

most frequently visited the campus counseling office were selecting a major, the

sophomore review, and faculty critiques of their work. Lindsey said,

Art students have their sophomore review. Some [students] come from

competitive programs or they've already had critiques. They've been exposed to

other students who are very talented too. I did have a student who had just gone

through her sophomore review. I don't know who the art faculty are, but she said,

"Well, people are reviewing my piece and they don't really understand it."

[Selecting a major] varies from student to student. I see some students who have a

strong plan for what they want to do after graduation. "This is what I want to do,

so this is what I want my major to be." And then there [are] others who say, "This

is what I enjoy, so this is what I'll major in."

Sophia noted, "[By the second year], sophomores are getting comfortable with

themselves, settling in."

**Subtheme: Counselors report critiques can be harsh and stressful for most**

**students in every year.** Students find critiques difficult and challenging, but also feel

they are an essential element of art and design learning (Dannels et al., 2008; Eshun &

DeGraft-Johnson, 2011). Students manage critiques differently: some students feel

vulnerable and personally attacked; others take critiques as a form of feedback that is

intended to improve their work. Lindsey stated,

> Some students feel bad about the critiques they get from professors. My personal
>
> opinion about that is many students come from places where everyone gets a
>
> trophy. Many freshmen come to college thinking they are special. Why am I not
>
> getting special treatment? Some feel the professors don't really appreciate what
>
> they are trying to do. Most students recognize the reason why professors are
>
> putting pressure on them.

Sophia commented,

> I think art students struggle with the vulnerability of putting [themselves] out
>
> there and being judged for it. It is a vulnerable position to be in. When they're
>
> given constructive criticism, they struggle to incorporate that. It's feedback that is
>
> intended to help you improve, but I think for students' I've worked with, it
>
> becomes a personal thing. Their art is a personal thing with them. That leads to

perfectionism. … If it's not perfect, they can't put it out there and that leads to procrastination. … Sometimes I've heard the faculty can be really harsh. There is ego involved between performers, singers, artists. There's kind of a hierarchy of those who have the best abilities and the professors are among that population. The way they communicate with the students can be incredibly supportive or incredibly harsh.

**Subtheme: Counselors report students often come to counseling to manage family stressors.** According to Sophia,

General issues such as poor coping, stress, and unresolved trauma, finances and the situation at home with their families [are things students struggle with]. Many students have parents at home in poor health, and that puts pressure on their time. [Parents'] expectation is that the student is going to sacrifice their education [to help at home]. Whatever mom and dad need will come first. There's a lot of guilt around not being able to meet mom and dad's needs. Grandparents are very much a part of their lives too.

**Subtheme: Counselors report juniors come to counseling to discuss internships, summer employment, and personal relationships.** Counselors reported juniors worry about internships, summer jobs, and relationships. Lindsey stated,

I see the anxiety building in the junior year. They're worried about internships and jobs. I still see a lot of stress building around that time. Their courses are getting more difficult. I also see that … students will avoid coming here until their junior year. They see these symptoms aren't going away. I also see these students

are a little more relaxed. They realize, okay, I have to pass this course to get into

that course. The relationships I have with my professors may affect my future

decisions for graduate school or to get a job. Their courses are getting more

difficult. Also, what I have seen lately is that students will avoid coming here

until their junior year.

Sophia added, "There's some stress around internships and summer jobs [junior year].

Often students will be in a relationship by this time, whatever problems arise there."

**Subtheme: Seniors are worried about life after graduation**. Counselors report

seniors have a unique set of stressors they hope to resolve by visiting the counseling

office. Seniors are stressed about what they are going to do after graduation and repaying

student loans. The following quotations illustrate what counselors heard as they met with

seniors in the campus counseling office. Lindsey explained,

For many students [State U] has become home. Then there is that point in senior

year … it can be a tough transition. [Seniors] are sad that they are graduating and

leaving their friends. Some of them don't want to go home, some don't have a

home to go to. What am I going to do? Where am I going to live? I think that can

be overwhelming for many students. Some students stay and go to graduate

school because they love the college environment and don't want to leave. They

really don't know what they will do and it's safe to stay on. Some seniors go to

graduate school because they have a focused, clear idea of what they want to do.

The difference I often see with grad students is that they are in a different place in

life. They are balancing more of their personal lives. Some grad students, and

undergraduates as well, are working and have children. Some grad students really

know what they want to do. Then there are others who say, "I don't really know

what I want to do, so I decided to go to grad school." Some students go to grad

school to defer having to pay student loans. Sometimes it's a way to put off the

reality of work. Students max out their student loans. They don't have the money

to pay and they can't complete.

Sophia stated,

Some students don't want to leave. Others can't wait to get out of here. [For

seniors] it's the job. What am I going to do with my life? They're worried about

student loan debt and how they're going to pay for it.

**Theme: Coping Strategies Identified by Counselors Are Confirmed by the**

**Literature and Student Responses**

Coping strategies identified by campus counselors ranged from positive behaviors

such as sleep, exercise, coming to therapy, and taking prescription medications to

negative coping strategies such as drug and alcohol abuse, self-harm, avoidance, and

perfectionism (Hudd, et al., 2000; Pierceall & Keim, 2007; Wichianson et al., 2009).

These coping strategies are behaviors common to many college students, but counselors

added a few behaviors that they have seen with art and design students such as

perfectionism, dependence on social media, and poor self-regulation.

**Subtheme: Counselors confirm students at State U. employ the same positive**

**coping strategies used by students in the literature.** Lindsey noted that "Exercise,

sleep, running, [and] hiking is common." Sophia stated, "The healthy coping strategies are exercise; they come to therapy."

**Subtheme: Counselors report different negative coping strategies used by many students at State U do not agree with the statements students made.** Lindsey claimed, "[Students use] alcohol, drugs, self-harm; those are the big ones." Sophia stated,

> Self-injury and alcohol, eating disorders, perfectionism. Essentially what ends up happening is there is a lot of trauma that students face and have not really been given the opportunity to deal with or think about that in a different way. There's a lot of substance abuse and addiction [at home], so basically when children come to college, [they] repeat the coping strategies they learned [at home]. I don't encounter many students who are addicted to substances, but there's a lot of reliance on alcohol.

**Theme: Counselors Feel the Use of Social Media Prevents Students from Developing Meaningful Personal Relationships**

Counselors observed students had poor skills at developing personal relationships due in their opinions, to the use of social media. Although students and faculty participants did not mention the use of social media at all, counselors expressed concerns regarding its use for building peer relationships. Counselors classified social media as a negative coping strategy for managing personal relationships. Counselors further stated that the use of social media does not provide students with the depth that a face-to-face relationship provides. Lindsey noted, "Students who are online with social media tend to

discount personal relationships. … That lack of face-to-face contact that research shows

are important for retention." Sophia discussed her experiences:

> Technology, getting lost on U-tube, Facebook, social media, getting lost in video
>
> games. I think most students have figured out how to use social media and are
>
> heavily dependent on it in their relationships. And those that are okay with that,
>
> they do okay. But there are students who don't want to have to text somebody in
>
> order to have to talk to them; or in order to have a relationship. There are so many
>
> students who reject that because they want the face-to-face. I can't tell you how
>
> many students I have in here who say, "I hate my generation." I have to explain
>
> them, it's not just their generation. There are real strict laws, rules, and norms
>
> around the use of technology. Like dating even is: "just give me your number."
>
> It's all established over text. There's no meeting over coffee. If you're interested,
>
> we'll talk over text. Then if we get comfortable over text, we go out. There are a
>
> whole number of students who are uncomfortable with that whole process. If they
>
> don't want to engage [over text], [other students] wonder, "What's wrong with
>
> you?"

She went on to say,

> I had a student who was very distraught over a breakup with his girlfriend. It turns
>
> out the whole relationship was over text messages. They want to sit and read all
>
> the text messages. He read, "This is what she said to me and this is what I said to
>
> her." How can you establish any kind of real relationship over text? Everything is
>
> worthy of a text message. I had another student come to me with tears streaming

down her face, "Why can't people just talk to one another? I go to visit my grandmother and she won't get off Facebook. … She'd rather stare at that screen than talk to me!"

**Subtheme: Counselors identified perfectionism as a negative coping strategy.** Some students are disposed to regard anything that is short of meeting very high standards of excellence as unacceptable. When students are disappointed with the results of their work, they avoid turning in their assignments or showing up for critiques. Sophia stated,

I think some of the students struggle with perfectionism. If it's not perfect, they can't put [their art work] out there and that leads to procrastination, and then it just kind of snowballs. I had one photography student, who was here 6 years. She would get so far into her assignment and did not finish it because she couldn't work herself up to having the photograph up there to be judged. It was such a struggle for her. She's 6 years into a 4-year degree!

**Subtheme: Counselors identified the lack of emotional regulation as problematic for some students.** Emotional regulation is the ability of an individual to not let negative emotions take over their lives to the extent that positive experiences are impossible (Boerner & Jopp, 2010). Resilient individuals may be able to experience negative events, but also enjoy moments of positive emotions. These inner adjustments can include changing one's goals or seeing the positive aspects of a negative situation. Sophia noted,

Emotional regulation, regulating their emotions. When I think about the art

students I work with, emotional dysregulation is a common theme. Events,

decisions, performances, whatever takes on a times 10 magnitude. Everything is

much bigger. Then there is the emotional response. There's going to be a baseline

level of stress that you're going to have to get comfortable with. The stress affects

the mood tremendously.

In the next section of this chapter, I discuss the responses and compare those of

students, faculty and counselors.

**Comparisons between Students', Faculty's, and Campus Counselors' Responses**

When looking at the data from students, faculty, and campus counselors, it

appears that faculty and campus counselors have an accurate picture of the stressors and

coping strategies students used to bolster resilience. Campus counselors identified

additional issues that students struggled with such as perfectionism, emotional

dysregulation, and the negative effects of social media to form and sustain relationships.

Faculty and counselors were sincerely interested in creating the healthiest, positive

learning environment possible. The student who is raised by loving parents, attends

quality schools, has financial security, high self-efficacy, and intelligence is at a clear

advantage for student success (Brewer & Yucedag-Ozcn, 2013; CSCMH, 2009;

O'Dougherty Wright et al., 2009). Faculty and counselors' understanding of issues was

based on the information students shared with them. It is likely that students shared a

select group of issues with peers and other issues with parents, faculty, and counselors,

based on the nature of the problems.

**Evidence of Trustworthiness**

I followed the procedures outlined in Chapter 3. Study findings credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability are described below. Before I began the interview, I restated the elements in the consent form that addressed confidentiality, the ability to withdraw from the study at any time, voluntary participation, risks and benefits and that participants were not required to continue with the study or answer any questions they did not feel comfortable answering. Credibility was enhanced by asking study participants to read the consent form and sign it. I answered questions students had about my background and reasons for pursuing the Ph.D. In the invitation letters sent by the department chair, most students felt they understood the purpose of the study and were eager to begin. I asked permission to record the interview, it was granted by all participants. I first asked students to discuss their best, most memorable experiences while a student at State U or at any college they attended prior to attending the host institution. After some reflection, students were able to mention several high points that confirmed their choice of an art and design major and reasons for attending State U. As students spoke, I took notes to supplement recordings. After each interview transcript was typed, I listened to the recording again and proofread each transcript. Then the interview transcript was sent to the student or alum by e-mail for confirmation that it was accurate.

Transferability of the study was enhanced when participants with different majors within the art and design department shared their lived experiences and when faculty and campus counselors reflected on the interview questions. Merriam stated that transferability or "external validity is concerned with the extent to which the findings of

one study can be applied to other situations" (p. 223). While all students experienced high points and low points during their years at the university, the specific details varied. Eight students entered State U as freshman and four students transferred from other colleges and entered as sophomores. I scheduled interviews 2 hours apart to allow participants to speak as long as they wished; on average 60 minutes. This allowed me to make notes in my journal after one interview and before the next interview started.

A fourth data source was the journal I maintained that allowed me to reflect on ideas and address bias. Preceding each interview, I reflected on my own experiences with stress and resilience as a design student and as a graduate student. This task helped to ensure the dependability of the findings. After each transcript was typed and confirmed to be accurate, I uploaded it to NVivo10 software. Then I read, and highlighted notable quotations in each transcript. The notable quotations became nodes. Later, reflecting on these nodes, patterns emerged. Eventually, after further reading, these nodes became lists under potential themes. I gave each potential theme a name and reviewed all transcripts again, highlighting and listing confirming remarks. I reread each transcript at least 10 times during the data analysis process to be sure I recorded each students' descriptions accurately. Some themes changed, some themes required a breakdown into subthemes. Peer review by my dissertation committee enhanced confirmability of the data.

## Summary of Answers to Research Questions

In this section of the chapter, I report the important findings for each research question that guided the study.

Research Question 1 (RQ1) was "Which external protective factors of resilience (e.g., family, faculty, peers, counselors, coaches, finances, and religion) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?"

Participants identified family, faculty, and peers as the most important personal relationships for resilience in their lives. Parents were given acknowledgement, and especially mothers were significant supporters for resilience. Faculty were essential to students' academic success. Faculty pushed students to improve their work through feedback in critiques. Financial aid was essential for the majority of students. Without the help of scholarships, loans, tuition waivers, employment, and their parents, the completion of the degree would have been impossible.

Only a few students in this study took advantage of the campus counseling center. However, counselors have met with many art and design majors over the years of counseling State U.'s students. Many students in this study never used the campus counseling services. A few students visited once or twice and one student saw a psychiatrist and therapist in her home town on a regular basis. The experience of counselors with other art and design students provided a valuable perspective on resilience and academic success. The faculty member reported students came to her when personal issues arose that would influence their academic success. Students in the same major were frequently listed as important for resilience. Students, faculty, and counselors described art and design students as a tightly knit group, like a family, supportive of one another.

Research Question 2 (RQ2) was, "Which internal protective factors (e.g., hardiness, mindsets, motivation, optimism, tenacity, persistence, self-efficacy, and spiritual beliefs) do successful art and design students identify as central to their academic progress?"

The students possessed a combination of the internal protective factors identified in the literature review. Students were tenacious, persistent, hardy, confident, highly motivated, and eager to succeed. Students were passionate about art and design and motivated to go out into the world and pursue employment in their field. Even though students faced some physical and mental health issues, harsh criticism, and problems with roommates and finances, the internal factors they possessed helped them overcome challenges. However, they were also nervous and fearful of the job market and opportunities for employment. Although some students had the support of family, students without that support still had the motivation and self-confidence to face the uncertain job market.

Research Question 3 (RQ3) was, "What stressors present the greatest challenges for college art and design students with regard to persistence?"

The lack of compatibility with roommates was a topic for discussion among students in their freshman and sophomore years, although problem-solving coping strategies prevailed. When living arrangements became intolerable, students found better, smaller, more private accommodations so their work would not suffer. Harsh critiques were challenging to students' feelings of self-worth and persistence. They cited multiple examples of how painful critiques were for their peers and themselves. Although it is

likely faculty gave encouragement and compliments to students regarding their work as well, few students reported them. Nearly all students, faculty, and counselors reported actions and remarks that were hurtful. Although the goal of critiques is to strengthen student work, many participants reported mean-spirited remarks that were unhelpful.

Participants acknowledge critiques were meant to improve the quality of their work, but felt some faculty still needed to remember the vulnerability of students putting their work up for examination. Some physical and mental health diagnoses were challenging, but students sought help from faculty, counselors, parents, medical experts, and each other when problems arose. Consistent with counselor reports, even though most students do not live at home, they are still closely connected with their families and worry about the welfare of family members.

Research Question 4 (RQ4) was "What coping strategies and resources do successful art and design students use to sustain resilience through their college experiences?"

Students reported sleep, exercise, talking difficulties through with family and friends, and changing living arrangements as important ways to reduce stress. Negative coping strategies included eating junk food, drinking soda, avoidance and withdrawal, and playing video games. Students rarely mentioned negative coping strategies found in the literature review: procrastination, perfectionism, alcohol abuse, drug abuse, or self-harm. Participants may have withheld some negative coping strategies. Counselors saw a different group of students over the years and indicated more negative coping strategies than this study group reported. Counselors indicated strong use of texting and social

media was used to engage socially with other students, citing this as a negative coping method. Although many students have embraced social media as a way to interact with each other; some students reported to counselors how much they missed speaking face-to-face with family and peers.

## Summary

Chapter 4 presented the findings from a phenomenological research study exploring the lived experiences of university art and design seniors. Data from seniors was supplemented by faculty and campus counselors. It was clear from these interviews that students are managing a heavy load of academic and personal challenges during their years at the university. No participant indicated their years at the university were carefree. Rather, course work with its inherent deadlines, and harsh critiques challenged student resilience.

Parents were proud of their children's ability to achieve a university bachelor's degree, but worried about their children's ability to find work in their field. Hadley confirmed student reports of stress related to the sophomore review and harsh critiques; and expressed compassion for students who received this feedback. Hadley also observed the family-like support students in the art department provided each other, and indicated the culture was much warmer at State U than at other universities in which she taught. Hadley was committed to helping students navigate the academic and personal challenges students faced by encouraging them to come to her office to share personal information that influenced academic success such as breakups and divorces. Students struggled with writing and plagiarism in her courses, which are writing intensive.

Analysis of the interview transcripts revealed three major themes that supported resilience and academic success: (a) high points and accomplishments, (b) external protective factors, (c) internal protective factors. Examining low points, challenges and stressors, and student coping strategies provides educators with data they can use to support student success.

An additional category provided advice from student graduates to future students. Each theme was supported by subthemes and quotations that illustrated the themes. Counselors reinforced themes stated by students and faculty regarding harsh critiques and struggles with parents. Parental support was important, but that lack of parental support did not stop students from following their passion to the degree they hoped would bring them satisfaction. Counselors reported students' fears of the future and worries about paying off student loans. Participants in this study did not use the campus counseling center often. Findings from the student interviews confirmed previous studies that reviewed the importance of external and internal protective factors for bolstering resilience (Masten, 2001; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010). Successful students in the study sample relied on a cluster of protective relationships, behaviors, and self-beliefs to achieve their goals.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

The purpose of this exploratory phenomenological study was to understand the supportive relationships, behaviors, and attitudes university art and design seniors' used to bolster resilience and achieve academic success. The primary data source was interviews with graduating students and an alum at a state university in the eastern United States; these data were supplemented by interviews with a faculty member and campus counselors at the same institution. The central phenomena of the study were resilient factors and coping strategies that students used as they interacted with the university environment to successfully complete their academic program. A planned outcome of this study was to identify the factors that graduating seniors and alums successfully used to bolster their resilience. The intended purpose was so that this information can be shared with future students and educators to help students persist with their education and graduate.

This chapter is devoted to interpreting findings from the data analysis, reporting limitations of the study, providing recommendations for future research, and discussing implications for social change. The major findings fell into 5 categories: (a) high points and accomplishments; (b) external protective factors; (c) internal protective factors; (d) low points, challenges, and stressors; and (e) coping strategies. Categories 2 through 5 directly relate to the research questions. Data were analyzed from the interviews to form themes and subthemes, as reported in Chapter 4. A sixth category included advice art and design students would give to prospective students. Data from interviews with faculty

and campus counselors corroborated or augmented the perspectives derived from student data.

## Findings

### Finding 1: Students' Identified Academic, Artistic, and Personal Accomplishments Inspired Their Optimism and Further Motivated Them to Remain Enrolled

A major finding of this study was that the students consistently identified academic, artistic, and personal accomplishments inspired their optimism and further motivated them to remain enrolled. This finding derived from answers to the opening interview question with students, which was intended to establish rapport and balance students' positive experiences with negative experiences. The most significant accomplishments listed were completing the senior capstone project and graduation. Other notable accomplishments included establishing independence from their parents, making new friends, winning awards, obtaining scholarships, and working at interesting internships. These accomplishments encouraged the students' artistic expression, enhanced their self-efficacy, and inspired them to move forward with coursework.

### Finding 2: Students Identified Relationship-Related External Protective Factors That Supported Their Resilience to Succeed Academically

A second finding of this study underscored the importance of social relationships to resilience and students' success. Students reported strong relationships with parents, especially mothers and peers. Findings on external protective factors involved supportive relationships that bolstered academic resilience. Relationships with supportive parents, sisters, faculty, peers, and counselors provided the students with encouragement and

advice. Students relied primarily on support from family and friends to push forward with their education. The majority of students cited support from both parents; and nearly all students cited the support of their mothers and peers. Some students gathered encouragement from their sisters.

**Finding 3: Financial Aid was a Key External Factor That Enabled Students to Enroll and Persist to Graduation**

Another major finding of this study was the importance of financial aid. Many students secured scholarships, loans, waivers, and worked while attending school in addition to full-time enrollment. This financial support was essential for so as to meet their financial obligations for tuition and living expenses. Most students worked part-time in addition to taking a full course load, but one student worked 35–40 hours a week in addition to his full course load.

**Finding 4: A Harmonious, Quiet, and Safe Living Environment was an External Factor That Enabled Students to Study Without Disruptions from Roommates**

Important to all students was a quiet, safe, stress-free living environment where they could work on assignments without the distraction of roommates. Many students reported difficulties getting along with roommates who were assigned to them in the dormitories, or even who they selected to live with. Differences in values, cleanliness, and life styles created friction between students. Students in this study moved to single dormitory rooms or small apartments when problems with roommates could not be resolved. Students recognized that the need for less stress and fewer distractions in their living arrangements was essential to their academic success.

**Finding 5: Students Identified Six Internal Protective Factors That Support Their Resilience to Succeed Academically**

A fifth finding was the importance of a cluster of positive attitudes and beliefs about their abilities to persist despite setbacks. Students relied on a combination of traits, values, and behaviors to bolster their resilience. Students identified six personal traits that helped them achieve academic success: hardiness, mindsets, motivation, optimism, self-efficacy, tenacity, and perseverance. These same traits have been reported extensively in the research literature (Bandura, 1995; Becker & Gable, 2009; Burris, et al., 2009; Dembo & Seli, 2008; Dweck, et al., 2014; Duckworth, et al., 2007; Fredrickson & Branigan, 2005; Luecken & Gress, 2010; Masten, & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010; Reich, et al., 2010; Skodol, 2010; Southwick & Charney, 2012; Yeager et al., 2011).

Not every student reported every external and internal protective factor. Rather, students relied on their own cluster of factors to support them as they pursued their goals. This finding is aligned with research from Mastern & O'Doughertty Wright, (2010). For example, when students' parents did not support their goals, students found support from mothers, sisters and peers. In addition, students' mindsets about their artistic abilities and intelligence reflected persistent beliefs about their capacity for academic success.

**Finding 6: Students Reported Significant Low Points and Stressors That Challenged Their Resilience and Academic Success.**

Another major finding was the number of low points and challenges students faced during their years at the university. All students reported low points, challenges and stressors. Students reported struggling with a number of adverse events in three contexts:

academic, family, and personal. For most students, the academic stressors concerned selecting a major, the sophomore review, and addressing feedback in studio critiques. With regard to challenges and stressors in the family context, students worried about problems at home with parents and grandparents who had health problems, parents' marital problems, a father engaged in criminal activity, or one or both parents being unemployed. Other family stressors included unsupportive fathers, parents who did not support students' choice of an art or design major, or students' sexual orientation. With regard to personal challenges and stressors, students emphasized poor relationships with roommates, addressing their own physical and mental health problems, and managing grief from the loss of a loved one,

**Finding 7: On Balance, Students Used More Positive Coping Strategies than Negative Coping Strategies to Manage Stress**

The most significant finding regarding coping strategies was the fact that students' reported the use of many more positive coping strategies than negative coping strategies to address stress. Often students reported negative coping strategies, but the positive coping strategies outnumbered the negative. A primary positive coping strategy was talking about issues with family members and friends. Other positive coping strategies included exercise, sleep, meeting with counselors, and taking prescription medications. Negative coping strategies students reported included avoidance and withdrawal, overeating, eating junk food, drinking soda, and drinking caffeinated beverages.

**Finding 8: Students Offered Advice for Future Art and Design Students Who Were**

**Planning to Attend the University**

A key finding from the interview question regarding advice these graduates would give to future students fell into two areas: academic and social. Students believed their academic success was partly the result of combining academic hard work with making friends. With regard to academics, students encouraged prospective students to research career options in the arts, build a portfolio of work and references, meet deadlines, and try not to be discouraged when projects did not meet expectations. With regard to social life, students recommended that new students develop a social group of friendships with peers and balance parties with academic work.

## Interpretation of the Findings

The findings from this study confirmed previous studies in factors of resilience and academic success among college students. According to the literature, resilience and academic success is the result of combined external and internal protective factors. Although early research focused on resilience with regard to personal traits of individuals, contemporary research on resilience focuses on a process-oriented approach (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010). A seminal study by Werner and Smith (2001) that followed individuals from birth to age 40 looked at personal traits of children whose parents were mentally ill, alcoholic, or who lived in chronic poverty to see how those early life challenges influenced their development and resilience (Werner & Smith, 2001; Zautra, Hall, & Murray, 2010). Contemporary scholars examined genetic influences that promote resilience (Lemery-Chalfant, 2010); and cognitive, affective, environmental, and

behavioral influences that foster resilience (Luecken & Gress, 2010; Ong et al., 2010; Reich et al., 2010; Skodol, 2010). Perry (2006) stated that individuals can withstand chronic stress and even trauma with assets and resources (external and internal protective factors) and successful coping strategies. Researchers identified assets and resources as high intelligence, academic achievement, interpersonal skills, and social resources such as community support (Werner & Smith, 2001; Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010).

In the interviews, I asked students to identify the people and personal traits that supported them as they navigated the university environment to persist to graduation. The first interview question was established to get students to reflect on their best and most favorable university experiences. By recalling the attainment of new social relationships, recognition for their talents, scholarships and awards, students reflected on all the good things that happened over their years at the university. Students were confident and positive about the skills and knowledge they acquired and felt positive about their futures. Positive psychologists found that when individuals wrote about three good things that occurred each day, they reported less depression and greater feelings of happiness (Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2010). This study reinforces the benefits of establishing optimism, an internal protective factor for resilience. Students shared examples of events that influenced satisfaction and happiness in three areas: academic accomplishments, artistic accomplishments, and personal accomplishments.

The second category, external protective factors, was framed by the literature on resilience theory. Luthar (2006) reported that after 5 decades of research on resilience, "resilience rests, fundamentally, on relationships" (p. 780). This connection is important

because students who have a wealth of rewarding experiences and relationships have recollections that can buoy their resilience when adverse events occur (Seligman et al., 2005). Resources external to the student, such as parents, faculty, advisors, mentors, and friends buffer the student from adverse experiences and promote resilience (Reich et al., 2010). Findings from this study confirmed the significance of supportive relationships to resilience. Campus counselors affirmed the close ties students have with their parents and peers. Students reported supportive relationships with family, faculty, and peers were essential to keep them focused on their goals. The majority of students reported they had the full support of both parents, but students who did not report this found support from sisters, faculty, counselors, and peers.

Scholars in prior studies indicated faculty play an important role in persistence among undergraduate students (Braxton, 2008). Scholars agree that faculty validation of students' efforts with encouraging statements diminish insecurities students face and support socialization and student success (Braxton, 2008; Kinzie, Cruce, Shoup, & Kuh, 2008). Faculty in this study pushed students to improve their skills by establishing high standards that brought criticism if the work submitted fell short. The harsh language used in critiques, however, often left students feeling attacked. Most students understood that when faculty were hard on them, their professor's goal was to make the work stronger. Some students who received harsh critiques from faculty relied on tenacity and persistence to foster resilience. Some students in this study reported positive relationships with faculty, whereas others did not. Relationships students have with faculty and peers

gives them a sense of belonging in their academic setting and they are more likely to persist, as these relationships play critical roles in resilience (Fruiht, 2015).

When students have a sense of belonging in their academic setting by forming relationships with peers and faculty, they are more likely to persist, as those relationships play critical roles in resilience (Zimmerman & Brenner, 2010; Tinto, 1995). Students in this study generally felt supported by fellow students and experienced a warm, family-like culture in the art department. Art and design students may have an advantage over students in other programs where close working relationships are not the norm. Early research indicated that feelings of not being part of the group, the institution, or feeling welcome by fellow students or faculty has a profound effect on student withdrawal (Tinto, 1995). In this study, the strong supportive relationships with peers clearly helped students cope with adversity.

Isolation and weak social integration are key elements for student withdrawal for all college students (Seidman, 2005; Tinto, 1993, 2007). The faculty member and a transfer student reported that some university art and design programs have a fiercely competitive culture. In contrast, the supportive culture at State U was seen by some as beneficial to resilience and persistence.

Campus counselors expressed concerns that overuse of social media has limited the ability of students to form meaningful relationships. Twenty years ago, 38% of students spent 16 hours a week or more face-to-face socializing with peers. This year only 18% said the same (Berrett & Hoover, 2015, A16). Students in another study reported spending as many as 8 hours a week or more checking social media sites (Wang,

Chen, & Liang, 2011). Scholars suggest this use of time has been shown to influence a decline in confidence with social skills, procrastination, and poorer grades (Berrett & Hoover, 2015; Eagan et al., 2014; Kalpidou, Costin, & Morris, 2011). Counselors in this study asserted that time spent on social media sites have had a negative effect on developing social connections that support retention.

The majority of students in this study needed financial aid to remain enrolled. Findings from this study indicated students took on the added responsibility to apply for scholarships, tuition waivers, student loans, and secured employment to stay enrolled.

The third category of findings explored internal protective factors that were framed by the second research question and the literature. Scholars asserted that students' beliefs about themselves, their feelings, and self-control matter more to resilience than academic ability (Dweck et al., 2014, p. 2; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). According to the literature, non-cognitive factors such as tenacity and perseverance are essential to a student's capacity to strive and succeed at long-term goals (Schechtman et al., 2013). Not every student in this study had every external and internal factor identified in the literature, but students developed a cluster of supportive relationships, positive attitudes, and behaviors that helped them establish and maintain resilience. Scholars stated factors such as hardiness, motivation, optimism, mindsets, self-efficacy, tenacity, and perseverance are malleable, teachable, and essential for meeting life's challenges (Schechtman et al., 2013).

Skodol, (2010) identified a group of personal traits that support resilience. These internal protective factors or personal traits include hardiness, mindsets, motivation,

optimism, tenacity and perseverance. Hardiness suggests that some individuals are more capable of dealing with stress than others (Aptor, 2007). Mindsets about intelligence and artistic abilities are another factor that influences resilience. Findings from this study indicated students did not agree on whether intelligence and artistic talent comes from a growth or fixed mindset; but the majority of students indicated practice and hard work is essential to improving artistic skills. Some students in this study stated artistic talent and intelligence were formed at birth, whereas others felt they developed over time from time spent with parents and their environment.

Previous studies reported that individuals with high self-efficacy beliefs, optimism, and internal locus of control had positive appraisals of stressful events (Skodol, 2010; Southwick & Charney, 2012). Similarly, students in this study reported self-confidence in their artistic abilities and felt capable of managing life's challenges effectively. Students in this study stated that they had improved as artists in many ways and that the years they spent at State U prepared them for careers in the arts.

Key findings, in Category 4—low points, challenges, and stressors—indicated students' experienced significant, impactful stressors during their university years. This finding is consistent with students in previous studies who reported stress as the most important factor affecting their academic performance (ACHA, 2012; Conley, Durlak, & Dickson, 2013). According to the literature, students consistently report stress as the most important factor affecting their academic performance (ACHA, 2012; Conley, Durlak, & Dickson, 2013). Previous studies reported students who passed out while being ridiculed

in critiques, burst into tears, and in an extreme case committed suicide following a difficult critique (Anthony, 1991; Koch et al., 2002).

In this study, students indicated they experienced stress in three areas: academic, family, and personal. Academic stress occurred during critiques and when students prepared for the sophomore review and senior capstone project. Studio critiques have been identified as stressful and often harsh by students, faculty and campus counselors. Housley Gaffney (2011) posited that given the nature of design studios, each presentation has the opportunity to enhance or damage students' self-efficacy. Findings from this study confirm this assertion. That is, many students in this study described critiques as "torture, demoralizing" events that left them feeling attacked and depressed. Students in this study who experienced a harsh critique had two reactions. First, students had an emotional reaction: some students said they cried, locked themselves in their room, and reported feeling depressed. The emotional reaction was followed by a problem-solving coping strategy. Some students changed their major, transferred to another college, or decided to try again and continue in the same major.

The faculty member agreed that the sophomore review and senior capstone projects were very stressful for students. Campus counselors confirmed reports regarding the feedback students received during critiques, stating that feedback can be very supportive or harsh. Students in this study indicated critiques could be learning experiences if students were given specific examples of how their work could be improved.

Students are likely to persist in college if they feel they are fairly treated and supported by faculty. Schechtman et al. (2013) asserted that students are more likely to persist if the learning environment has "a fair and respectful climate, conveys high expectations, emphasizes effort over ability, and provides necessary tangible resources-materials, human, and time" (p. vii). A key finding indicated negative remarks could inspire students to demonstrate to unsupportive teachers and parents that they could be successful. Students who were told they would never graduate from college or had no artistic talent were motivated to prove to former teachers they were wrong. It was important to demonstrate to themselves and faculty that they could be successful at the university. Students in this study who cried and withdrew after harsh critiques later returned to tackle the work. Students who reported harsh feedback in critiques shared a range of reasons why they persisted in courses in spite of negative feedback or bullying. Students who have been bullied or experienced trauma in childhood may find feedback in critiques highly stressful and therefore forget what was suggested. Reports by students of harsh critiques triggered recollections of being bullied in elementary, middle, and high school. Students who experienced bullying still carried memories of these painful events. Adult learners who experienced trauma may experience "anxiety, hypervigilance and cognitive distortion, trouble concentrating, and have difficulty maintaining self-esteem" (Perry, 2006, p. 21).

In this study, family stress occurred when students worried about the health and welfare of family members. Students in this study also struggled with a lack of acceptance from parents who did not approve of their choice of an art or design major.

Findings from this study revealed that students' tenacity and perseverance were essential to college completion. One reason for persistence was students' desire to make their parents proud. Another reason was to prove faculty and parents they were talented and intelligent. Students also said they persisted because they wanted to feel successful. Students indicated negative remarks would not prevent them from graduating with a degree that brought them satisfaction. Students who reported their parents did not support their choice of major, still managed to graduate. The lack of support merely strengthened the students' resolve to remain enrolled in a major they felt was right for them. When parents did not support the students' selection of an art or design major, students looked for support from others: faculty, peers, or advisors.

According to the literature, many students struggle with mental health conditions that affect performance and can influence negative outcomes such as poor performance (APA, 2011; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Eisenberg et al., 2013; Mandracchia & Pendleton, 2015). Campus counseling centers are seeing an increase in students nationwide, more students with depression, anxiety, and other mental health conditions are seeking help (Mistler et al., 2012). Most students in this study managed to cope with adversity by talking problems out with family and friends. The literature reported the demands on university students with mental health problems are significant (Hartley, 2011). Students in this study struggled to manage issues that all college students shared (as reported in the research literature), such as feeling part of a social group, managing time, meeting deadlines and making the transition from home to college life.

This study confirmed findings in the literature regarding some students' reasons for not visiting the campus counseling center (Czyz et al., 2013). Campus counselors in this study reported meeting with many art and design students over the years; however, not many students from this study visited the campus counseling center. Several students in this study visited the counseling office a few times, one student had ongoing sessions on campus, and another student sought help from a psychiatrist in her home town. Findings indicated two reasons for their reluctance to visit the counseling center. First, students reported they did not have time; and second, students felt they could manage problems on their own. Students from this study demonstrated that regardless of the physical and mental health challenges they faced, they took full responsibility for completing their course work.

Campus counselors reported students faced different challenges and stressors in each year and these challenges and stressors changed from freshman to senior year. Counselors reported the biggest stressors for freshman were establishing independence from their parents, managing the academic work load, and making friends. Sophomores expressed concern regarding selecting their major and reported significant stress during the sophomore review. These points were confirmed by the students and the faculty member. Campus counselors reported juniors were often concerned about finding meaningful internships and summer jobs: however, students did not report this concern. Most students in this study felt the least stress in their junior year, with the exception of two students who reported a difficult romantic breakup and an internal struggle over his religious beliefs. Counselors reported seniors being worried about life after graduation,

finding employment, and paying off student loans. Counselors also reported seniors'

being worried about leaving behind friends and the uncertainty about life after college.

These points were affirmed by students. The faculty member echoed students' reported

stress around completing the senior capstone. Campus counselors reported that students

were plagued all years with managing harsh critiques and dealing with relationship

problems.

After seeing thousands of students in all majors and hundreds of art and design

students, campus counselors reported they were attuned to the struggles students faced as

they matured and moved through years at the university. Faculty and campus counselors

understood the challenges students faced with sophomore review, critiques, and senior

capstone projects. It was notable that students felt comfortable talking with faculty about

personal problems that influenced their academic success. The faculty member reported

that students discussed romantic breakups and divorces that impacted their performance,

along with academic issues.

Students in this study drew on more positive coping strategies than negative ones

when faced with adversity. It was common for the same student to report using both

positive and negative coping strategies. Positive coping strategies included talking with

family and friends, exercise, sleep, moving to a stress-free living environment, taking

prescription medications, and seeking counseling. This finding agrees with Byrd and

McKinney (2012) who found that high self-esteem and strong coping abilities are

important for managing tension and college-related stress. The literature found problem-

solving coping strategies were most effective for managing stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Students combined positive coping strategies with negative coping strategies. In this study students used avoidance and withdrawal, overeating of sweets and junk food, and drinking soda and beverages with caffeine. Campus counselors perceived that use of social media and playing video games are a negative coping strategy students in general used to manage stress. Kalpidou et al. (2011) found that students who used Facebook spent less time studying and had lower grades than students who did not use social-media sites. Counselors surmised that the use of social media prevents students from forming meaningful relationships. Counselors suggested students' use of social media in place of face-to-face communication has had a negative effect on retention for students in all majors.

A final area of inquiry was students' advice for future students, which addressed two areas: academic advice and social advice. Students suggested looking at the work one could find after completing a particular major, the importance of making friends, exploring new options and ideas, and the importance of meeting deadlines and staying current with assignments. Graduating students encouraged future students to find a group of friends, become a peer mentor, have fun, but not let parties keep them from doing their work.

**Findings in the Context of the Conceptual Frameworks**

Three theories from the literature review framed this study: resilience theory, mindsets, and the ecological theory of human development, also known as human

ecology. Resilience theory describes how a complex combination of personal relationships work with beliefs, attitudes, and personal traits to buoy students when faced with setbacks (Luecken & Gress, 2010, pp. 243–247). Reliance on external and internal protective factors to support resilience was evident from all of the students interviewed for this study.

In resilience theory, the process of recovery from adversity involves a process of examining the problem, coping with feelings, and arriving at a solution that either solves the problem or reduces the pain (Masten & O'Dougherty Wright, 2010). When students needed support, such as when they had a difficult roommate, they reached out to friends in their major, their RA, parents, and peers. When parents did not support a student's choice of major, students turned to friends or sisters for encouragement. When life events with families created stress and interfered with academic performance, students reached out to faculty, friends, and occasionally a campus counselor for help.

Consistent with other research, it is essential that students have a network of people who provide emotional, academic, and financial support (Mayer & Faber, 2010; Luecken & Gress, 2010; Masten & O'Dougherty Wright; Pargament & Cummings, 2010; Wolniak, 2012). The students in this study were fortunate to have at least one parent and often two parents who supported them. However, students who did not have a supportive parent could still foster resilience. Researchers showed that students in foster care and students whose parents are mentally ill or incarcerated can make strong connections with coaches, teachers, ministers, mentors, or supportive spouses; leaning on these external supports to advise and encourage them (Hines et al., 2005; Wolniak et al., 2011).

Critics of resilience theory asserted resilient individuals do not have unusual traits (Garmezy, 1991; Masten, 2001; Perry, 1997, 2000). Findings from this study contest that perspective. Students reported that strong combinations of external and internal protective factors helped them navigate the challenges that arose as they worked toward graduation. Although not every student mentioned having every protective factor discussed in the literature review, students possessed a combination of factors that worked for them. Most students in this study reported having personal traits such as confidence, motivation, optimism, hardiness, and persistence. These traits were essential for their college completion and were combined with external protective factors.

When students believe they can achieve success, they move ahead with self-confidence. When students received poor feedback in critiques or a lack of parental support, they did not let that stop them. Other literature supported mindsets and self-efficacy beliefs as important for developing resilience (Bandura, 1977; Dweck, 2001; Dweck & Leggett, 1988). When faced with a painful experience, the initial reaction for some students was to cry, eat junk food, or withdraw and stay in bed feeling depressed. A short time later, these same students resolved to redo the work or avoided taking future courses with faculty members they perceived provided unfair criticism. Students also looked to others who would provide the needed support. Bandura (1977) explained that when students believe in their abilities to achieve their goals, they are likely to achieve them, surmounting obstacles. College students who feel they are being supported in setting goals, and problem solving are likely to feel hopeful about their future (Fruiht, 2015).

Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological theory on human development asserted that human growth is the result of the interaction of an individual with the environment. Bronfenbrenner theorized that growth from infancy to adulthood is influenced by five systems: microsystem, macrosystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and chronosystem. Bronfenbrenner believed human growth is interactive, and multiple factors work together to influence growth. Findings from this study support that assertion.

First, in the microsystem, "relationships with family and friends suggests that human growth relies in part on close personal relationships" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, pp. 21–22). Nearly all students relied on parents and friendships they developed with peers to buffer them from adversity and provide encouragement when facing challenges. Secondly, the macrosystem reflects the actual culture that influences the individual, such race, ethnicity, and socioeconomic status. The macrosystem refers to consistencies that exist in belief systems.

The mesosystem includes the relationship between the microsystems. The mesosystem fosters growth in two or more settings, for example, the relationship between the student and the art department; or the student and their living arrangements. In this study, the art and design studios and classrooms and the dormitories or apartments where students lived and worked were important environments for individual growth and development. Students spent long hours in the studio during and after class working side by side. This shared proximity and passion for the arts helped build strong peer relationships, which are important for resilience and human development.

The exosystem refers to environmental settings that indirectly affect the individual. In this study, financial aid, university policies, curriculum requirements, and the university housing office had indirect influence on students. The exosystem does not play an active role in development but nonetheless has an important influence on students' academic success. The chronosystem refers to the major events that influence individuals over the life course, such as leaving home to attend the university, the death of a parent or sibling, marriage, divorce, or unemployment.

In Dweck's (2000) mindset theory, students with growth mindsets welcome challenges and look forward to tackling difficult assignments with hard work. In contrast, students with fixed mindsets feel success is based on the genetic inheritance of artistic talent and intelligence. In addition, students with fixed mindset believe they can do little to increase their abilities: either one has artistic talent or they do not. The majority of students in this study believed that practice and hard work were required to further develop intelligence and artistic abilities. Students expressed pride in their skills as artists, felt confident in their abilities to produce good work, and were eager to begin their careers. Findings from this study illustrated that when students voluntarily continue in a goal-directed path in spite of obstacles and adversity, they are likely to graduate.

## Evidence of Trustworthiness

In this study, the phenomenon of resilience was under investigation. Students reflected on their lived experiences at the university sharing high points and low points that were assessed directly through interviews. Credibility or internal validity was supported with triangulation of data: multiple sources of data, multiple methods

(interviews and journal entries) and multiple conceptual frameworks. Merriam posits
"Just as there will be multiple accounts of eyewitnesses to a crime, so too, there will be
multiple constructions of how people have experienced a particular phenomenon" (p.
214). Triangulation using multiple sources through interviews collected from different
perspectives (students, alum, faculty and campus counselors) supported credibility. If this
study were repeated, it is likely students would also report highs and lows that challenged
their resilience and academic success. However, "because human behavior is never
static" details of accomplishments, challenges and stressors may vary. My dissertation
committee reviewed interview transcripts, node lists of themes in order to ensure
confirmability. No adjustments to credibility, transferability, dependability or
confirmability strategies as described in Chapter 3 were needed.

### Limitations of the Study

This study had two main limitations. The first limitation is the small sample size
of faculty who were able to participate. Interviews with a few more faculty may have
yielded additional perspectives or strengthened themes, especially if I had been able to
conduct the focus-group interviews initially planned. A second limitation is the short
length of time during which I had access to all participants before the term ended. If I had
more time on campus, I could have conducted student interviews first, analyzed those
data, then conducted follow-up interviews with faculty and counselors to corroborate or
challenge students' perspectives. I clarify the possibility of researcher bias here.

To prevent my personal bias from skewing data analysis and interpretations of the
data, I tried to keep in mind that all people experience stress in their lives and stress in

college is no exception. I attempted to approach each interview with an open mind and encouraged interviewees to discuss any relationships or events that influenced their progress from freshman to senior year. My own experience as a design student differed from the students I interviewed. That is, I had very good relationships with my college roommates, I had little support from peers in my major, and I did not rely on my family for advice. There were similarities as well: I was a transfer student, changed my major, had the support of a loving family, and experienced high levels of stress in my senior year and in graduate school. At times, lengthy stories of difficult roommates and their behaviors and bullying students received in elementary and middle school consumed much interview time. Participants' responses could have been more concise, but these stories underscored the significance of these stressors. Although I asked students to report on the challenges and stressors of their university experiences, some participants recalled events from elementary, middle, and high school that left long-lasting scars. I used open-ended questions following responsive interview techniques to encourage participants to fully share their experiences (Rubin & Rubin, 2005). I am confident that all students, with one exception, openly shared their feelings and experiences. At the end of each interview, I made entries in my journal, listened to the audio recordings multiple times, transcribed the interviews, and sent a copy of the interview transcript to each participant by e-mail. I made additional notes in my journal of any observations or thoughts that occurred before, during, or after the interview.

I conducted interviews with 15 participants: 11 students and one alum, one faculty member, and two counselors. This group was sufficient for an exploratory

phenomenological study. The sample size surpassed the goal for students and alums. I

expected to interview 10 students or alums and interviewed 12. I anticipated interviewing

4–5 faculty, but for reasons discussed earlier, could not gather those volunteers. I

interviewed two campus counselors. The number of student participants was sufficient

for an exploratory phenomenological study with a graduating class of 55 art and design

majors.

To ensure coding consistency, I used Nvivo10 nodes and made itemized lists of

the codes participants used. I made numbered lists from the nodes of high points, external

protective factors, internal protective factors, low points, challenges and stressors,

bullying and trauma, coping strategies, and advice. I read and reread the lists to ensure

that all words and phrases listed belonged on the list and accurately represented the

themes. My committee chair and committee member reviewed transcripts, lists of nodes,

and notable quotations during data analysis.

I encouraged participants to share their experiences in a year-by-year sequence,

but often participants moved into relevant topics and issues that were important to them

in random order. I believe all participants shared their lived experiences fully with the

exception of one participant who was uncomfortable discussing her experience with

depression. I encouraged participants to add or clarify any statements to their interviews,

by e-mail: I received one small edit request and no participants e-mailed additional

information. As reported in Chapter 3 and presented in Chapter 4, I took intentional steps

to ensure that all data were considered and analyzed. For example, I read interview

transcripts at least 10 times. With each reading, I found more responses that would yield

relevant data. When I reached a point of saturation of information, I began data interpretation. I believe the steps taken can be trusted to represent students' experiences and help educators understand the challenges students face in art and design programs.

## Recommendations

Based on the findings from this study, I offer recommendations for university educators. The first set of recommendations concerns transfer students. I suggest a required orientation program specifically for transfer students in the art and design programs, regardless of credits achieved at prior institutions. The transfer-student orientation would acquaint students with campus services and ease their transition to State U. The orientation would include a walking tour of the campus to acquaint new students with the health center, campus counseling office, mathematics and writing tutors, and student organizations that students could access for support.

Second, help new students form friendships in their majors as soon as possible. Connect current art and design students with transfer students as peer mentors. Initiate a peer-support group where art and design students who have been on campus for 2 or more years' partner with incoming transfer students.

Third, provide training for students and faculty on effective ways to offer feedback in studio critiques. As role models, faculty should demonstrate professionalism and civility; therefore, the comments professors and peers make during critiques should focus on the student work and not contain personal attacks or the use of profanity. Dramatic displays and hurtful remarks and actions affect the individual under attack, but also seems to have a negative effect on other students in the classroom. Offering

suggestions such as, "Your work would be better if you did this, this, and this," would provide constructive feedback and offer students ways to strengthen their work. Treating students with respect would reduce the stress and anxiety students experience during critiques. Remarks students reported, such as telling students they are not talented or smart enough to compete, or telling students they should not pursue a particular major, can destroy a student's self-confidence. Behaviors such as ripping up a drawing or throwing drawings out the window does not provide the student with any useful feedback or positive role modeling. Appoint a student advocate and encourage students to speak up when they feel they have been bullied by peers or faculty.

Fourth, work to dispel the stereotypical myth of the starving artist by providing a list of possible careers for art and design majors. Create a stronger connection between companies that hire art graduates and the campus employment office. Invite employers to campus to recruit students such as graphic design firms, museums, furniture designers, textile producers, home goods, and school districts. Provide parents and students with a list of successful State U. alumnae who are currently working in art and design positions.

Fifth, empower students with information on the difference between negative and positive coping strategies during orientation. Counselors indicated students often repeat the coping strategies they learned at home, which may not be the most effective or healthy. Counselors reported students bring coping strategies they learned at home (such as drinking alcohol and poor eating habits) with them to college. Training programs can help students identify and use positive coping strategies that foster resilience.

## Implications for Positive Social Change

With increased national attention on higher education completion rates, educators will benefit from understanding reasons students remain at the university as well as reasons students choose to leave. Listening to successful college graduates talk about their accomplishments, challenges, and stressors, and the ways in which they coped with adversity will provide future art and design students and educators with information they can use when faced with the same problems. Providing opportunities for students to develop supportive relationships with peers, faculty, and counselors can help students make a smooth transition to college life. Seeing how students before them stumbled, but were able to continue can provide inspiration to other students. If the institution provided faculty development training that improved the way that critiques were delivered, students might find critiques less stressful. Adding orientation for transfer students might ease the transition for students entering the university. Society will benefit if students graduate, are able to find employment in their area of specialization and repay student loans.

No participant in this study reported an easy, carefree journey to graduation. Each participant experienced rejection, disapproval, and relationship and financial challenges that could have driven them to give up. Many students had physical and mental health issues that challenged their ability to stay focused on coursework. However, in spite of the difficulties students faced, they addressed each situation and persevered with hardiness, tenacity, and optimism. Resilience is a process that can be formed by developing supportive relationships, attitudes, and beliefs. Knowing when to ask for help,

individuals can overcome obstacles with coping skills that help them in daily life, college, life and beyond.

**Suggestions for Future Research**

Several themes emerged from the data analysis that could be studied in greater depth. The following suggestions for future research came from reflections following interview responses. First, more research is needed on the connection between bullying, educational trauma, and the ability to incorporate feedback during studio critiques. Second, more research is needed with regard to bullying and educational trauma and how those experiences influence a student's ability to absorb feedback during critiques. Provide faculty with information they can use in the classroom with students to better incorporate suggestions to produce stronger work. Third, more research is needed on the way dormitory roommate assignments at State U influence retention. Problems with roommate assignments clearly posed a challenge for students and could be improved.

<div align="center">

**Conclusion**

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How art and design students met and managed challenges is at the core of this study. The results from this study and the recommendations for action are intended to help educators gain a better understanding of the challenges art and design students face as they persist to graduation. Findings from this study could be of interest to educators who hope to improve retention and graduation rates.

Students in this study were fortunate to have at least one parent who supported their goals. For students who do not have parents, it would be helpful if educators could steer students toward adults (coaches, mentors, faculty, or religious leaders) who can

provide them with encouragement and support. Compelling evidence suggests that mindsets students have about their skills, beliefs, and attitudes can build protective factors that allow students to recover from setbacks and move forward in the face of challenges (Dweck et al., 2011). Intervention programs are available for students who need to build resilience and incorporate more positive coping strategies.

Students who have faced adversity and successfully coped with it have emerged as stronger young adults and university graduates. Graduation could not be achieved without supportive relationships, access to financial aid, and a group of positive attitudes and beliefs. Students' optimism, hard work, tenacity, and perseverance conquered obstacles and fueled the motivation to complete their degrees. Students in this study were confident in their abilities and eager to begin careers. Positive relationships and the supportive culture at State U helped students feel they could face a future where their artistic skills were valued. When supportive relationships did not exist, students found others who encouraged them. We cannot control the adverse events in our lives, but we can control how we react to them. If graduates surround themselves with supportive relationships and develop positive coping strategies, they are likely to face the world with confidence and the knowledge that they can face adversity and cope with it successfully.

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Appendix A: Student and Recent Alum Interview Questions

- Looking back on your best college experiences, what would you say are your greatest achievements, your happiest memories? Let's start with your freshman year.

- In what ways have you improved as an artist or designer while in college?

- Have you won awards, recognition or scholarships for your skills?

- Think back on your college years from freshman to senior. What times or events stand out for you as particularly challenging?

- When you first came to campus, how confident were you in your ability to succeed in college level work?

- Who has been most important in supporting your goal for completing a college degree?

- Who can you count on to help you when things don't go your way?

- When you were going through challenging events, how did they affect your ability to do quality work and stay current with assignments?

- How long did it take you to get back to feeling yourself?

- How have you managed studio critiques?

- What are some of the things you do when you are feeling stressed?

- Do you believe artistic talent is something you were born with or something you develop with hard work?

- If you could give any advice to future students about dealing with college challenges, what would you tell them?

Appendix B: Faculty Interview Questions

- In the freshman year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- In the sophomore year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- In the junior year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- What are the difficult issues your students report in their senior year?

- Do students contact you regarding personal issues?

- Do students contact you regarding academic issues outside of class time?

- What issues have been most troubling or stressful?

- What methods have you used to help students manage?

  o Have you suggested counseling, tutoring, mentoring to help students succeed?

  o Have you offered to give students extra time to complete the work?

Appendix C: Campus Counselor Interview Questions

- What programs and services do the campus counseling center offer to help students with time management, stress, and other issues students deal with.

- Beginning in freshman year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- In the sophomore year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- In the junior year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- What are the difficult issues students report in their senior year?

- Do art and design students report more or less distress than students in other majors?

- What challenges and stresses to academic progress do you see as most challenging to student resilience?

- Can you discuss the types of coping strategies students use to manage stress?

Appendix D: Sign-up Sheet

INTERVIEW SIGN UP SHEET

Each interview will take about 60-75 minutes

MONDAY May 4

2:00_____ cell_____

4:00_____ cell_____

6:00_____ cell_____

8:00_____ cell_____

TUESDAY MAY 5

10:00_____ cell_____

12:00_____ cell_____

2:00_____ cell_____

4:00_____ cell_____

6:00_____ cell_____

8:00_____ cell_____

WEDNESDAY MAY 6

12:00_____ cell_____

2:00_____ cell_____

4:00_____ cell_____

6:00_____ cell_____

8:00_____ cell_____

THURSDAY MAY 7

10:00_____ cell_____

12:00_____ cell_____

2:00_____ cell_____

4:00_____ cell_____

6:00_____ cell_____

8:00_____ cell_____

FRIDAY MAY 8<sup>TH</sup>

10:00_____ cell_____

12:00_____ cell_____

Appendix E: Sample E-mail to Recent Alums

**Share the highs and lows of your college experience**

In the next 10 days a researcher from Walden University, Ruth Morgan, will be on campus to interview students, recent graduates, faculty, and counselors about stress, resilience, and coping strategies you dealt with while pursuing your degree in art and design. Your contributions to this study will inform future students of what they may experience as an art and design student; and most importantly, how others have managed to stay focused on their goals while working toward graduation requirements. The findings may also benefit this university regarding ways in which future students can bolster resilience, cope with stress, and graduate. In addition, this study will be used towards Ruth Morgan's dissertation in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in higher education.

The researcher is interested in learning what your life experiences were like as an undergraduate student in art and design. Not all students experience college in the same way. Not all students face the same challenges. Ten students and/or alums are needed for a one time only, one-on-one interview lasting 60-75 minutes. Your responses will be confidential. Your real name will not be used. You may select a pseudonym to replace your real name.

In exchange for your valuable information, you will be given a $25 gift card to the campus bookstore. If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu. Please answer these two questions in your reply: 1) What was your major? 2) Are you willing to discuss some of the best and worst times you

experienced while in college? The risks are minimal. Participation is voluntary and you

may withdraw at any time. Ruth looks forward to meeting you.

Appendix F: Sample E-mail to Students

**Share the highs and lows of your college experience**

In the next 10 days a researcher from Walden University, Ruth Morgan, will be

on campus to interview students, recent alums, faculty, and counselors about stress,

resilience, and coping strategies you have dealt with while pursuing your degree in art

and design. Your contributions to this study will inform future students of what they may

experience as an art and design student; and most importantly how others have managed

to stay focused on their goals while working toward graduation requirements. The

findings may also benefit this university regarding ways in which future students can

bolster resilience, cope with stress, and graduate. In addition, this study will be used

towards Ruth Morgan's dissertation in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in higher

education.

The researcher is interested in learning what your life experiences have been as a

student. Not all students experience college in the same way. Not all students face the

same challenges. Ten students and/or alums are needed for a one time only, one-on-one

interview lasting 60-75 minutes. Your responses will be confidential. Your real name will

not be used. You may select a pseudonym to replace your real name.

In exchange for your valuable information, you will be given a $25 gift card to the

campus bookstore. If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to

ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu. Please answer these two questions in your reply: 1) What is

your major? 2) Are you willing to discuss some of the best and worst times you have

experienced in college? The risks are minimal. Participation is voluntary and you may

withdraw at any time. Ruth looks forward to meeting you.

Appendix G: Sample E-mail to Faculty

**Will you participate in a research study on student resilience?**

In the next 10 days a Ph.D. student from Walden University, Ruth Morgan, will be on campus to interview students, recent alums, faculty, and counselors about stress, resilience, and coping strategies students use while pursuing a degree in art and design. Four or five faculty who teach and advise undergraduate art and design students are needed for a one time only small group interview lasting 45-60 minutes. The findings from this study will benefit this university regarding ways in which we can help students bolster resilience, cope with stress, and graduate. In addition, the findings will be used toward Ruth Morgan's dissertation in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in higher education.

Not all students experience college in the same way. Not all students face the same challenges. Ruth is interested in learning what you know about the challenges and stress your students experience and the coping strategies your students use to persist to graduation.

If you decide to participate, your responses will be confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your actual name. The name of the institution will not be used. If you are interested in participating in this study, please reply to ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu. Interviews will be scheduled on campus and in person. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Appendix H: Sample E-mail to Campus Counselors

**Will you participate in a research study on student resilience?**

In the next 10 days a Ph.D. student from Walden University, Ruth Morgan, will be on campus to interview students and recent alums, faculty, and counselors about stress, resilience, and coping strategies students use while pursuing a degree in art and design. Ruth is interested in interviewing two or three counselors in an individual, one-time only 30-45-minute interview regarding services offered to undergraduate students to help them manage time, stress and other issues that challenge academic success. The findings from this study will benefit this university regarding ways in which we can help students bolster resilience, cope with stress, and graduate as well as future students and university stakeholders. In addition, the findings will be used toward Ruth Morgan's dissertation in partial fulfillment of her doctoral degree in higher education.

Not all students experience college in the same way. Not all students face the same challenges. If you are interested in participating in this interview, please contact ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu. Participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. All interviews will be strictly confidential. Interviews may be audio recorded if you agree. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your actual name. The name of the institution is confidential. The interviews will be held in your office or location of choice. Thank you.

Appendix I: Follow-up E-mail Invitation for Students to Participate in Research

**Share the highs and lows of your college experience**

A Ph.D. student from Walden University, Ruth Morgan is looking for art and design students who are in their senior year or recent alums (those who have graduated within the last three years). The purpose of Ruth's study is to explore resilience, stress, and coping strategies that support academic success. Ruth is interested in learning what your life experiences have been as a student. Not all students experience college in the same way. Not all students face the same challenges. Your contributions to this study will inform future students of what they may experience as an art and design student at this university and, most importantly, how other students have managed to bolster resilience and stay focused on their goals while working toward graduation requirements.

Ruth is looking for 10 students and/or recent alums (those who have graduated in the last 3 years) who would like to participate in a one-on-one interview lasting 60-75 minutes, one time only. All participation is voluntary and your remarks will be completely confidential. Pseudonyms will be used in place of your actual name. Risks are minimal to participants. At the end of the interview, you will receive a $25 gift card to the campus bookstore in exchange for your time and information.

If you are interested in participating in this research study, please reply to ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu with answers to these two questions: 1.) What is your major? 2.) Are you willing to discuss some of the best and worst times you have experienced while in college? Thank you for considering this invitation to participate.

Appendix J: Student Consent Form

**Share the highs and lows of your college experience**

My name is Ruth Morgan; I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am inviting

you to take part in a research study on resilience, coping strategies, and academic success

of students and alums in art and design majors. The purpose of this study is to examine

the factors that have helped you make it to graduation. I wish to include graduating

seniors and alums who have completed a B.A. or B.F.A. within the last three years. This

form is a part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand the study

before deciding whether to take part. I do not work for this university or have any

affiliation with it other than conducting this research study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine factors of resilience that have helped you

achieve academic success. The interview questions will center on three areas. Any

awards, recognition, support and other positive experiences that have helped you build

resilience and stay focused on your goals will be identified. Any events that have been

challenging or stressful will be explored. Lastly, I hope you will reflect on behaviors and

relationships you have developed to cope with stress so that you could successfully

complete your degree.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Devote 60-75 minutes for a one-on-one interview about your college

  experiences conducted at a location convenient to you.

- Read and review the written transcript of your interview and return it with any corrections or inaccurate information within 10 days of receipt (optional).

**Here are some sample interview questions:**

- Looking back on the years you have been a student, what are the best experiences you have had in college? Let's start with your freshman year.

- Looking back on the years you have been a student, what are the most stressful events or periods you have experienced?

- What coping strategies have been most effective?

- Who do you call when something significant occurs in your life?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to participate. No one will treat you differently if you choose not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop the interview at any time.

**Risks and benefits of being in the study:**

By sharing your experiences with me, you may gain feelings of pride in your accomplishments, and satisfaction in your ability to overcome challenging situations. It is also likely that you may have good feelings as you reflect on your success. You may generate good feelings by providing advice that will help future students succeed. Minimal risks may be involved in recalling past life events that have made you feel sad, hurt or angry about difficult events in your past.

**Payment:**

In gratitude for your participation, a $25 gift certificate to the campus book store will be given at the completion of your interview.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. All participants will be identified by a pseudonym. No real names will be used. I will comply with all mandated requirements to protect the safety and welfare of students, faculty, administrators and local residents by reporting any incidents that would endanger their health and safety as determined by the state of West Virginia and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Child/elder abuse or illegal activities will be reported to the appropriate authorities. I will also notify Walden University. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by locking it in my vehicle while on campus or home office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Ruth Morgan at ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu or Dr. Catherine Marienau, Dissertation Committee Chair at Walden University, catherine.marienau @waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB # 04-28-15-0091964 and it expires on April 27, 2016.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I agree to the terms described above. You may consent to participate in this study in one of two ways. First, by returning this e-mail saying you consent to participate in the study or by signing the consent form at the beginning of the interview. If you consent by e-mail, keep a copy of this form. If you consent in person at the beginning of the interview, you will be provided with a copy of this form.

**I consent to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature: _____**

**Date of consent: _____**

**Researcher's Signature: _____**

Appendix K: Recent Alum Consent Form

**Share the highs and lows of your college experience**

My name is Ruth Morgan; I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am inviting you to take part in a research study on resilience and academic success. The purpose of this study is to examine the factors that helped you make it to graduation. I am inviting seniors and alums who have completed a B.A. or B.F.A. within the last three years in one of the art and design majors to be in the study. This form is a part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand the study before deciding whether to take part. I do not work for this university or have any affiliation with it other than this research study.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to examine factors of resilience that helped you achieve resilience and academic success during your degree program. During a one-on-one interview, I will ask you questions in three areas. Any awards, recognition, support and other positive experiences that helped you build resilience and stay focused on your academic goals will be identified. Any events that were challenging or stressful will be explored. Lastly, I hope you will reflect on behaviors and relationships you developed to cope with stress so that you could successfully complete your degree.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Devote 60-75 minutes for a one-on-one interview about your college experiences, conducted in a location convenient for you.

- Read and review the written transcript of your interview and return it with any corrections or inaccurate information within 10 days of receipt (optional).

**Here are some sample interview questions:**

- Looking back on the years were a student, what were the best experiences you had in college? Let's start with your freshman year.

- Looking back on the years you were a student, what are the most stressful events or periods you experienced?

- What coping strategies were most effective?

- Whom did you call on when something significant occurred in your life?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to participate. No one will treat you differently if you choose not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop the interview at any time.

**Risks and benefits of being in the study:**

By sharing your experiences with me, you may gain feelings of pride in your accomplishments, and satisfaction in your ability to overcome challenging situations.

It is also likely that you may have good feelings as you reflect on your success. You may generate good feelings by providing advice that will help future students succeed. Minimal risks may be involved in recalling past life events that have made you feel sad, hurt or angry about difficult events in your past.

**Payment:**

In gratitude for your participation, a $25 gift certificate to the campus book store will be given at the completion of your interview.

**Confidentiality:**

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. All participants will be identified by a pseudonym. No real names will be used. I will comply with all mandated requirements to protect the safety and welfare of students, faculty, administrators and local residents by reporting any incidents that would endanger their health and safety as determined by the state of West Virginia and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Child/elder abuse or illegal activities will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Walden University will also be notified. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by locking it in my vehicle while on campus or home office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Ruth Morgan at ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu or Dr. Catherine Marienau, Dissertation Committee Chair at Walden University, catherine.marienau@waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's

approval number for this study is IRB# 04-28-15-0091964 and it expires on April 16, 2016.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I agree to the terms described above. You may consent to participate in this study in one of two ways. First, by returning this e-mail saying you consent to participate in the study or by signing the consent form at the beginning of the interview. If you consent by e-mail, keep a copy of this form. If you consent in person at the beginning of the interview, the researcher will provide you with a copy of this form.

**I consent to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature: _____**

**Date of consent: _____**

**Researcher's Signature: _____**

Appendix L: Faculty Consent Form

**Consent to participate in faculty small group interview**

My name is Ruth Morgan; I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am inviting faculty and advisors who teach undergraduate art and design students to participate in a small group interview. The interview will consist of one meeting and last 45-60 minutes. The purpose of the group interview is to explore the challenges art and design students face as they progress through their undergraduate degree and coping strategies they use to achieve academic success. This form is a part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand the study before deciding whether to take part. I do not work for this university or have any affiliation with it other than this research study.

**Background Information:**

The phenomenon under investigation is students' resilience which includes the mindsets and coping strategies they use to persist to graduation. Your perspectives as faculty who interact with these students over time will provide vital information for this study.

**Risks and Benefits of participating in the study:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the protective factors that have helped undergraduate students in art and design make it to graduation. The information learned in the group interview will be used to benefit the university's understanding of challenges art and design students face, as well as add to the literature on retention in art and design education.

**Procedures:**

- Devote 45-60 minutes to participate in a small group interview at a private location on campus, conducted by this researcher.

**Here are some sample questions:**

- Do students contact you regarding academic issues outside of class time?

- What issues have been most troubling or stressful to your students?

- What methods have you used to help students manage?

- Do students contact you regarding personal issues?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to participate. No one will treat you differently if you choose not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may withdraw from the interview at any time.

**Risks and benefits of being in the study:**

What you know as a faculty member is vital information for this study. The information learned in the group interview will add to the literature on retention, and benefit future students, as well as other art and design educators.

**Payment:**

There is no compensation for your participation, but your information is appreciated.

**Confidentiality:**

Your actual name will not be known to anyone outside of the small group. You can choose a pseudonym to identify yourself during discussion. The name of the institution will only be known to Walden's dissertation committee, IRB, and this researcher. The group conversation will be recorded, if you agree. Faculty participants must agree to protect the identities of the participants in the interview. Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts to participants. I will comply with all mandated requirements to protect the safety and welfare of students, faculty, administrators and local residents by reporting any incidents that would endanger their health and safety as determined by the state of West Virginia and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Child/elder abuse or illegal activities will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Walden University will also be notified. I will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Data will be kept secure by locking it in my vehicle while on campus or home office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Ruth Morgan at ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu or Dr. Catherine Marienau, Dissertation Committee Chair at Walden University, catherine.marienau @waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss

this with you. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB #04-28-15-0091964 and it expires April 27, 2016.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I agree to the terms described above. You may consent to participate in this study in one of two ways. First, by returning this e-mail saying you consent to participate in the study or by signing the consent form at the beginning of the interview. If you consent by e-mail, keep a copy of this form. If you consent in person at the beginning of the interview, I will provide you with a copy of this form.

**I consent to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature: _____**

**Date of consent: _____**

**Researcher's Signature: _____**

Appendix M: Counselor Consent Form

**Consent to participate in counselor interview for research study**

My name is Ruth Morgan; I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am inviting counselors from this university who work with undergraduate students of any major including art and design majors have been asked to participate in an interview for a research study on resilience and academic success. The interview will consist of one individual meeting and will last 30-45 minutes. The purpose of the interview is to identify the services offered to students to manage time, stress, and other issues that affect their academic success. This form is a part of a process called "informed consent" to allow you to understand the study before deciding whether to take part. I do not work for this university or have any affiliation with it other than conducting this research study.

**Background Information:**

What you know as counselors is vital information for this study. The purpose of the interview is to explore the challenges art and design students face as they progress through their undergraduate degree and the services the counseling center provides to help students. The phenomenon under investigation is resilience.

**Benefits:**

The information learned in the interview will be used to benefit the university's understanding of challenges art and design students face, will add to the literature on retention in art and design education, and help other counselors identify services that support academic success.

**Procedures:**

- Devote 30-45 minutes to participate in a one-on-one interview. Here are some sample questions:

- Will you identify programs and services the campus counseling center offers to help with time management, stress, and other issues students deal with.

- Beginning in freshman year, what issues do students find to be most challenging?

- What are the difficult issues your students report in their senior year?

- Do art and design students report more or less distress than students in other majors?

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation is voluntary and you may withdraw at any time. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not to participate. No one will treat you differently if you choose not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop the interview at any time.

**Risks and benefits of being in the study:**

By sharing your experiences with me, you may gain feelings of pride in the services you provide to help students manage the challenges they face. There are no anticipated risks or discomforts for counselor participants.

**Payment:**

There is no compensation for your participation, but your information is appreciated.

**Confidentiality:**

Your actual name will not be known to anyone other than myself. You can choose a pseudonym to identify yourself during our discussion. The name of the institution will only be known to Walden's dissertation committee, IRB, and myself. The interview will be recorded if you agree. I will comply with all mandated requirements to protect the safety and welfare of students, faculty, administrators and local residents by reporting any incidents that would endanger their health and safety as determined by the state of West Virginia and the American Counseling Association Code of Ethics. Child/elder abuse or illegal activities will be reported to the appropriate authorities. Walden University will also be notified. Data will be kept secure by locking it in my vehicle while on campus or home office. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the university.

**Contacts and Questions:**

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher, Ruth Morgan at ruth.morgan@waldenu.edu or Dr. Catherine Marienau, Dissertation Committee Chair at Walden University, catherine.marienau @waldenu.edu. If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is IRB # 04-28-15-0091964 and it expires on April 27, 2016.

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. I agree to the terms described above. You may consent to participate in this study in one of two ways. First, by returning this e-mail

saying you consent to participate in the study or by signing the consent form at the

beginning of the interview. If you consent by e-mail, keep a copy of this form. If you

consent in person at the beginning of the interview, I will provide you with a copy of this

form.

**I consent to participate in this study.**

**Participant's signature: _____**

**Date of consent: _____**

**Researcher's Signature: _____**

Appendix N: Interview Protocol

Participant pseudonym_____

_____Participant has been informed of confidentiality of their statements.

_____Participant has been informed of their ability to terminate the interview at any

time.

_____Participants have been informed of the purpose of the study.

_____Participants have signed the consent form.

_____Participants have been provided with key definitions of terms used in this study.

_____Participants have been provided with the confidentiality agreement.

_____Participants have completed the interview and received the gift card (students

only).

_____Participant's signature that gift card has been received.

_____Participant has been thanked for their time and information.

Participant: _____ Date: _____