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Older, Wiser, Novice: An Autoethnographic Study of Nontraditional Students' Participation in Collegiate Forensics

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Older, Wiser, Novice: An Autoethnographic Study of Nontraditional Students'
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By

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This thesis has been examined and approved by the following members of the thesis
committee.

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ABSTRACT

There is a growing trend in nontraditional college student enrollments in the United States. Older, nontraditional students are currently the majority on many college campuses. Due to the constraints on nontraditional students' time, they are often unable to spend as much time on campus as traditional students and are unable to fully partake in campus life and socialization. Cocurricular activities, such as collegiate forensics, can be time consuming activities which for nontraditional students, especially those who have children, may seem like an impossible fit for their already busy schedules. Because college demographics continue to change and there are a growing number of nontraditional students as part of the student body, it is worth researching how much of what we do in the forensic community assumes that our students are only part of a traditional student body. In order to accomplish this, I used an autoethnographic approach along with participant interviews to obtain data concerning nontraditional students' participation in forensics. Four major themes emerged from the analyzed data: reasons for forensic involvement; assimilation and initial feelings; conflicting emotions concerning participation; and the nontraditional experience. From this data, I was able to offer conclusions, recommendations, and areas for future research.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"Here are your speaker codes. Schemats are posted out in the hall, you're on your own for lunch, have fun and good luck!" This was my first speech tournament. The good news: the tournament was being held on our campus, so I at least knew my way around. The bad news: this was my first speech tournament, *ever*. It was 8 a.m. on a Saturday in October. I had been on campus since 7 a.m. (I am really not a morning person). I was dressed in a black skirt suit (ironically, I had recently given away all of my suits thinking I would not be returning to the corporate world). I was feeling lost and very out of place (and I am sure that it was obvious to everyone I met as well).

Unlike the majority of my teammates, I did not compete in high school speech. I actually have no idea if my high school even had a speech and/or debate program. The nuances, language, unwritten rules, quirks of college speech (forensics) were completely new to me. I love public speaking and I really loved my performance of literature class and thought forensics would just be a continuation of those types of classes. However, in the midst of team warm ups prior to the start of the tournament I realized I did not fit in here. I left our warm up room and there was this energy and vibrant camaraderie everywhere. Everyone seemed to know everyone. Competitors were excited to see other competitors and judges from other teams. I was just getting to know my own team. Everyone seemed to know just where to go and just what to do. My campus suddenly felt foreign to me. As if feeling confused, lost, and alone were not enough, I also felt very conspicuous in this crowd. I felt out of place because I was much older than the other

competitors. In most cases I was older than the judges. I was competing as a nontraditional student.

The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) (USDE, 2002a) defines a nontraditional student as one who has any of the following characteristics: delays enrollment after high school (does not enroll in the same calendar year as they graduated), attends school part time, works full time (35+ hours a week), is considered financially independent, has dependents other than a spouse, is a single parent, and/or does not have a high school diploma. Nontraditional can also be defined along a continuum in which a student who has one characteristic from the list is defined as "minimally" nontraditional, those who have two or three nontraditional characteristics are defined as "moderately" nontraditional, and those having four or more nontraditional characteristic are defined as "highly" nontraditional (USDE, 2002a). In my case, I first enrolled in college five years after graduating high school. I did not complete my degree at that time and returned to college to complete my degree after having been out of high school for 22 years (delays enrollment after high school: check). At the time I decided to return to college, I was working full time and had been with my present employer for 15 years (works 35+ hours per week: check; is considered financially independent: check). I was a single parent when I first started college and still had a minor child at home when I returned to college the second time (has dependents other than a spouse; is a single parent: check and check). By the U.S. Department of Education standards I was considered a "highly" nontraditional student.

I felt alone and out of place at my first speech tournament, however, according to the U.S. Department of Education (2009a, 2009b), I am not alone. Reports (USDE, 2009a, 2009b) show a growing trend in nontraditional student enrollments and the typical college student of yesteryear is no longer the norm on many U.S. campuses. Over the past 20 years the number of students 25 and older entering college has increased by 9 percent from 44 percent of the college student body in 1989 to 53 percent in 2009 (See full USDE, NCES reports in Appendix C). This means that if traditional students (those enrolling the same year they graduate high school) are currently representing about 25 percent of the college population, the other 75 percent of the student population are considered nontraditional students by USDE standards. The U.S. Department of Education, (USDE, 2009a, 2009b) projects in 2013, 21 percent of the student population will be traditional students and by 2018 only 20 percent of the student population will be considered traditional defining the other 80 percent as nontraditional. Older, nontraditional students are currently the majority on many college campuses and their numbers are projected to steadily increase.

College forensics is an extremely time-consuming activity that requires a great deal of effort, perseverance, and desire from those who are involved with the activity. Being a forensic competitor means finding the time to fulfill the requirements of travel, coaching events, work days, attending tournaments, and socializing with team members. In addition, the National Forensic Association bylaws (2002) require that competitors are enrolled at their institution for more than just a course in forensics and must meet minimum eligibility requirements as determined by their institution. The American

Forensic Association bylaws (2009) state that a competitor must be an officially enrolled undergraduate in good standing at the institution he or she is representing in competition. Colleges and universities have their own individual standards for "officially enrolled" and "in good standing" by which competitors must abide.

The forensic program at my institution requires that students maintain a 3.0 grade point average in order to travel to tournaments. Students are also required to have at least two events in order to travel to tournaments that require an overnight stay. Students are also required to participate in weekly coaching sessions, attend a weekly meeting, and memorize all events. This means students are carrying a full-time course load (12-18 credits), maintaining a 3.0 GPA, developing two or more events (typically 5-7 events), coaching one hour per event per week, attending an hour and forty-five minute team meeting each week, practicing their events outside of coaching schedules, traveling to multiple tournaments that involve 2-4 days of travel and competition time (7-10 days for national tournaments), attending mandatory work days and retreats, attending classes, doing homework, and maintaining a social life. For nontraditional students, especially those who have children, fitting forensics into their already busy schedule can seem like a daunting, if not impossible, task.

Once individuals decide that they are able and willing to make this kind of commitment to an organization, such as forensics, they must deal with the process of assimilation and integration into that organization. Assimilation refers to the communicative, behavioral, and cognitive processes that influence individuals to join, identify with, become integrated into, and (occasionally) exit an organization (Alberts,

Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Jablin, 2001; Pettigrew, 1979). When a person joins an organization, they usually do not automatically become an accepted member of the group, nor do they immediately identify with the organization or its members. Instead, over time, they go through a process in which they and others begin to see the person as an integral and accepted part of the organization. Each organization has its own distinctive set of roles, appropriate behaviors, ethical standards, norms, and values – what is defined as culture. While new members of an organization can know their craft or skill prior to entering an organization, they cannot know the specific culture prior to entry. People measure an organization from their very first contacts with it, to see whether it will satisfy or frustrate them, and their initial judgments shape the rest of their reactions to the organization. Some people who become members go on to identify with the organization and feel close to their colleagues. Only these workers can respond to organizational cultures that encourage cohesion. People want colleagues to recognize, respect, and support them to satisfy developmental needs. They want to elaborate and preserve a coherent identity. This means they want to act in ways that are simultaneously congruent with their self-perceptions and with others' expectations of them (Baum, 1990). Members who remain apart from the culture rather than becoming a part of it are unlikely to be as effective or satisfied with the organization as they could be. Members who receive only task information and do not assimilate into the organizational culture are unlikely to ever reach their full potential. In order to recruit and maintain effective and satisfied members, organizations should not have a culture that prohibits enjoyment and productivity.

Cultures can be healthy or dysfunctional, either way they always have an impact on organizational outcomes; they may assist in achieving goals, hinder it, or do some combination of both (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Hess, 1993; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985).

The process of assimilation is long, frustrating, and stressful for some, but especially for those who may be considered as out-group members. Specifically, nontraditional students first must assimilate into the culture of higher education, which may be especially difficult for students who have not been a part of any educational system for a long period of time (Knowles, 1984; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Adults who have been away from academics for some time often experience high anxiety on reentering the halls of higher education. Adult students are potentially more vulnerable to difficulties in the management of their transition to higher education often due to their minority status, because they may have little recent experience of formal education, and because they may have additional life pressures outside of university. Nontraditional adults' learning identities may be contradictory, volatile, and fragile (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). They worry about being embarrassed by asking dumb questions or giving the wrong answers; they wonder whether they can learn as well or as quickly as the younger students; they fear that they might fail or get bad grades (Knowles, 1984; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Negative self-image is a problem for many nontraditional students as well. There is a kind of negative self-image that has been developed from years out of academia and now as they come back into academia, they are wondering

"Will I look dumb?" "Will I look silly?" "Will I fail?" Therefore, a good deal of attention has to be paid to build a positive self-image (Apps, 1981). Additionally, many faculty members are uneasy with the increasing number of older students in the classroom (Knowles, 1984; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

For nontraditional forensic competitors, the process may also be more complicated or difficult. For those who are parents, they may not have as much time as other forensic students to dedicate to the activity. They may not develop as many events, coach as many hours, or travel to as many tournaments as traditional students may. Older students may also have difficulties assimilating due to the differences in goals, motivation, and social expectations. Because nontraditional students may be spending less time with the team, they may not feel as accepted by team members or as "in the know" as other participants. Nontraditional students miss out on the insider stories that happen within the context of tournaments, coaching, and socializing. Nontraditional students may also not spend as much time on campus as traditional students do. They may be working more hours, have family responsibilities, and/or commute longer distances. This lack of immersion on campus makes it difficult for nontraditional students to identify with the institution and/or organizations that are a part of the institution thus creating the out-group identity (Apps, 1981; Bowl, 2001; Glass & Hodgin, 1977).

The main reasons adults begin or return to higher education include: professional growth (other than increased salary); self-esteem; long-range economic security; increased salary; social status and prestige; family expectations; authoritative figures; peer opinions; and college social life. There are obvious dangers when attempting to

make generalized comparisons between nontraditional students (those 25 years of age or older and have been out of school for some years) and traditional students (those 18-22 years of age who have gone to college directly after high school). However, many differences exist within each of these groups and it is important to point out some of the major differences between the two groups (Apps, 1981).

One example is intellectual ability. Many people believe that as we grow older our intellectual powers decrease. This, however, is not the case. We do not lose intellectual ability as we grow older. Sometimes it may appear as if older adults have less intellectual ability when they are compared to younger learners. This is especially evident when a group of older students and a group of younger students are subjected to the same timed test. Two factors operate that make it appear older adults are less able intellectually. For one reason or another, younger learners place a good deal of value on doing things quickly. In fact much of the formal educational establishment still places considerable emphasis on speed of performance and recall of factual information. Unfortunately, accuracy is often compromised for speed. Because many returning students come to school from some type of work setting, the attitude of speed over accuracy is often inappropriate. So the adult learner wants to take more time on tests to make certain the responses are correct before answering (Apps, 1981). Older adults may see their student identity more as "job involvement" rather than "academic involvement" attaching a job identity that spills over into the classroom thus giving them a different set of values toward time and accuracy than their younger counterparts (Ferrell & Mudrack, 1992).

Several other differences between traditional and nontraditional students can also be observed. Where traditional students are primarily students, nontraditional students are not. The nontraditional student is primarily a business person, a homemaker, a parent of children, a community volunteer, a professional person, and a host of other roles that are held by adults in our society. The role of student has to take its place among all of the other roles being performed. Returning students are also not distracted by a variety of problems that concern growing up (Apps, 1981; Chartrand, 1992; Kim, Sax, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2010). Individuals are often balancing multiple roles, each of which require significant amounts of time, energy, and responsibility. Together, these multiple roles likely increase student levels of stress (Kim, et al, 2010). Kim, et al. found four categories of student identity based on their predominant roles. Students who are employees (students first) have the highest degree aspirations, are more likely to skip a class, are more likely to start an assignment the day before it is due, and spend the second most hours per week on campus (behind students only). Employees who are students work the most hours per week, have the most job-related responsibilities, and spend the least amount of time on campus. This group is also least likely to speak up in class or to think that college has good social activities. Parents who are students tend to be older and believe that family responsibilities are an obstacle to their education. This group is most likely to speak up during class, to believe that teachers encourage them in their studies and to always complete homework assignments. Students only are the youngest overall and spend the most time on campus. These students are most likely to talk with students

about things other than courses, believe that college has good social activities, and spend the most time watching television.

In addition to academically related problems, nontraditional students have other problems that set them apart from younger, more traditional students. Four major categories of problems can be identified: unrealistic goals; poor self-image; social/familial problems; and alienation and isolation. Some nontraditional students have unrealistic goals, especially those who have been out of school for quite some time. When a person returns to school and begins to discover that it is going to take much more time than originally anticipated, they are likely to modify their program because time is more important to them than it is to a younger person (Apps, 1981; Bowl, 2001).

Probably the most common nonacademic problem faced by nontraditional students, especially those married and with families, has to do with changing lifestyles and problems related to spouse and children. Most of these returning students have been established for some period, carrying on careers and having a means of livelihood. Then they return to school and try to be a "real" student again. Returning students have a wider variety of constraints than traditional students. It is often difficult for returning students to manage multiple roles, so they cannot spend hours a day chatting with other students and going to classes. They have other claims on their time and they have to move back and forth between these roles (Apps, 1981; Bowl, 2001; Glass & Hodgin, 1977).

There are ongoing tensions between normative ideas about what it means to be a student, and to belong to the student community, and the reality of the lives of nontraditional students. Membership is generally perceived as involving two aspects:

participating in the social practices to do with learning and participating in the social

practices that deal with student life. Nontraditional students often experience a divided

life. Within a single day, a person may be student, worker, spouse, parent, son, or

daughter, and each of these roles vies for the time and energy of the individual. Due to

the constraints on nontraditional students' time, they are often unable to spend as much

time on campus as traditional students and are unable to fully partake in campus life and

socialization. Balancing these different demands leads nontraditional students to

conceptualize themselves as merely "day students" since they are limited in their

participation in the wider aspects of university life. Within the university they do not

view themselves as "proper" full-time students (people who participate in a full social life

that takes place through the social microcosm of the university), and should not expect to

"fit in" (Bowl, 2001; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008; Dill & Henley,

1998; Glass & Hodgin, 1977; Jinkins, 2009; Kim, Sax, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2010;

O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Spanard, 1990). A proper student life is seen as something

to look at but not touch, so their membership in the student community can only ever be

partial.

By the time I joined our forensic team, I had already come to grips with being a

nontraditional student on campus and had established my "student" identity. However,

when I became a forensic competitor, my identity was once again questioned. My biggest

identity concern was not that I had children, not that I had a life partner, and not that I did

not have much of a social life any longer. My main concern, admittedly my *stigma*, was

my age. While I believed I had come to terms with my "older student" status while

attending classes, the forensic circuit was somehow different. I was always the oldest

person in my classes, including being older than my instructors, but we merely came and

went for classes, socializing and intimate conversations were not part of the curriculum.

Being on the forensic team however, made me realize once again that I was "different"

from the rest of the competitors on my team and every other team I came in contact with.

When I walked into a round, competitors often thought I was the judge. I had children the

same age, or *older*, than competitors, and often many of the judges. I am actually older

than both our Director of Forensics and our Assistant Director. During tournaments, van

rides, hotel stays, and team functions, I did not always comprehend or understand

references being made (pop culture or forensic culture) since my musical tastes were

different, my television and movie viewership was different, and my life and experiences

were just different from those of my new peers. I felt that fitting in was out of reach,

perhaps impossible.

In predominantly youth oriented societies such at the United States, to be "old" is

to be deviant, to stand outside prevailing norms and expectations. Once a person becomes

labeled as "old" there is an inclination for that person to behave according to the

stereotypes associated with "old age" for that society. The ways in which society

describes older people, such as in the media, provide parameters for behavior which some

people may feel obliged to stay within. An over-riding image of older adults is that of

people in declining health waiting around to die. Ageism pervades American culture.

However, the vast majority of older adults are fit and healthy, wanting to participate more

fully in daily life and wanting to take more control over their own learning (Findsen,

2005; Woodward, 2006). For nontraditional students, their age made them feel different from other students, giving them the feeling of "sticking out like a sore thumb" (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007, p 325). The primary reason for age being a concern was that their age was often incongruous with their new identity as a student thus rendering a feeling of not belonging (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007).

Because college demographics continue to change and there are a growing number of nontraditional students as part of the student body, it is worth researching how much of what we do in the forensic community assumes that our students are only part of a traditional student body. With so much emphasis put on a traditional student body in forensics, it would appear that a majority of the changing student population may be overlooked and underutilized. The forensic community needs to address the changing student population and consider changes to the recruitment, assimilation, and retaining of forensic participants who represent nontraditional populations.

The main objective of this research is to allow current and past nontraditional forensic participants to share their experiences with the forensic community and their experiences with educational institutions in order to answer the following research question: How can the lived experiences of nontraditional students shed light on the organizations of forensics and higher education in order to improve the experiences and educational value for nontraditional students? The experiences of nontraditional students in forensics will be given prominent priority in order to allow the forensic community to establish programs that will enable them to recruit and retain nontraditional students and to help both traditional and nontraditional students make a smoother transition into the

forensic culture. Other primary objectives of this thesis are to see how the forensic community can aid in the recruitment of nontraditional students, how the forensic community can aid in the assimilation of nontraditional students into the forensic culture, and how the forensic community can retain nontraditional students.

By examining the dynamics of nontraditional students and the acculturation and assimilation process of forensic participants, educators can start to answer questions related to inclusion, how these factors relate to nontraditional students' decisions to remain in forensics or leave it, and the commitment of the intercollegiate forensic community to resolving issues raised by its formally proclaimed desire to enlist and gain participation from traditionally underrepresented groups in the activity (Allen, Trejo, Bartanen, Schroeder, & Ulrich, 2004). Wider participation and opportunity would extend educational advantages to more individuals. The long-term success of forensic programs requires that its participation rates reflect the changing dynamic of the population (Allen et al., 2004). Educators may begin to devise coping strategies to help their students and colleagues deal with negative experiences and also find ways to emphasize and broaden the positive experiences that draw nontraditional (and other) students into the activity.

While research has been done concerning nontraditional students in higher education (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Bowl, 2001; Chartrand, 1992; Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008; Dill & Friedman, 1979; Dill & Henley, 1998; Drajo-Severson, 2004; Langer, 2010; Levine, 1989; Loring, LeGates, & Josephs, 1978; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Schaefer, 2010), adult learners (Apps, 1981; Brookfield, 1983; Cranton, 1989; Findsen, 2005; Knowles, 1986; Knowles, Holton, & Swanson,

1998; Ross-Gordon, 2011), diversity in forensics (Allen, Trejo, Bartanen, Schroeder, &

Ulrich, 2004; Valdivia & Simon, 1997; Valdivia-Sutherland, 1998), women in forensics

(Greenstreet, 1997), recruitment in forensics (Mascowitz, 2005), and team cohesion in

forensics (Friedley & Manchester, 2005), I have yet to find research that has been

conducted specifically on nontraditional students in forensics. Since there is a growing

demographic of nontraditional students in higher education, it is important to research the

participation of nontraditional students in cocurricular activities, such as forensics, in

order to fill a gap in our understanding of this specific and growing demographic.

In the following chapter, I present a review of the literature on organizational

culture, assimilation, nontraditional students, and identity. Next, I describe in detail the

methods of autoethnography and interviewing along with the methodological choices

made throughout my study. Then, I present my story as well the stories of my research

participants. The stories presented are divided based on themes that emerged from my

data analysis. Finally, I explain the conclusions to my findings along with the limitations

inherent in the research design and directions for future research.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

Adult students are an increasing demographic in higher education. Adult students are also potentially more vulnerable to difficulties in the management of transition because of their, typically, minority status in higher education. Entering higher education can be a shock, accompanied by a sense of personal powerlessness. Adult students may also be more vulnerable because they may have little recent experience with formal education and because they may have additional life pressures outside of university. The transition to higher education is seen initially as a struggle for personal, academic, financial, and emotional survival. Higher education is experienced by nontraditional students in different ways than by the typical 18-year-old entrants (Bowl, 2001; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). While the transition to higher education may be a struggle for nontraditional students, entering a cocurricular activity such as college forensics may be an added stress on an otherwise highly stressed student. There is a great deal of literature concerning college forensics, however there is little to no research available specifically concerning the assimilation and participation of nontraditional students in the forensic organization.

In this chapter, I will review the construct of organizational culture, the presence of an organizational culture within forensics, the process of assimilation, and the performance of identity. Initially, by using the definitions of organizations and culture, it is easy to see that forensics is an organization with a culture all its own. Forensics, like all organizations, needs to be researched, entered, navigated, and exited by its members.

Therefore, it is important to explain forensics as an organization and investigate the culture that potential members will encounter. Next, once an individual decides to become a member of an organization, they must begin the process of assimilating into that organization. Many newcomers to an organization experience similar assimilation processes, however, those members who are not considered to be within the typical norms of current members may experience greater degrees of difficulty in assimilating into the organization. Therefore, it is important to explore how nontraditional students view the process of assimilation into the forensic organization. Nontraditional students, especially older students or students with children, are not the typical forensic competitors often seen on the circuit, therefore my goal is to see how their assimilation into forensics is experienced. Finally, new members of an organization must come to terms with identity performance. Each organization has a specific culture and members of that culture are expected to perform roles in ways that are identified by the organization. For nontraditional students negotiating identity becomes complex. On any given day, a nontraditional student performs many roles ranging from employee to parent to spouse. When an individual decides to return to college, they then must negotiate the role of student as well. Should this individual choose to become involved in a cocurricular activity such as forensics, they once again take on the responsibility of negotiating another new role. Therefore it is important to explore how individuals perform identity.

Organizational Culture

Institutions are influenced by external factors such as demographics, economics, and political conditions; however, they are also shaped by internal forces. These internal

forces have roots in the history of the organization and are derived from the values,

traditions, processes, and goals held by those most intimately involved in the

organization. The most fundamental construct of an organization is its culture. An

organization's culture is reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in

doing it (Chaffee & Tierney, 1988).

The word culture entered managerial thinking in the 1980s, but the idea that

people who worked together and had common occupational backgrounds would form

common values and norms has been known since the earliest studies of organizations

(Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Hofstede, Neujen, Ohayv & Sanders, 1990). Pettigrew

(1979) first coined the term "organizational cultures" which he defines as "creators of

symbols, ideologies, languages, beliefs, rituals, and myths" (p. 574). Schein (1985)

defines organizational culture as a "pattern of shared basic assumptions that have been

invented, discovered, and/or developed by a group as it learns to cope with problems of

external adaptation and internal integration" (p. 247). Further anthropologist Sahlins

(1976) defines culture as "meaningful orders of people and things" (as cited in Eisenberg,

Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010). Thus, we learn about a culture not only by what members

of that culture say, but also by what they do on a regular basis and the items they choose

to display in connection with the organization.

Organizational cultures are created as people act and interact with one another.

When multiple people share the same social identity, this identity creates group norms

and, thus, culture. Within every national culture there are thousands of smaller cultures

based on religion, ethnicity, geography, and multiple other factors, and each organization

develops its own internal culture, even if it is of a similar type or serves a similar function as other organizations. Organizational culture comes to represent the glue that holds an organization together because it provides its members with a frame of reference (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Eisenberg & Riley, 2001; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Schein, 1985).

When defining an organizational culture we examine the environment and symbol use of that organization. Organizational cultures are composed of cultural elements such as the languages (Adler & Rodman, 2009; Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979), metaphors, performances, (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Martin & Siehl, 1983), habits/practices/norms (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Croucher, Thornton, & Eckstein, 2006; Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009), rituals and ceremonies (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979), myths and stories (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Croucher, Thornton, & Eckstein, 2006; Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979), values/beliefs (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985), and artifacts (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Schein, 1985; Schein, 1992) performed by members of that group.

Forensics has a unique organizational culture that exhibits many of these cultural elements. For individuals, like myself, it is not always easy to integrate into this culture and it can be very frustrating, especially if individuals have no prior knowledge about the culture. I often felt lost because I did not understand the language of forensics anymore than I would have understood a foreign language. Teammates and coaches would talk about legs, good legs, golden legs, how many legs, and I had no idea what legs had to do with forensics. When I asked, I was told legs were for AFA quals. Okay, so what are quals? Quals are qualifying rankings for national tournaments, such as the American Forensic Association (AFA) tournament. And so the continuous question and answer sessions continued. At my first tournament I was told to check the schemat for my schedule and after prelims I should wait for breaks. A schemat, it turns out, is a schematic that maps out all of the tournament events, what times and rooms the events are in, who the judges are for each, and in which order the competitors speak. Prelims are the first preliminary rounds of the tournament in which all competitors are judged and ranked. Those rankings then determine breaks, or those competitors who advance to final rounds to compete for a placing in the tournament. That placing, typically first through sixth, are what coaches and competitors refer to as legs.

Because it was hard for me to comprehend the language, it was also difficult to understand the norms, rituals, unwritten rules, stories, and practices of the forensic culture. Learning the cultural etiquette of a tournament was almost more difficult than learning the language.

Once I found my room for each event, I had to properly sign into the round. Coaches informed me that I had to sign into each event using my name and speaker code in the correct order listed on the schemat. "You'll see when you get in the round," they told me. So, I learned from competitors who had already signed in, that I should write my speaker code first, followed by my first and last name in all caps, after my proper number for the speaking order, typically one through six. If a competitor is double entered, in two events running at the same time, they should add DE in parenthesis after their name, or TE in the case that they are triple entered. When I first started I didn't have to worry about being double entered, but I did have to worry about how to act in my rounds. I learned the proper way to address a judge, such as asking permission to leave for another round if double or triple entered, how to, or not to, interact with other competitors in the round, not to sit too close to the judge, keeping your interp book out, but everything else put away in my speech bag, only take a drink of water after someone performs, applaud for performers after they finish, but not when they are called up to perform (unless it is a final round, then the judges dictate applause), and don't leave a round until all competitors have performed and the judge excuses everyone.

Once I survived my preliminary rounds, I had to gather with my teammates to wait for postings. This is where we find out who makes it to final rounds. Postings can be hand written on larger posters or they may be in electronic form such as PowerPoint. When postings are presented, competitors applaud for those who make finals each time a new event is posted until all events have been presented. Competitors, I learned, are to remain professional during postings at all times. We do not overtly show joy or

disappointment at breaking or not breaking or competitors from other teams breaking. Once the final rounds are complete, our team reconvenes to wait for awards. Here lies another area in which forensic rituals and performances need to be learned and they also may vary by areas. For my area, finalists for each event are called up to receive awards, typically on a stage or at least the front of the assembly area. The person announcing individual placings starts with the last place and works their way up to the first place (event champion). For each competitor who places second on down, the audience gives one single clap as their name is announced. For the first place competitor, the audience gives a standing ovation. This routine is repeated for all eleven events. Tournaments also typically give out individual sweeps and team sweeps trophies. The top three individuals with the highest point earnings get an individual sweeps trophy and a round of applause, and the first place individual gets a standing ovation. Then the top three teams with the highest points earned get team sweeps trophies. For third and second place, an individual from that team goes up to get the trophy for the team and the audience applauds the teams. For the first place team, an individual gets the team's trophy while the team gets a standing ovation from the audience. I learned quickly that if your own team gets a team award, they sit quietly accepting the applause, and never applaud for themselves. That one took me a while, applause seems to be catchy!

Cultural elements are important components to organizational culture. While some organizations may incorporate different cultural elements than other organizations, all organizations exhibit various forms of cultural elements that set them apart from other organizations and these elements must be navigated by newcomers. The process of

navigating organizational culture and becoming integrated into the organization is known as assimilation. In the following section I review assimilation as well as four major theories of assimilation.

<div align="center">**Assimilation**</div>

Organizational cultures develop as a result of organizations' responses to external and internal feedback and the organization's attempts to integrate, or assimilate, new members into the organization. The socialization processes used to introduce new members to the culture and maintain continued loyalty and morale are also significant cultural mechanisms in organizational life (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Chaffee & Tierney, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1992). No organization can exist for any length of time without acquiring new members. The ultimate goal of assimilating newcomers into an organization is to achieve a good person-organization fit. Hess (1993) stated that a person-organization fit is "the congruence between patterns of organizational values and patterns of individual values" (p. 189). In other words, employees' goals, work ethic, and morals should match those of the organization. If this match happens, members will work harder and be more satisfied than if the two parties do not match.

Assimilation refers to the communicative, behavioral, and cognitive processes that influence individuals to join, identify with, become integrated into, and (occasionally) exit an organization (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Jablin, 2001; Pettigrew, 1979). When a person joins an organization, they usually do not automatically become an accepted

member of the group, nor do they immediately identify with the organization or its members. Instead, over time, they go through a process in which they and others begin to see the person as an integral and accepted part of the organization. Organizational assimilation involves both surprise and sense making. As new members' initial expectations are violated, they attempt to make sense of the organization and their place in it. The newcomer learns the requirements of his or her role and what the organization and its members consider to be normal behaviors and actions (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Martin & Siehl, 1983). In order to better understand assimilation, I will review four important theories: cultural paradigm; stage models of assimilation; the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic; and intergroup contact theory.

Cultural Paradigm

As newcomers to an organization begin to learn about the organization's reality, they experience a reduction in anomie (a state or condition of individuals or society characterized by a breakdown or absence of social norms and values, as in the case of uprooted people). Newcomers learn norms and roles in order to function effectively as a part of the organization. As individuals locate themselves within the organization's culture, they are likely to adopt the patterns of ordering reality that prevail in the organization. In order for newcomers to join the shared reality of the organization, the reality must be communicated to them somehow since communication creates what we call reality (Alvesson & Billing, 1997; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; Hatch &

Schultz, 1997; Hess, 1993; Jablin, 2001; Kim, 2001; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985).

Each organization has its own distinctive set of roles, appropriate behaviors, ethical standards, norms, and values – what was defined earlier as culture. While new members of an organization can know their craft or skill prior to entering an organization, they cannot know the culture prior to entry. Members who remain apart from the culture rather than becoming a part of it are unlikely to be as effective or satisfied with the organization as they could be. Members who receive only task information and do not assimilate into the organizational culture are unlikely to ever reach their full potential. In order to recruit and maintain effective and satisfied members, organizations should not have a culture that prohibits enjoyment and productivity. Cultures can be healthy or dysfunctional, either way they always have an impact on organizational outcomes; they may assist in achieving goals, hinder it, or do some combination of both (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Hess, 1993; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985).

Forensics has an ever changing culture since members are continually entering and exiting the organization and students deal with different competitors at different tournaments. The cultural paradigm is applicable to forensics because newcomers to the organization need to learn and adopt the reality of the organization and that reality is shared through communication by forensic directors, coaches, and fellow team members. New members, even those who have prior forensic experience, cannot know the individual team culture prior to joining the team, thus the communication and cultural

assimilation that happens is important. If a member is given only task information (i.e. choose a prose, write a public address speech) and is not properly assimilated into the organizational culture, they may not achieve satisfaction with the team and may not continue with the team. Many forensic team members have a moment in their forensic career that they can point to and say that moment changed their attitude toward the activity, their team members, or their events. These are the moments that mark the process of true assimilation into the organization.

Stage Models of Assimilation

Many of the assimilation models, such as the cultural paradigm model, that have been developed over the years (e.g. Jablin, 1987; Schein, 1985) are linear in nature. Each proposes a series of stages that a newcomer goes through culminating in complete assimilation. However, Hess (1993) believes that organizational assimilation involves "many processes that overlap chronologically, regress at times, form spirals, and fit into multiple categories" (p. 195). Hess also asserts that a person might never assimilate into an organization and may remain an outsider to the established culture. Hess uses Jablin's (1987) assimilation phases of; anticipatory socialization, organizational encounter, and metamorphosis, but instead of depicting them as a linear model, Hess creates a Venn diagram to indicate that the major components are clusters of events. Each cluster is drawn as overlapping to indicate influence rather than a chronological progression.

Anticipatory socialization happens when newcomers communicate with people from the organization prior to joining the organization. Anticipatory socialization actually begins in early childhood and involves learning about work and careers in general from

family members, teachers, part-time employers, friends, and the media. As a result of this

conditioning, most of us have developed a set of expectations and beliefs concerning how

people communicate, what will be expected of them, and how they will be treated in

particular settings before ever entering any particular organization (Alberts, Nakayama,

& Martin, 2010; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; George, Sleeth, & Siders;

1999; Hess, 1993; Jablin, 2001). The organizational encounter stage is when individuals

learn the norms, expectations, and practices of the organization, usually through

observation, surveillance, questioning, and testing limits, and begin to accept and adapt to

them. The encounter events are sense-making activities that help newcomers begin to

form organizational self-concepts and self-esteems and allow them to form ties to the

organization (Alberts, Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George,

Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Hess, 1993; Martin & Siehl, 1983;

Hofsted, Neuijen, Ohayv, & Sanders, 1990; Pettigrew, 1979; Schein, 1985). The

metamorphosis cluster is dominated by events that turn a newcomer from outsider to

insider. It describes the period during which employees come to see themselves as

members of the organization, and colleagues see them this way as well. It is characterized

by role negotiation and the formation of interpersonal and group relationships. The

communication processes that occur during metamorphosis include familiarity with

others, organizational acculturation, recognition, involvement, and competency (Alberts,

Nakayama, & Martin, 2010; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999;

Hatch & Schultz, 1997; Hess, 1993; Jablin, 2001).

Hess' (1993) stage models of assimilation shows assimilation as a non-linear process since stages of assimilation may happen individually or simultaneously depending on the context and/or individuals. An individual's assimilation may move forward or regress at any point in time and changes within the organization may create new assimilation challenges. Hess's assimilation process is more fluid than previous research models suggest and this makes it applicable in the study of forensics. Forensic teams constantly change. New people join the team, existing members may quit the team, different members travel to different tournaments, tournaments are held in different areas with different competitors and different judges, and in many cases, coaches may change each year as well. The fluidity and flux of forensics matches the fluidity of Hess' stage models of assimilation very well for comparison.

The Stress-Adaptation-Growth Dynamic

While the cultural paradigm model is viewed as a linear assimilation model, and stage models of assimilation are viewed as multiple processes overlapping, the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic model of assimilation is thought of as the highest degree of acculturation. Assimilation is thus an "ideal" state characterized by the "maximum possible convergence of strangers' internal conditions to those of the natives" (Kim, 2001, p. 52). Assimilation brings about an internal transformation in individuals – a gradual opening of a culturally fixated existence to an intercultural synthesis. Adaptive change, then, causes stress in the individual's psyche. They experience a conflict between the desire to retain old customs and keep their original identity and the desire to adopt new ways and seek harmony with the new (Kim, 2001).

Stress is a direct result of the lack of fitness between the individual's subjective experiences and the prevailing norms and modes of experiences among the existing members. Ill-equipped to deal with the inconsistencies, most individuals will experience states of mental, emotional, and physical turmoil and confusion that vary in degrees of severity. This state of misfit and a heightened awareness of their state of stress are the very forces that drive individuals to overcome their predicament and participate in an active development of new cultural understanding and habits. Through these activities, some parts of the environment may be integrated into an individual's internal structure, gradually increasing their overall fitness to the external realities. What follows the stress-adaptation disequilibrium is growth. Periods of stress pass as the individual works out new ways of handling problems. A crisis, once managed, presents the individual with an opportunity for new learning and for strengthening his or her coping abilities (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; Denison & Mishra, 1995; Kim, 2001; Martin & Siehl, 1983). Stress, adaptation, and growth "highlight the core of strangers' cross-cultural experiences in a new environment" (Kim, 2001, p. 56). Together, they constitute a dynamic movement in the forward and upward direction of increased chances for success with assimilation into the new environment. The process is continuous as long as there are new environmental challenges and because no living structure can be permanently stabilized (Kim, 2001).

Kim's (2001) stress-adaptation-growth dynamic emphasizes the fluidity of assimilation in an organization. Organizations, like forensics, are ever changing and face environmental challenges due to the nature of the activity (changing members, changing coaches, changing venues). Forensic competitors often deal with the stress of

assimilation. Each year students cope with new team members, new coaches, new events, new judges, and new competitors. Students need to adapt to the new team dynamics, new tournament dynamics, and negotiate relationships with other competitors. Forensics is an educational activity, not just for the student's ability to write and deliver speeches, but also to learn how to negotiate roles and environments which makes the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic model useful to study forensic culture.

Intergroup Contact Theory

While cultural paradigm, stage models of assimilation, and the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic focus on the processes of assimilation, intergroup contact theory focuses on the amount of time that group members spend together and the relationships that are built over a period of time. Intergroup contact is an effective approach for the reduction of prejudice, negative stereotyping, and discrimination. Intergroup contact is especially important for disciplines that focus on face-to-face contact. In order to produce positive outcomes, certain conditions within the contact situation have to be met: equal status among the individuals; individuals share common goals; individuals work together to achieve such goals; and contact has the support of authorities (i.e. social norms favor intergroup cooperation and interaction) (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Ortiz & Harwood, 2007; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1998).

Equal group status within the situation is stressed. It is important that both groups expect and perceive equal status in the situation. Prejudice reduction through contact requires an active, goal-oriented effort (common goals). Athletic teams provide a good example because when striving to win, interracial teams need each other to achieve their

goal. Goal attainment furthers this process. Attainment of common goals must be an interdependent effort without intergroup competition (intergroup cooperation). The final condition concerns the support of authorities, law, or customs. With explicit social sanctions, intergroup contact is more readily accepted and has more positive effects. Authority support establishes norms of acceptance (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988; George, Sleeth, & Siders, 1999; Martin & Siehl, 1983; Pettigrew, 1998).

Four processes of change through intergroup contact have been discovered through research studies: learning about the out-group, changing behavior, generating affective ties, and in-group reappraisal. Learning about the out-group occurs when new learning corrects negative views of the out-group. As a result, contact should reduce prejudice and new information about an out-group can improve attitudes. Changing behavior happens when optimal intergroup contact acts as a benign form of behavior modification. New situations require conforming to new expectations. If these expectations include acceptance of out-group members, this behavior has the potential to produce attitude change. Generating affective ties involves emotion as critical in intergroup contact. Anxiety is common in initial encounters between groups, and it can spark negative reactions. Continued contact generally reduces anxiety and positive emotions aroused by optimal contact also can mediate intergroup contact effects. In-group reappraisal results from optimal intergroup contact providing insight about in-groups as well as out-groups. In-group norms and customs turn out not to be the only ways to manage the social world which means less in-group contact may lead to less bias toward the out-group (Pettigrew, 1998).

Forensics prides itself on being a very open community; open to a diverse group of members and topics. However, in practice, many forensic teams do not have the diversity of members that may be representative on their college campus. Using intergroup contact theory may help analyze how members of a forensic team accept and integrate a diverse set of newcomers. It is also applicable in this study since nontraditional students may be considered as out-group members due to the lack of representation they have on typical forensic teams.

Assimilation requires that a newcomer learn his or her roles within the organization and what the organization's members consider normal behaviors and actions. Assimilation theories such as cultural paradigm, stage models of assimilation, the stress-adaptation-growth dynamic, and intergroup contact theory offer explanations on how assimilation may occur within an organization and how they apply to the assimilation into the forensic culture. A large part of the assimilation process comes from role negotiation within the organization. This role negotiation is how we as individuals perform identity. In the following section I will review identity performance, identity and cultural performance, and student identity.

Negotiation of Identity

Performing Identity

According to Goffman (1959), when an individual enters the presence of others, they often wish to acquire information about that other or bring into play information that has already been acquired of the other. Having information about the individual helps to define the situation and enables others to make assumptions about what to expect of

them. Individuals who present themselves before others will need to control the conduct

of the others, especially their responsive treatment of themselves. Goffman goes on to

explain that individuals can influence others by expressing themselves in such a way as to

give the kind of impression that will lead others to act in accordance with their plans. In

everyday life there is a clear understanding that first impressions are important, thus,

when an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some "reason

for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which it is

in his [or her] interests to convey" (Goffman, 1959, p. 3).

Identity can be defined as how individuals position themselves in the world

through language and action. Our understanding of how we are both similar to and

different from others shapes our very sense of self. Meanings, however, are never set, but

are vulnerable to new interpretations and new identities for self, audience, and society

(Delgado, 2009; Noy, 2004; Scott, 2008). The culture(s) in which we associate can also

provide a unique sense of identity. Negotiating multiple identities simultaneously is an

ongoing project for most individuals. This negotiation process often takes on heightened

importance for some organizational members, particularly for those who are other than

the assumed norm (Butler, 1990; Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethehwey, 2010; Goffman,

1959).

A performance, as defined by Goffman (1959), is all the activity of a given

participant on a given occasion which serves to influence, in any way, other participants.

A performance is socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and

expectations of the society in which it is presented (Butler, 1990; Goffman, 1959). Thus,

when the individual presents him/herself before others, "his performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society, more so, in fact, than does his behavior as a whole" (Goffman, 1959, p. 35). Performance implies a kind of reflexivity, as any performance causes the audience to judge not only the content, but also how the content was realized, that is, how a particular performance fulfilled expectations of the performance tradition, the genre, and the culture. Performativity cannot be understood outside of the process of accepted norms. Performance is not a singular act or event, but a ritualized production reiterated under constraint and through the force of taboo (Butler, 1993). The power of performance to create, store, and transmit identity and culture lies in its reflexive nature. Through performance, individuals not only present behavior, but they reflexively comment on it and the values and situations it encompasses (Fine & Speer, 1992). When an individual takes on an established role they usually find that a particular script has already been established for it (Goffman, 1959). Performers often foster the impression that they had ideal motives for acquiring the role in which they are performing, that they have ideal qualifications for the role, and may even attempt to give the impression that their present poise and proficiency are something that they have always had and that they never had to fumble their way through a learning period (Goffman, 1959). Many of our social roles depend on cooperation with others (Bell, 2008). When individuals play a part they implicitly request their observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered. The observers are asked to believe that the character they see actually possesses the attributes he appears to possess and that matters are what they appear to be (Goffman, 1959).

Performativity maintains that identity, especially for gender, desire, race, ethnicity, and abilities, is a complex matrix of normative boundaries. These boundaries are created in language, enacted in institutions, produced by technologies that generate certain relationships, are materially embodied and performed by each of us. How we dress, sit, move, and talk, where we live are all boundaries that are utilized in and through culture to secure political and social ends (Amaya, 2007; Bell, 2008; Butler, 1990; Butler, 1993; Moreman, 2009).

To perform is to carry something into effect, whether it is a story, an identity, an artistic artifact, a historical memory, or ethnography. Cultural performances in forensics can be characterized by (1) a limited time span (the school year; competitive season), (2) an organized program of activity (attending classes; competing on a forensic team), (3) a set of performers (students, coaches, competitors), (4) an audience (instructors, colleagues, peers, judges), and (5) a place and occasion of performance (classroom, tournaments). Cultural performances take place virtually everywhere; work, home, universities, etc. (Bell, 2008). Goffman (1959) argued, we are always on stage and every performance is a presentation of self.

Personal narratives reinforce cultural meanings and the narrator, in their performance of identity, has the opportunity to resist the established definition and explanations of labeled identities (Bennett, 2003; Noy, 2004; Scott, 2008). Social identities such as "college student," "nontraditional," "competitor," and any other identity associated with the narrator are represented in the narrative act. Individuals struggle to create meaning, to negotiate and renegotiate truth, and constitute identity. College can be

a time of great transition for many students as they learn new perspectives and develop new interests and friendships; some may begin to experience adult responsibilities for the first time while others learn to juggle work, family, and school. Given these changes, it is not surprising that many students begin to develop new facets of their identities and shed others. Within most organizational settings, members tend to enact dominant norms and communication styles during everyday interactions. As a result, organizational members may judge others who do not meet, or do not seem to meet, expectations related to the group, in a negative way. Those outside of the dominant group may feel a sense of marginality, feeling as though their identities are not like those of the dominant group (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010; Goffman, 1959; Noy, 2004).

Identity and Cultural Performance

Human beings want to elaborate and preserve a coherent identity. This means that they want to act in ways that are simultaneously congruent with their self-perceptions and with others' expectations of them (Hesselbein & Goldsmith, 2009). Negotiating multiple identities simultaneously is an ongoing project for most individuals. That negotiation process often takes on heightened importance for some organizational members, particularly for marginalized members who are deemed other than the norm or outside of the dominant group (Eisenberg, Goodall, & Trethewey, 2010). Roles emerge as comprehensive ways to cope with multiple obligations and function as a source for interpreting and evaluating specific actions. Role theory examines how individuals manage and prioritize the demands of multiple roles so that they are regularly and adequately performed (Kim, Sax, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2010).

A performance is socialized, molded, and modified to fit into the understanding and expectations of the society in which it is presented. When an individual presents themselves before others, their performance will tend to incorporate and exemplify the officially accredited values of the society. Physically sharing time and space with members of an organization teaches people what to wear; what language to use; what behaviors to exhibit and those to avoid; with whom to associate. These lessons are fundamental to learning social and cultural lessons on how to be part of the organization. In order for newcomers to enter into conversations with existing members, they must learn their culture and theories (Amaya, 2007).

Human beings negotiate many roles on a daily basis. Proper role performance requires that individuals follow socially acceptable scripts for a particular role. We follow scripts and perform roles as employees, students, volunteers, parents, siblings, partners, and many other roles. Individuals who are working to fit into an organization, such as forensics, need to follow scripts previously ascribed by members. Newcomers must learn the language, dress code, rituals, habits, and norms that belong to the organization in order to be accepted as members. Like any organization, if proper role performance is not taken on by newcomers or individuals are not accepted by veteran members, success in assimilating into the organization may be minimal.

Mature students or workers may experience an additional challenge when it comes to assimilation into a new organization due to their age and the social scripts surrounding age. One problem surrounding the negotiation of age roles is that our culture offers little guidance on living the second half of our lives. Turning fifty or sixty is a

milestone that for many people elicits feelings of apprehension, if not outright depression. Part of the problem is that our American culture lacks a clear picture of what we are meant to be doing in our second half. The American glorification of youth further distracts from this picture. Despite the fact that many older adults are still full of life and energy, they are subconsciously entering the second half of life with an outdated script. In the next section I review the performance of student identity and how nontraditional students negotiate the student role.

Student Identity

Being and becoming a learner is the product of complex interplay amongst the social and economic structures which shape people's lives, the educational institutions which determine the processes of engagement with learning, and the learners themselves (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008). In the case of nontraditional college students, individuals are often balancing multiple roles, including those as students, employees, and/or parents. Each of these roles independently requires significant amounts of time, energy, and responsibility (Chartrand, 1992; Dill & Henley, 1998; Kim, Sax, Lee, & Hagedorn, 2010; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007; Ross-Gordon, 2011). These roles may be assets, both through the social supports they provide and through the rich life experiences that may help adult learners make meaning of theoretical constructs that may be purely abstract to young learners. Yet, more often, these multiple roles present challenges in students' allocation of time for both academic study and participation in campus-based organizations and activities (Ross-Gordon, 2011).

Simply being at university, and developing identities as students, involves making significant changes to students' domestic arrangements. The emotional work this entails often puts a strain on their home lives. The emotional toll of developing an identity as student is greatest when family members are not supportive. These pressures are often felt more acutely by women with dependent children because cultural discourse about what it means to be a good mother can conflict with the individuals desire to become a student (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008). Trying to achieve membership in the college community and becoming absorbed in the culture is primarily about the learning aspects of the student identity. To go beyond this was to stray too far into the ideas of membership that centered on belonging to the social world of the student. For the majority of the students, personal and family sacrifices cannot be made in order to engage in such activities. The identity work of becoming a competent learner is underpinned by a strong emotional desire to engage in the social practices of learning. Individuals not able to engage in these social practices are only ever partial members of the wider community and their engagement with "proper" student life may elicit strong emotional feelings of ambivalence and dislocation (Christie, et al., 2008).

The commitments and responsibilities adults have outside of university are consistently found to affect their participation in higher education. Balancing these different demands leads adults to a conceptualization of themselves as merely "day" students. Such identities disadvantage adults in higher education by limiting their participation in the wider aspects of university life, and by excluding them from networks through which important information circulates. Nontraditional students simply do not

have the time to spend with friends and peers because they have other obligations. Since

nontraditional students often report more responsibilities at home, it is very likely they

are juggling so many roles and responsibilities that there is little time left to devote to an

outside social network (Dill & Henley, 1998; O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Because

student identity and satisfaction often hinges on the social aspects of college as well as

the learning aspects, it is important to look at how cocurricular activities such as forensics

may help nontraditional students become complete members of college life and provide

individuals more completeness in their student identity. In the following chapters I will

review my research method design as well as an analysis of the research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHOD DESIGN

In order to understand the concept of assimilation of the nontraditional student, specifically within the realm of college forensics, I designed a study that used autoethnography and participant interviews. In order to research the forensic culture and the assimilation of newcomers into that culture, it is imperative to use a research method that best enables me to examine culture. No questionnaire, experimental study, control sample, or statistical analysis can capture the essence of a culture as completely or as richly as an ethnographic study can. The purpose of my study is to dispel some of the common misconceptions of nontraditional students as well as some of the misconceptions that surround forensics. My main goal in this research is to share multiple stories of nontraditional students' participation in collegiate forensics. The following sections outline my research question, the research design with attention drawn to ethnography, autoethnography, and participant interviews, as well as the coding procedures.

Research Question

The goal of my research is to address the stresses and difficulties that nontraditional students deal with while attending secondary education and whether the forensic community is conducive to, or a hindrance to, nontraditional student participation. Additionally, I explore what steps both the forensic community and higher education can take to create an open and welcoming environment for nontraditional students. This lead to my research question: "How can the experiences of nontraditional students in collegiate forensics shed light on the organizations of forensics and higher

education in order to improve the experiences and educational value for nontraditional students?" Based on my own experiences within higher education and collegiate forensics, I believe collegiate forensics can benefit from the addition of more nontraditional students. In turn, nontraditional students can benefit from participation in forensics while dispelling misconceptions and stigmas that surround nontraditional students and the forensic culture. The best way to explore my research question is by incorporating my personal experiences and the stories of others through a triangulation of ethnography, autoethnography, and interviews.

Research Design

Ethnography

Ethnography is the art and science of describing a group or culture. Ethnographic observation studies are based on a desire to focus on communication behavior that is not affected by the research process. Participant observation methods are characterized by the attempt to use nonintrusive ways of gathering information. The researcher explores communication by participating in the natural environment. In many respects, ethnography is the most basic form of social research. Not only does it have a long history, it also bears a close resemblance to the routine ways in which people make sense of the world in everyday life. Critical ethnography takes seemingly mundane events and reproduces them in a way that exposes broader social processes of control, taming power imbalance, and the symbolic mechanisms that impose one set of preferred meanings or behaviors over others (Bickman & Rog, 1989; Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995; Reinard, 2007; Thomas, 1993).

In anthropology what the practitioners do is ethnography. Ethnography is not a matter of methods: establishing rapport, selecting informants, transcribing texts, taking genealogies, mapping fields, keeping a diary and so on. These are not the things that define ethnography, rather what defines ethnography is the kind of intellectual effort it involves: "an elaborate venture in thick description" (Geertz, 1973, p. 6). One aim of anthropology, and thus ethnography, is the enlargement of the universe of human discourse. Other goals include instruction, amusement, practical counsel, moral advance, and the discovery of the natural order in human behavior (Geertz, 1973). The claim of an ethnographic account does not rest on its author's ability to capture primitive facts in faraway places and carry them home like souvenirs, but rather, on the degree to which he or she is able to clarify what goes on in such places and reduce the number of questions that arise from unfamiliar acts emerging out of unknown cultures (Geertz, 1973).

I conducted my ethnography by becoming a collegiate forensic competitor. In order to compete as a master's student I obtained a special waiver that allowed me to compete for one year with the permission of the tournament directors for individual tournaments that I attended. After obtaining my waiver, I began working with coaches to put up a total of three forensic events. Two interpretation events (prose and poetry) and one public address event (after dinner speaking). I traveled to, and competed in, eleven tournaments with my team including one national tournament (American Forensic Association National Individual Events Tournament). I attended team sponsored events such as our spring showcase, nationals weekend retreat, work days, weekly speech meetings, and team social events. I spent roughly 400 hours in the field during my year as

a forensic competitor. I kept a journal of my experiences which included coaching, traveling, competing, and my professional and social associations with my teammates as well as my experiences with coaches and competitors from other teams. Along with my journal notes, I retained all of the ballots I received from each tournament. These ballots also helped to remind me of details during specific tournaments. Journaling my experiences as a forensic competitor and writing my story allowed me to relive the experiences, both good and bad, that I have had after returning to college and becoming a member of a forensic team. My experiences led me to seek out the stories of other nontraditional forensic competitors.

Autoethnography

Evolving from some of the same basic principles of ethnography, autoethnography is an approach to research that seeks to describe and analyze personal experience in order to understand cultural experience (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Spry, 2001). While a form of ethnography, autoethnography differs from ethnography in that it focuses on the writer's subjective experiences rather than solely on the beliefs and practices of others. A researcher uses tenets of autobiography and ethnography to do and write autoethnography. Thus, as a method, autoethnography is both a process and a product (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Ellis & Bochner, 2006). Autoethnography allows researchers to produce meaningful, accessible, and evocative research grounded in personal experience. Autoethnographic research has the ability to sensitize readers to issues of identity politics, to experiences shrouded in silence, and to forms of representation that deepen our capacity to empathize with people who differ from us

(Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011). Autoethnography wants the reader to care, to feel, to empathize, and to act (Ellis & Bochner, 2006).

According to naturalism, in order to understand people's behavior, researchers must use an approach that gives us access to the meanings that guide that behavior. As a researcher using autoethnographic methods, I am better able to learn the culture or subculture of the people I am studying since researchers are able to interpret the world in the same way as the participants do. Naturalists argue that because people's behavior is not caused in a mechanical way, it is not amenable to the sort of causal analysis and manipulation of variables that are characteristic of quantitative research. According to the naturalist account, the value of autoethnography as a social research method is founded upon the existence of such variations in cultural patterns across and within societies, and their significance for understanding social processes (Hammersley & Atkinson, 1995). Autoethnography respects the same basic rules of logic, replication, validity, reliability, theory construction, and other characteristics that separate science from other forms of knowledge. When done well, autoethnography is as scientific and rigorous as quantitative social science or even the natural sciences (Thomas, 1993).

Autoethnography digs to a deeper level of meaning that may lie beneath superficial surface appearances. The ontological assumption is that there is something else there that will take us beneath the surface of accepted appearances and reveal another side of social life (Thomas, 1993). Ethnography attempts to be holistic, covering as much as possible about a culture, subculture, or program (Bickman & Rog, 1989). Autoethnography is the one research method that allows a researcher to discover deeper

levels within a culture because it is the only method that involves an extended participation with the group being studied. An outside observation or second hand information regarding forensic culture and assimilation would not yield the depth of understanding that an autoethnography would. Ethnographers and autoethnographers study culture for the purpose of describing it and/or changing it (Thomas, 1993). In order for an ethnographer to create a "thick description" of the culture or bring forth needed change, the researcher *must* spend extended time with the culture being studied.

Critical researchers begin from the premise that all cultural life is in constant tension between control and resistance. The tension is reflected in behavior, interaction rituals, normative systems, and social structure, all of which are visible in the rules, communication systems, and artifacts that constitute a given culture (Thomas, 1993). Autoethnography expands and opens up a wider lens on the world, shunning rigid definitions of what constitutes meaningful and useful research (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011).

When researchers do ethnography, they study a culture's practices, values, beliefs, and shared experiences for the purpose of helping insiders and outsiders better understand the culture. Ethnographers do this by becoming participant observers in the culture by taking field notes of cultural happenings as well as their part in and others' engagement with these happenings (Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Geertz, 1973). Ethnographers generally speak for their subjects and speak up on behalf of their subjects as a means of empowering them by giving more authority to their voice. The success or failure of

ethnography depends, in part, on the degree to which it rings true to the subjects as well as colleagues in the field (Bickman & Rob, 1989).

When researchers do autoethnography, they retrospectively and selectively write about epiphanies that stem from being part of a culture and/or by possessing a particular cultural identity. Autoethnographers must use their methodological tools and research literature to analyze experience, and consider ways others may experience similar epiphanies; they must use personal experience to illustrate facets of cultural experience and make characteristics of a culture familiar for both insiders and outsiders. Researchers may accomplish this by comparing personal experience with existing research, interviewing cultural members, and/or examining relevant cultural artifacts (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005; Ellis, Adams, & Bochner, 2011; Spry, 2001).

While quantitative research methods are valuable in many respects, quantitative research is unable to represent research subjects the way that autoethnography is able to. Qualitative research is the one way in which researchers are able to derive direct quotations from research subjects and allow their personal narratives to come through in the final project. Narratives represent something much larger and more significant than the idea that stories are just another source of data used for the purpose of advancing theory and criticism. We narrate to make sense of experience over the course of time (Bochner, 2000; 2001). Narratives facilitate a way of knowing that emphasizes the relationship between performance and experience to substantiate abstract claims (Bennett, 2003). The personal narrative is part of the study of everyday life, particularly performance in everyday life and the culture of everyday talk. Studying the

"communication and performance of ordinary people invites researchers to listen on the margins of discourse and give voice to muted groups in our society" (Langellier, 1989, p. 243). The researcher therefore must select quotations/narratives that are typical or characteristic of events described. Using atypical conversations or behaviors to make a point is not science and readers will most likely detect the false use of such material (Bickman & Rog, 1989).

Autoethnography allows me to academically and creatively tell my story. I am able to include why I am interested in nontraditional students as well as forensics and include my voice throughout the research project. Autoethnography, as a research method, works well for me because the subject of nontraditional students has been directly tied to my life experiences over the past seven years and I would be a biased researcher if I were to leave this information out of my research. The descriptions of my higher education experiences as well as my experiences as a nontraditional participant in collegiate forensics are the foundation for my study.

As part of my research I will integrate my own story and experiences with the data gathered from interview participants and the resulting analysis of that data. My experiences and stories will complement, or possibly contradict, those of my participants, but they will offer a picture of what it is like to be a forensic competitor from the perspective of a nontraditional student. Sharing my participation experiences will give a voice to an underrepresented group as well as give my research a level of humanness that I would not have otherwise achieved using quantitative research.

Interviews

The interview is one of the naturalistic researcher's most important data gathering techniques. Interviews explain and put into a larger context what the researcher sees and experiences. The researcher quickly learns to savor the subject's every word for its cultural and subculture connotations as well as for its denotative meaning. Qualitative research can give us compelling descriptions of the human world, and only qualitative interviews can provide researchers with well-founded knowledge of our reality (Kvale & Brinkman, 2009).

General interview types include structured, semi-structured, informal, and retrospective interviews. In practice they overlap and blend and each plays a role in soliciting information. Formally structured and semi-structured interviews are verbal approximations of a questionnaire with explicit research goals. These interviews generally serve comparative and representative purposes – comparing responses and putting them in the context of common group beliefs and themes. A structured or semi-structured interview is most valuable when the fieldworker comprehends the fundamentals of a community from the insider's perspective. Informal interviews are more casual conversations used to discover the categories of meaning in a culture. Informal interviews help identify shared values in the community – values that inform behavior. They do not involve any specific types of order of questions, and can progress much as a conversation does. The retrospective interview can be used by the ethnographer to reconstruct the past, asking informants to recall personal historical information. This type of interview does not elicit the most accurate data since people

forget or filter past events, however, in some cases, retrospective interviews are the only way to gather information about the past (Fetterman, 1989).

Because I wanted to compare my forensic experience as a nontraditional student to other nontraditional forensic competitors, interviewing these individuals was the next step in my research. I was unable to do interviews as a participant observer since I was not competing with other nontraditional students in our area. I did not have the opportunity to talk to other nontraditional competitors at the tournaments I traveled to; therefore I needed to put out a call for interview participants in order to conduct structured retrospective interviews.

A call for participation was sent out to the forensic Individual Events listserv (IE-L) as well as the District 4 listserv (the district in which my forensic team is located), asking for current or former forensic competitors who were competing or had competed as nontraditional students. My criteria for "nontraditional" were students who were 25 years of age or older and/or were parents of minor children at the time they competed. Having competed as a nontraditional student myself, I felt the two biggest barriers to competing in forensics were being an older student than the majority of student competitors and/or having children at home for whom I had to care. Those receiving the call for participation on the listservs were asked to forward the email to any person or persons they knew who would fit my participant criteria. Over the course of a four week period, I received interest emails from 11 potential participants. All potential participants were sent interview consent forms (see Appendix A) and eight of the 11 potential participants signed and returned the consent forms agreeing to participate in the email

interviews. Interview questions (see Appendix B) were emailed to my participants with instructions to answer the questions as completely as possible and return to me when complete. Three weeks after sending participants the email interview questions, a reminder email was sent to respondents who had not returned a completed interview asking them to complete and return the interviews. Of the eight original respondents who agreed to participate in the interviews, six returned completed interviews.

Of the six respondents, four participants were male and the remaining two participants were female. Two participants, one male and one female, had forensic experience in high school while the remaining participants had no prior forensic experience prior to joining in college. Two participants competed for smaller colleges, two competed for both small and large colleges, one competed for a larger college, and one respondent did not specify the college for which she competed. Two of the participants were currently in their first year of competition and indicated that they intend to continue. The remaining four participants competed in college for four years. Ages of the participants at the time they competed ranged from 24 to 62. One competitor competed from ages 24-28 after spending five years in the Navy before attending college, one specified competing from the ages of 28 to 31, another was 27 in their senior year of competition, one competed between the ages of 34 and 38, one current competitor (as of this writing) is a first time, first year competitor at the age of 30 while my final participant is a 62 year old, first time, first year competitor who is also a college senior.

Beyond asking basic demographic questions, the interview (see Appendix B) also included questions in the areas of: prior forensic experience; participants' reasons for

joining and continuing forensics; initial feelings and experiences upon joining; the

nontraditional student experience; teammate and coach interactions; assimilating into

forensics; goals and advice. After receiving completed interviews, I moved on to code the

data provided by my participants. In the following section I will explain my coding

procedures.

Coding Procedures

Because my research involved interviewing other members of the forensic

community, it was necessary to code the qualitative data gathered from those interviews.

Codes serve as a shorthand device to label, separate, compile, and organize data

(Emerson, 1983). Once all of the interview data was collected, I organized the raw data

into conceptual categories and created themes or concepts (Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Emerson, 1983; Neuman, 2009). Coding was a two-phase process: an initial phase

followed by a focused phase of coding (Emerson, 1983). In the initial phase, I coded

interview data line by line and coded each incident into as many categories of analysis as

possible, by noting categories in the margins of the transcripts, to see what categories

would emerge from the language of the data (Emerson, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). In

the second phase of coding, focused coding, I developed larger themes or categories to

which the initial coding can be applied. The purpose of focused coding is to "build and

clarify a category by examining all the data it covers and variations from it" (Emerson,

1983). This focused coding allows diverse properties to become integrated and helped me

develop a framework of overarching themes that allowed me to explain the issues and

events being studied (Emerson, 1983; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The participants received

a copy of the analysis in order to make corrections and/or adjustments to ensure accuracy of the stories and experiences they shared.

The interview data gathered along with my autoethnographic data proved to provide rich information that can be used to shed light on nontraditional students in forensics and answer my research question concerning how the experiences of nontraditional students in collegiate forensics may aid forensics and higher education to improve the experiences and educational value for nontraditional students. In the following chapter I layer my story with those of my research participants to analyze the major themes that evolved from coding interviews and explore the nature of forensics, the importance of the activity, and what it means to be a nontraditional student both in and out of forensics.

CHAPTER FOUR

ANALYSIS

Being a nontraditional student has elicited a wide range of emotions for me during

my collegiate career. Returning to college after a 15 year plus absence caused me more

than a little concern. I was excited about the possibilities of becoming a student again and

finally finishing my degree, however, knowing that I was old enough to be the majority

of my classmates' mother was very disconcerting to me. I worried that my age would

make me feel too different and out of place in the classroom. I worried that I would not

keep up with the class load or make the grade. Most of all I worried that I would not fit in

or feel accepted as a "real" college student.

Despite the fact that I was older than everyone in my classes, including the

instructors, I fell into the academic portion of college life quite easily. I worked full time

and kept up with a full course load all while making the Dean's list each semester. I

found it much easier to do the required work since I had more focus and determination

than I did when I attended college at a younger age. I also realized that not only did I

have more to contribute to class discussions because of my experiences, but I also was

much more willing to contribute in class than I was my first time in college. My age and

worldly experiences were actually beneficial to me in the classroom.

In the classroom, my age was an advantage. Outside of the classroom however,

my status as a nontraditional student posed other difficulties. Because I was older,

worked full time, had a partner and child at home, a house to maintain, and classes to

keep up with, feeling like a true member of a college campus was not so easy. I often felt

like I was missing out on a lot of opportunities offered on campus and the feeling of

being an integrated member of the college student body. Often there were events on

campus that I would like to attend, however, my work schedule did not allow for that. In

order to attend classes, I had to change my work schedule around to fulfill my full 40

hour week. I went from starting work at 8 a.m. to starting at 6 a.m. in order to leave for

night classes. I would attend night classes three nights a week, usually from 4-10 p.m.

and the nights I didn't attend class I spent doing homework and catching up with

housework and my family. If the university sponsored events during the day, I was

typically at work; if they were offered at night, I was usually in class; and if there was an

event going on when I was "free," I would either be too tired or feel too guilty to attend. I

was rarely able to make it to study groups that were organized by classmates and

socializing with students who were so much younger than me seemed awkward and

frankly unthinkable to me. As if time commitments and the feeling of awkwardness over

my age were not enough, there was the constant guilt that I felt about being away from

home.

When I returned to college, my daughter was a sophomore in high school. She

was an athlete and between working full time and attending school (mostly night classes)

it was hard for me to attend her school activities and help with homework. I was no

longer home every night to make my family dinner. The majority of my "spare" time was

spent doing homework. I often felt overwhelmed with guilt over not fulfilling the

obligations to my family and spending so much time away from them. Despite their

support, I felt like I wasn't doing enough at home and I continually felt like a "bad"

mother. Eventually, my daughter graduated high school, I found a balance between work, school, and home life and I finished my bachelor's degree. Finally I felt all was right with the world. Then, I entered the world of collegiate forensics.

Once I began my journey as a novice forensic competitor, my old feelings of insecurity, fear, misgivings, and a sense of being an outsider began again. The forensic culture was completely new and highly confusing to me. My teammates and competitors were all far younger than I was. I was older than all of my coaches and even our Director of Forensics. The idea of competing and surviving in this community felt nearly impossible. However, despite the large learning curve I had to endure and my struggles with my age identity, I found a fantastic support system in the forensic community. I found so many positive aspects within forensics and my team that any fears and misgivings I had in the beginning were outweighed by the benefits. My experiences as a nontraditional student in forensics enticed me to find other nontraditional forensic competitors to see how their experiences compared to mine and to see if there are ways the forensic community can create an environment that allows for more participation of nontraditional students.

In this chapter I layer my story with those of my research participants to explore the nature of forensics, the importance of the activity, and what it means to be a nontraditional student both in and out of forensics. The major categories that evolved from coding interviews are: reasons for forensic involvement; initial feelings and assimilation into the activity; conflicting emotions concerning participation; and the nontraditional experience.

Reasons for Forensic Involvement

During the interviews, participants frequently discussed their reasons for participating in forensics. They discussed reasons for joining forensic teams as well as reasons for continuing to participate in the activity. Specifically the following themes emerged: influence of high school participation, a desire to take advantage of what college has to offer, enjoyment of the activity, success and competition, and camaraderie.

Initially, for many respondents their decision to participate in forensics was tied to previous high school experiences. When I joined the forensic community, however, I was a complete novice. I had never competed before either as a college undergraduate or in high school. I actually have no idea if my high school had a speech team. Not that it would have mattered. I was so shy then I never would have considered joining a group that did competitive speaking! I literally knew nothing about collegiate forensics. It was a new and confusing world to me. In the area of high school participation, surprisingly to me, four of my six research participants also did not compete in high school forensics, yet chose to join forensics in college. One participant, like me, noted that he did not participate in high school because, "We did not have a forensic team as far as I knew, but I would not have done so anyway." One participant indicated his high school had a program, however, "My sister had done speech and went to state. I didn't want to follow in her footsteps." While another participant said she wanted to join the high school team but she didn't have time because she "was raising my two little brothers." While I would not have participated because I was shy, I do understand and sympathize with her circumstances. My two siblings were much younger than I and I was expected to care for

them. Even though my mother was a stay-at-home mom, she was not in favor of extracurricular activities. She felt a woman's place was in the home and that was where I needed to be. I was expected to cook, clean, help with my siblings, and maintain A's in school. My mother believed that after school activities were a waste of time and didn't allow my participation in any clubs, athletics (participation or spectator), plays, band, or choir. My time was to be spent at home when I wasn't in school. It may have been this attitude that was instilled in me that made me feel such guilt about being away from home when I returned to college.

For those participants who did compete in high school, they went on to compete in college in order to continue doing an activity which they loved in high school. These participants were quite vocal about the thrill of performing and enjoying the competition. As one competitor explained, "I thought it was a great activity that allowed my performance side to meet my competitive side. I just loved the activity, loved performing, and loved competing."

However, what makes someone unfamiliar with forensics join? My reason to join forensics is certainly not the norm. My reason was purely goal oriented. I was enrolled in a Master of Fine Arts Forensic program which required a minimum of two years of coaching during the three year program. The fact that I had never competed in forensics, I believed, put me at a disadvantage to coach forensic competitors. And so it was decided that I would apply for a special waiver in order to compete for one year as a graduate student. In the beginning it was just an opportunity to gain experience and knowledge in order to coach and finish my program. Once the waiver was approved, though, it was a

different story. Competition suddenly, and quickly, became a reality. Within two weeks I had two events and was attending my first tournament. I was terrified, confused, and seriously questioning my plan of action.

Although I may have been a unique case, several participants talked about choosing to participate in forensics because of a desire to take advantage of what college has to offer. Several participants noted that it was harder for them to get to college and being there meant more to them because of that struggle. Therefore, they wanted to take advantage of everything they could in college in order to truly get the most out of their experience. One participant noted that, "Since I was paying for my own college, I decided to take advantage of everything. I joined the choir, did theater, ran for student senate, and joined the Speech Team." Another participant explained that she "was originally in theatre but went to forensics for a change in social aspect." Forensics gave some nontraditional students an opportunity for social bonds with other college students that they often could not achieve elsewhere on campus. As one participant observed:

> I feel more of an outsider because I do not live on campus. I don't have
>
> the social aspects of my teammates who live on campus so I feel excluded
>
> in that aspect. I feel very connected to my teammates when it comes to
>
> speech but not college life.

This participant's experiences mirror those of my own. As an undergraduate student I did not have the time, energy, or inclination to connect on a deeper level to other members of my campus. I simply commuted to campus to take classes and while I got along well with my instructors and classmates, I did not feel connected to them in anyway outside of

classes, nor did I feel connected to the campus as a whole. It was not until I became a member of the forensic community as a graduate student that I really started to feel like I was a member of my campus and that I made connections to my teammates and peers. Because of the connections I made through forensics, I enjoyed my college experience more, was happier with teaching and coaching, and felt pride in both my team and my university. I became much more connected to my university once I became connected to individual members of my university's forensic team. This connection made me feel less like an outsider and more of an integral part of the campus community.

Once a competitor joins forensics they often find out how time consuming this activity can be. For nontraditional students this time commitment can be compounded by demands outside of college. With time constraints and demands on competitors' time it is also important to explore themes relevant to why nontraditional students continued their participation in forensics after initially joining a program.

Many participants found they stayed because they enjoyed the activity. After my first collegiate tournament I truly wanted to quit competing. I felt both out of place and over my head. I had been involved for only a short period of time, but already I was feeling a strain on my time as well as the worry of keeping up with my academics. Had it not been for my one year waiver and the push of my Director of Forensics, I am certain I would not have continued to compete. As it turned out, the more tournaments that I attended, the more hooked I got. Once I began to understand and master the forensic culture and the uniqueness of this activity, I found myself enjoying the activity much more. I actually started looking forward to going to tournaments instead of dreading

them. One participant noted that he "loved it [forensics] in high school, so decided to keep doing it [in college]. I just loved the activity, love performing, and love competing."

Further, part of the enjoyment entails the competition and having some success in the activity. One of my favorite tournaments happened to be on the weekend of my 45th birthday. This was, I believe, only my third tournament, and it was a national warm-up tournament, so it was my largest so far. I was feeling overwhelmed by the level of competition I was facing, but much more comfortable with the whole process at this point. My teammates, along with the rest of the competitors and coaches, were waiting for postings, talking, laughing, and mingling. When finals were posted, one of my teammates turned to me with the most amazing smile on her face, hugged me, and congratulated me. I looked at the postings and realized that I had broken prose. This was my first break into finals, it was my birthday, and to make it even more memorable, I had beaten out a competitor whom I had seen before and thought was beyond beating (at least by me). When I started competing it was just for the educational benefits of my program, but deep down I wanted to break just once. The experience of making it to, and performing in, a final round made me want to compete even more. As one participant explained, "I had a little bit of success at my first couple of tournaments and it motivated me to do more of it." My first success made me want more. I wanted the adrenaline rush of seeing my name on those postings. I wanted the thrill of performing to a larger audience. I finally understood what motivated competitors to get up at 5 a.m. and attend tournaments.

Finally, enjoyment of the activity and success aside, one of the main reasons that competitors remain in the activity is for the camaraderie and friendships that form. When asked what kept them involved in college forensics, one participant shared this story:

The camaraderie, the people I was around. I made some of the most

lasting friendships I've ever had while in forensics in college – I just went

to the wedding of my former duo partner – she had come to my wedding

the year before – even though we live thousands of miles apart, we're still

in each other's lives, and that's all because of forensics.

Another participant when asked this question stated that, "It's a great deal of fun and camaraderie. Being a nontraditional student it is hard to really bond with classmates and form connections with other students. Forensics is a bit of a family group that you instantly can find a bond with." She further explains that, "of course, the chance to travel with the team and experience many different fun activities together won't hurt incentive wise either ☺."

The amount of time spent with teammates traveling to tournaments, the long days competing, hotel stays, and the van rides all create an atmosphere like no other. For me, the tournament with my first break was a turning point. It was my birthday and I was feeling kind of lonely for my family. At the end of the first day of the tournament, the team returned to the hotel for pizza and a team meeting. At the end of the meeting, my team brought out a birthday cake and sang happy birthday to me. I didn't even realize that they knew it was my birthday, but they had the whole thing planned out, and it made

me feel truly feel special and a part of the team. That weekend is something that I will remember and cherish for a lifetime.

Whether individuals choose to continue forensics in college because of their high school experience or because they want to try something new and take advantage of what college has to offer, it is clear from my participants that in either case, once they join the forensic community, there are many reasons to maintain their involvement. My participants and I shared stories about the enjoyment of participating in the activity, how some success in forensics motivated us to continue competing, our love for competition, and most of all the camaraderie with our teammates and coaches that kept us involved in such a time consuming activity. In the following section I will review the second major category, assimilation and initial feelings, which evolved from participants' interviews.

Assimilation and Initial Feelings

Quals, schemats, legs, black books, dress codes, proper public address gestures, and the list goes on. The world of collegiate forensics is loaded with unwritten rules and norms as well as a language all their own. The ability to navigate this world as an outsider is a key component to the success of forensic competitors. Entering this world is much like entering a foreign country and having no knowledge of the local customs or language. For those with limited or no exposure or experience with forensics, this learning curve can be daunting, confusing, and frustrating. During the interviews, participants frequently mentioned their own frustrations with learning to navigate through this new world. Specifically, two themes emerged from the interviews: exclusionary language and tensions relevant to generational differences.

Initially, the ability to become a member within the forensic community revolves around learning the language of forensics. Those who are unfamiliar with the language of forensics often feel like outsiders and may feel excluded from the dominant group due to the language barrier. When I began as a graduate teaching assistant, before working with the forensic team, I listened to coaches and competitors talking in the office and had no comprehension of what they were discussing. A typical conversation that would occur on a Monday afternoon following a tournament would go something like this:

A: Was that an AFA qual for your POI?

B: Not a qual, but I got a better leg.

A: What do you need?

B: I need a good 3 leg to qual.

A: You should get that at the TC or Vifl.

B: Yeah, I should be able to qual it out or maybe I can get the golden leg at districts.

All of these discussions about quals, breaks, legs, events, competitors, and judges simply washed over me. It really was a foreign language to me, one I could neither translate nor understand. Because of this, I had the mistaken perception that the forensic group was a very clicky, insider only group. It felt much like high school again and I was still not part of the "cool" group. I had reservations about joining this group and the likelihood that I would fit in or be accepted. One participant explained that, "Getting to know the rituals, warm-ups, expectations was tough – every team is different, every team wants things

done a certain way. This was intimidating at times." Another participant explained his initial feelings upon joining as:

> Nervous. There was this culture of rules and procedures that I wasn't familiar with. In my first round of Parliamentary Debate, I didn't realize we were supposed to leave the room for prep time. We just sat there quietly talking to our partners.

Further compounding anxieties about joining a forensic team are the tensions relevant to generational differences between nontraditional and traditional students. Not only did my participants and I not understand the language and culture of forensics, but to make our apprehension about joining forensics even greater was the age differences many of us experienced between our teammates. I was old enough to be my teammates' mother. As a matter of fact, my youngest daughter was actually older than some of them. This made me feel even more like an outsider because I felt that I would not have enough in common with them or they would be less likely to accept me into the group. One of my research participants had the same feelings. As he described, he was nervous because he "was the old guy and didn't know how I would fit in." As for his experience with assimilating into the team, he stated that, "It seemed very easy. I guess I still looked 18 when I started. Most people didn't realize I had spent 5 years in the Navy. I took to the activity very well." Another participant explained that:

> There are times when I feel my jokes are [not] fully comprehended, or that rare moment when the kids just want to be kids without an older adult looming. But for the most part they are few and far between and could be

just the hurdles of being 'new' in general than having much to do with

age.

Her description tends to mirror those of other participants. While many of us experienced

some apprehension or even "panic and excitement" as she explained, the one common

experience that we shared was the acceptance by our teams. As one participant, who is a

62-year old first time forensic competitor explained:

I had some apprehensions about being the only older team member. As for

my teammates, they have been exceptionally gracious in not making me

feel out of place. I am comfortable, and am gradually establishing myself

in the role of kind of 'big brother' to many of my teammates.

Another participant noted that:

I was very much accepted by both teams. More so after they got to know

me. At [one institution] I was called 'Papa Rick' so that was different but I

was okay with it. All of them made me feel that I was wanted.

My experience is much the same. I also have been very accepted and embraced by my

team. I always carry the "mom" bag with everything students may need along with a treat

bag full of snacks. The team calls me momma Laura and they refer to me as the team

mom. I sometimes even have members from other teams coming to ask, "Team mom, do

you have any more fruit snacks" or "Team mom, do you have a band-aid?" Instead of

feeling old and out of place, I feel very loved and needed by my team and other members

of the forensic community. One interview participant explained his experiences this way,

"They were VERY supportive." His reasoning is that, "I act really young, and don't

really look my age – even now people often assume I'm a student at the college where I teach – in reality, I'm old enough to be the father of some of my students." Only one participant noted anything negative about her assimilation process. Her issue surrounds teammates' perceptions of age:

> I have a teammate who tends to make comments about how old people are
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> that are my age which is a little off-putting sometimes. I know that she
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> doesn't think of me as old but when she makes comments about others my
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> age it makes me a little insecure.

Admittedly, I was very insecure about my age when returning to school, but even more so as a forensic competitor. However, my insecurities and fears turned out to be unwarranted. My team was very receptive to my joining. In fact many of them were actually excited about my competing with them. From the very beginning I was made to feel welcome and a part of the group. I had a large learning curve to overcome regarding the culture and language, but my teammates and coaches were more than accommodating and worked very hard to help me succeed both as a competitor and as a coach. I grew into the world of forensics quickly and with very little effort or frustration thanks to the support of my team and everyone I met on the forensic circuit.

Participants expressed apprehensions and anxieties surrounding the joining and participation in forensics, however, they all agree that they were accepted into the community and very well supported by coaches and teammates which quickly alleviated their apprehensions about fitting in and age differences. Beyond the assimilation process that members engage in upon joining forensics, there are can also be conflicting emotions

concerning their participation. In the next section I review the issues of conflicting

emotions participants experienced concerning participation in forensics.

<p style="text-align:center">**Conflicting Emotions Concerning Participation**</p>

The process of joining forensics, developing events, adjusting to rules, written and

unwritten, norms, and just trying to fit in was daunting for me and seriously struck fear in

my heart. After my first tournament I wanted to quit. I kept thinking, this is not for me,

it's not what I thought it would be, I felt lost, out of place, and I wasn't having as much

fun as everyone else seemed to be. I went to two tournaments my first semester and

avoided doing any others. I just couldn't bring myself to do it. My second semester the

DOF said, "I only get you for one year, we are making the most of it!" I was now going

to *every* tournament and I was going to have to put up more events. I think she [my DOF]

kind of forgot that I was a true novice in forensics since she viewed me as a "real" adult

because of my age. I don't think she realized how overwhelming that amount of

participation would be for me. She told me later that she always thought, "Laura's an

adult, she can handle it." I truly did not want to commit so much more time, but I also did

not want to disappoint those who worked so hard to help me get this opportunity. So, I

sucked it up and pushed forward and I am so glad that I did. After a couple of more

tournaments, things started to fall into place for me and, surprisingly, by the end of the

semester I did not want to be done competing. My whole perspective on forensics

changed in such a short period of time and I got so much more out of my experience than

I ever thought possible. Because I felt such a transformation in myself and my

experience, I wanted to know if other nontraditional competitors shared the same

experiences, both positive and negative. What we all had in common were only a few negative aspects of forensics that were outweighed by the positive aspects we discovered. The negative and positive aspects discussed by my participants will be reviewed in the following sections.

Negative Aspects

The few negative aspects that my participants cited fell into three general themes: time consuming, complex, and demanding nature of forensics; the difficulty in learning the culture, rules, norms, and procedures; and personality clashes.

For those who want to get the most out of forensics, either educationally or competitively, the activity is very time consuming, complex, and demanding. In order to achieve educational or competitive success, a student must travel to several tournaments a semester and be entered in multiple events. This means most weekends are spent competing and traveling to and from tournaments. Depending on the location of the tournament, the time spent each weekend could be anywhere from two to four days. In addition to traveling to and competing in multiple tournaments, competitors are also coaching and polishing their events. Each team has different requirements for coaching, but my team recommended coaching at least one hour per week for each event. Thus, a student with five events would practice for five hours per week. For me, I began with two events my first semester and added a third event my second semester of competition. I spent two to three hours a week preparing my events, evaluating ballots after tournaments, and coaching and polishing my events during coaching sessions. I also

traveled to 11 different tournaments during my competition year which meant many

weekends spent away from home and family.

Peer coaching, coaching with teammates as opposed to coaches, was also

encouraged in order to promote team cohesion and for students to have more time

practicing their events. Another aspect for success, are the events themselves. Students

are encouraged, and often times required to have multiple events. There are 11 individual

events to choose from and most competitors have between three and eight events in

which they compete. This means finding, cutting, programming, analyzing, and polishing

literature for interpretation events, or finding topics, researching, writing and memorizing

public address speeches. Creating several quality events, while academically meaningful,

is complex, demanding, and time consuming for students. During my year of

competition, I gained a lot of respect for competitors who were able to put up multiple

events. I found it a challenge to put up, memorize, and polish *three* events and many of

my teammates had between *five* and *nine* events.

Forensic competitors spend a great deal of time working on, practicing and

polishing their events while still maintaining a full college course load, maintaining a

high enough grade point average to remain eligible to compete, and often times working

full or part time jobs. I was carrying a full graduate course load, teaching two sections of

speech classes, and participating in forensics. I was actually lucky not to have another job

at the time, because it was more work than I had ever imagined it would be. As one

participant noted, "It is far more complex and demanding than one would think from the

outside…it is demanding in terms of time commitment." While another participant

offered this advice to prospective competitors, "Be prepared to work hard and spend a lot of time on this activity. It is time consuming and takes away from being able to work." Another explained that she had "a life to support. A job to maintain. ON TOP of all the homework I need to juggle into the mix."

Second, beyond the time commitment, competitors also addressed the difficulty of learning the culture, rules, norms, and procedures. For those unfamiliar to collegiate forensics, this can be a slow and frustrating process. One participant expressed her wish to "learn about the system faster." She went on to explain that, "Forensics is one of those things you have to learn on a schedule by experience, one day at a time." The few written rules in forensics are purposely ambiguous in order to allow for multiple interpretations and creativity, however, there are many unwritten rules that have developed and been perpetuated in the activity. These unwritten rules entail topics such as competitors' dress for tournaments, behavior in and out of rounds, addressing judges, book work, tech and blocking, gestures, movement within the performance or speech, signing into rounds, entering and exiting rounds, and so many more. After three years, I'm still not sure if I am aware of all of the unwritten rules. Each time I see ballots from coaches from other areas, I learn about some new norm or quirk of which I was not aware. Navigating and negotiating the numerous unwritten rules can be frustrating to new competitors. To make matters worse, those who have been members of the forensic community for a longer period of time often take it for granted that everyone just "knows" these rules and norms and therefore they are not addressed as part of the learning process. When I began, I was given a black book and slicks and told to find a prose because that was the easiest event

to get up. Prose found, I had no clue how to go about cutting the piece, page turns, character pops, or book work. My first coaching sessions were frustrating for me and the coaches. They "forgot" that I was new to all of this and took it for granted that I would "know" how to perform, how to hold the book, how to turn pages, how to stand or gesture. Before my first tournament, I had to sit a coach down to explain the whole tournament process to me. What do I wear, how do I read a schemat, how do I sign in? The coach looked at me for a moment, like *really*, you don't *know* this stuff, and then said, "Oh, yeah, I keep forgetting you're new and don't know any of this yet."

The longer people are involved in the activity, the harder it is to remember what it was like to be the new kid. This means that the norms and rules may not be addressed directly by coaches, but rather have to be learned by experience or trial and error by new competitors. One competitor explained that:

> The first step into forensics is a big, scary step. If you have never done it before, you don't know what you are getting into. Just trying to figure out what room you are competing in is a challenge if you have never used a schematic before. Then the different competition. The unwritten rules. Even the proper number of claps at the awards ceremony can be overwhelming.

One positive thing that came out of my starting forensics with a blank slate, was the realization of my coaches that they needed to create a more formal training session for new competitors that addressed the norms and unwritten rules. Because I asked so many questions and asked for so much clarification, my coaches were able to compile a list of

useful information for new competitors. The first time we initiated this particular training session, we realized that students did have a lot of questions, concerns, and fears about being new competitors but were reluctant to address them for fear of looking dumb. This training session proved to be very helpful in not only answering their questions but also alleviating a lot of their anxieties.

The final negative theme that came from my research participants was that of personality clashes. Those that expressed concern over personality clashes thought it was possible that these differences could be attributed to the age difference between them and their teammates, however from my own experience; age may not necessarily be the contributing factor. Any time you get a group of people, especially those who come from diverse backgrounds and start off as strangers, that spend a great deal of time together, you are going to end up experiencing some conflict. Personality clashes can also occur between competitors and coaches when there are differing opinions surrounding what, when, and how things should be done, or when competitors and coaches disagree on performance choices. My team is both blessed and cursed with a large coaching staff. It is nice to have different people to coach with and get different perspectives, but this can also cause conflict. I often felt frustrated by conflicting coaching advice and techniques. As a new person this was frustrating because I wasn't sure what I should be doing in the first place, and then to get several differing opinions on how to do something or disagreeing with their suggestions. I would then start to argue with the coach who was giving me the "newest" advice that conflicted with "older" advice from another coach. I also heard it was hard for my coaches to work with me because they felt awkward about

being younger than me. One participant explained that, "When my former duo partner coached me, and I disagreed with her – being older than her (and her being a former teammate) really hurt her credibility with me." Another respondent noted that, "Occasionally the head coach's personality will clash with mine but nothing too horribly negative." The things that bond a team together such as team retreats, social events, tournaments, and long rides in cramped vehicles, can also be the same things that contribute to personality conflicts. Like any group who spends a great deal of time together, or any significant personal relationship, people need to take some time off from each other in order to maintain healthy relationships.

Positive Aspects

While the difficulties in learning the forensic culture, the demands on competitors' time, and personality clashes may seem like serious reasons to consider leaving forensics, or not joining at all, my research participants and I all agree that the positive benefits of forensics far outweigh any negative aspects. While students put in so much time, energy, and effort into forensics, they also get much more out of it. The positive aspects described by participants fell into three general themes: learning experiences; professional development; and interpersonal and personal development.

The first theme that was identified was that forensics is a great place for learning experiences. While some believe that forensics is more concerned with competitive success, others, including competitors, approach forensics as a co-curricular activity in which education is the main priority. As one participant explained after becoming a coach he "realized that the educational value of forensics is much deeper than the competitive

value." Research participants listed qualities gained in forensics such as: "the ability to learn a lot about yourself," "learning about the world," "realizing that school is much more than a piece of paper," "the opportunities to see amazing speeches," "the ability to speak about subjects that your care about," "it gives you a chance to explore speech and performance in a fun way," and that "overall forensics is a good learning experience." Forensics is great way to improve speaking and critical thinking skills. As one participant explained, forensics is "the single most important part of one's collegiate development in terms of critical thinking and public speaking." Another participant described what he felt a person could gain from forensics this way:

> You learn a lot about yourself. You realize you can do much more than you thought you could. You learn a lot about the world around you. You learn that from the pieces you hear and the people who perform those pieces. You get off campus and realize that school is much more than a piece of paper. You have to interact with the world around you. Forensics helps you prepare you for that.

I improved my writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills, both by performing and by coaching and judging. Improving these skills has also made it easier for me as an educator. I find it easier to explain concepts to students as well as help them to apply them. I learned a lot from listening to others speeches and watching them perform. Most of all, I learned I could do a lot more than I thought I could and I pushed myself beyond my limitations and comfort zone and grew as both a performer and a person.

Along with the educational value of forensics, participants also noted positive aspects that fell into the theme of professional development. Professional development included such things as: "helping you prepare to interact with the world around you," "helps you with future plans and goals," "the ability to travel," "the feeling [of] fulfillment when you achieve success," and "a great resume builder." While the amount of work that may be put into forensics may be seen as one of the negative aspects, that same ability to do a large amount of work may also transfer to a positive aspect for a competitor's future. The ability to handle a full college course load, work, and forensics, bodes well for future multi-tasking and the type of dedication and work ethic employers look for. One participant noted that, "the hard work is what makes succeeding so fulfilling." On the topic of success, participants noted that having some success in forensics motivated them to stick with the activity and do more. This is also helpful for future employment because a forensic competitor already knows the feelings of success and motivation, and possesses the ability to support others in their successes. As one competitor advises, "Find what you like to do and support your teammates in what they like to do." Another explained that, helping or seeing "people get to final rounds at Nationals, and even become national champions, that was VERY gratifying." This type of team player is often sought out by employers and is often exhibited by forensic competitors. Another felt this way about her forensic experience:

> Forensics gives you a chance to explore speech and performance in a fun
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> way. You can use subjects you care about or want to learn about, and

there's a great deal of pride when you can be successful in something self

motivated like that.

I know many competitors who have advanced their professional development because of

forensics. They have stories of getting a highly desired internship, job, or their first

choice of graduate programs because of their forensic involvement. I truly believe that

forensic competitors have an advantage over other applicants. I believe that I now have a

better chance of getting the job I want because I have strengthened my curriculum vitae

with my forensic competition and coaching. Having these educational skills gives me an

edge in my professional development. The relationships and connections that I have

developed along the way won't hurt either.

Beyond the learning experiences and professional development, another major

theme that developed was personal and interpersonal development. Many participants

enjoyed sharing stories about their interactions and experiences with teammates and

coaches. Specific items discussed by participants included: "the camaraderie and fun

associated with forensics," "support from coaches and teammates," and "acceptance,

pride, and lasting friendships." One participant noted that what keeps her in forensics is

that, "it's a great deal of fun and camaraderie, and of course the chance to travel with the

team and experience many different fun activities together." She explains that her most

memorable interactions (thus far) are, "just sitting in the forensics room before meetings,

talking, laughing, joking. It's great camaraderie. I love hearing people laugh and there's

always someone ready to lift spirits with a joke or a hug." She also enjoys, "having

friendly faces and conversations about forensics as we bump into each other around

campus." She also notes that everyone on her team is "very eager to help" her as a new competitor. Another participant also explained his personal experiences concerning forensics and teammates:

I have an important personal story to tell and this will be a kind of 'petri dish' in which it can be nurtured. As for my teammates, they have been exceptionally gracious in not making me feel out of place. They are sympathetic about my personal story, which revolves around the diagnosis of mental illness and subsequent death of my oldest child. During the ride home from [our] last meet, one of my teammates shared a very personal story with me and asked my opinion on whether or not she should work up a persuasive speech on the issue. She indicated that she was very moved by my persuasive and wanted my input.

Another participant indicated that "the camaraderie, the people I was around," was what kept him involved in forensics. He went on to explain his interactions with coaches and teammates. "I made some of the most lasting friendships I've ever had while in forensics. Nothing bonds you with people like driving across the country in a small cramped space, playing stupid games, and acting silly. Those were great times." He goes on to explain that his teammates and coaches were "very supportive" and that his most positive interaction with coaches was, "being mentored by my coaches. To this day [coach's name] has a strong influence in my life, and really shaped my desire to become an educator myself. He really moved me to where I am today." It was obvious from all of

my participants that they have very fond memories of their time in forensics and many still maintain friendships with former teammates and coaches.

I, admittedly, went into forensics with some rather negative preconceived notions. I assumed that forensic competitors were an elitist group who were not welcoming or open to outsiders. This idea, of course, only made my anxieties about joining forensics worse. I was worried about how accepted I would be and how I would fit in. I was afraid I would be ostracized and left to either sink or swim. As I learned very quickly, my perceptions of forensics and forensic competitors and coaches was way off target. I was soon proven wrong about the elitism of the activity and its members. Everyone was enthusiastic about my joining and very welcoming. I received a great deal of encouragement and support both from coaches and teammates. My teammates shared in my successes and at times were more excited about me breaking into finals than they were of themselves. I felt truly cared about and loved by my teammates and we shared so many wonderful experiences. I too enjoyed the fun and camaraderie of the van rides, tournaments, and team events. I also have made lasting friendships with competitors and coaches both from my team and other teams around the area.

What I realized after my year of competition was that I gained far more than I had hoped to accomplish. I went in hoping to gain some experience to help me as a coach and to navigate the forensic culture. I got that and so much more. I have much more positive perspectives of forensics, a sense of unity and support, a better understanding of teamwork and small group dynamics, improved writing, speaking, and critical thinking skills, professional connections, and best of all, some of the best friendships I have ever

had. One participant noted that competitors should, "Enjoy your time, because it's going to go by WAY too fast." He is so right, at the end of each competitive season, I long for more time with my students and fellow coaches who have become more than friends to me. I see at national tournaments at the end of the season how hard it is for those graduating to let go because of all that forensics has given them. There are no other experiences I have had that can compare to what I have gotten from forensics.

The Nontraditional Experience

Nontraditional students typically have different needs, expectations, and perspectives than their more traditional counterparts. When it comes to being a member of the forensic community, these differences can become a disadvantage, but according to discussions with my participants and my own experience, there are more advantages to being a nontraditional competitor. Discussions surrounding the nontraditional experience fell into three main themes: experience and expectations; maturity and socialization; and work ethic.

Initially, many participants addressed their life or worldly experiences as being beneficial to being college students as well forensic competitors. One participant noted that being an older student, "I have more experience to draw from now that can be applied to my work." Another also noted that, "As I got into debate and impromptu, I realized I had a lot more experience I could draw on from than other students. When we were debating Kosovo, I could say I had been there." Many of the participants noted that their life experiences made it easier for them both in competition, because they had more depth of experience to draw on, and in academics because they were much more open

and capable of participating in class discussions. One participant noted that it was easier to achieve her goals "because I had that worldly experience under my belt."

While nontraditional students may have more life experiences to draw on, the perceptions of them being more experienced may also hinder them as well because coaches and teammates may not realize that these students are still in the learning stages as new competitors. Because of their age and perceived experience, the reality of them still being new is often overlooked or forgotten. As one competitor noted:

> I think that my age makes me somewhat of a target, in that they have perhaps higher expectations of me. For example, the head coach pushed me into doing extemp and impromptu at my first meet. This proved to be very stressful for me, although I did get through it. I was not well prepared, but I think they just assumed I would be able to handle it well. I think the expectations are greater because of my age. I am seen as an accomplished speaker with command and presence. That might not be the case were I a traditional student.

Another noted that, "because of my age, people assume I have experience in some things, forgetting that I may need help on something in the first place." In my own experience, I did find that having some life experience helped me quite a bit, especially when I was put in parliamentary debate for our state tournament, however, often times people would forget that I was new and needed help from square one or they would assume I already knew what I was doing. I would ask questions about things and often the response would be, "Oh, that's right I keep forgetting you don't know these things yet." I think more

things were explained to the true, first year, new competitors than they were to me because of the perception of having more experience with my age. I also remember a conversation with our forensic director about me doing debate. The staff was working to fill all of the state slots, and I was partnered up with another team member to debate as well as doing three other events. I had never done debate before and didn't know the first thing about it. I was really stressing out about not only doing debate, but doing it well so as not to overly embarrass the team. Our forensic director at one point said she should have asked me about participating in debate, but she thought I would be just fine because I could handle anything. She admitted she should have asked if I could handle it instead of just assuming I could handle it based on my past experiences. As it turned out, my partner and I did fine, but it was a stressful experience and one I probably would not have volunteered for, though looking back, I am grateful for the experience.

Another theme that nontraditional competitors discussed related to differences. Those differences were the social aspects and maturity issues. Socially, nontraditional students may not feel as connected to their campus or other students, as traditional students may. However, forensics seems to be one area in which it may be easier for nontraditional students to make those connections. As one participant noted, "Being a nontraditional student it is hard to really bond with classmates and form connection with other students. Forensics is a bit of a family group that you instantly can find a bond with." Another participant explains her perspective:

> I go to a traditional campus so I honestly don't feel nontraditional all the
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> time. I feel more of an outsider because I do not live on campus. I don't

have the social aspects of my teammates who live on campus so I feel

excluded in that aspect. But at the same time, I don't want to be a part of

that scene because I have grown out of it.

What should be noted is that while nontraditional students may no longer wish to have

the social aspects that younger, traditional students do, forensics offers those who do

want a bond to others on campus a great place to find that bond and a place for

socialization. Although I too had outgrown the traditional student social aspect, I really

enjoyed the bond that I developed with my coaches and teammates. I really felt wanted

and part of the team when I was invited to "hang out" with them or go to dinner and

lunches. I was often invited to far more social events than I cared to attend however. I

became concerned that my teammates would think I was aloof or did not want to spend

time with them if I did not attend their social gatherings. While I appreciated the

invitations, I had a partner to spend time with, homework and teaching to keep up with,

and most of all, I felt awkward and out of place hanging out with such a large and young

crowd. While my teammates did not necessarily think of me as "old" because I don't

project myself that way, I was well aware of the age difference and did not feel as

comfortable in social situations as I did in our more formal or professional situations that

involved forensics.

One reason for this may be the difference in maturity levels. This was also often

mentioned by my research participants. One participant explained that one negative thing

he experienced with his teammates was, "Being annoyed by the immaturity at times –

there were moments where I reacted very strongly, because I would forget that these were

truly 'kids' – not even old enough to drink yet, and would expect them to behave like 'adults'." Another participant shared his perception of team van rides, "They were acting very 'nerdlike' if you know what I mean; odd jokes and just weird mannerisms. I felt very distant from them." He went on to explain that:

> As a non-traditional student, one must be very patient and accepting of some of the immature behavior one will be exposed to. Forensic participants are by nature, unabashed. This combination can lead to bizarre behavior that seems to be accepted as normal to the other participants.

When I began forensics, I had already raised my children and I was an empty nester. While I really enjoy spending time with the forensic kids, I also realize that at times I am much less tolerant of their behavior because as a parent I have been away from it for a while. I have to remind myself that they are not my age and they are just young and full of life.

While the difference in maturity levels may be a concern for nontraditional students, the maturity displayed by nontraditional students can also have a positive impact. Some participants noted that coaches and teammates often placed more trust in the older students as well as being more likely to disclose to them. As one participant explained:

> I think they [coaches] enjoyed my maturity – it allowed me to be kind of a de factor leader, and was able to lead by example. Plus they loved that I was old enough to rent a car when we flew to nationals in a different state.

Another said, "My coach let me drive the van for most tournaments so he could get work

done. He didn't let any other student do that." While another explained that, "My coaches

tend to disclose more because they view me as more mature and on their level than my

teammates." I found that my teammates and coaches often talked to me about many

different issues. I think some of them thought of me as the person to go to for motherly

advice without the awkwardness of actually talking to their own mother. I think they

knew I had enough life experiences, both good and bad, that I could be a good sounding

board for their own life issues. I felt it was a great compliment that so many people felt

comfortable enough and trusted me enough to talk to me on such personal levels.

The largest theme that came out of our discussion concerning the nontraditional

experience was that surrounding work ethic. All of them spoke about how being an older

student was actually beneficial to them. While one participant noted that being an older

student was, "Perhaps a little harder. I just don't have as much energy as I used to. I have

a life to support. A job to maintain. ON TOP of all the homework I need to juggle into

the mix." She also explained on the positive side that:

> I have more experiences to draw from now, that can be applied to my
>
> work, and a different work ethic as well. Starting school up again is a little
>
> daunting. I'm afraid in my youth I may have quit, overwhelmed by all of
>
> my other classes. I may have dropped forensics to make time for
>
> myself…but as an adult I have a different mindset and determination to
>
> power through it.

Another participant stated that being a nontraditional student:

> Gave me a depth of experience (life experience) that really helped me
> succeed in ways that other students couldn't especially in balancing my
> forensics life, my academic life, and my work life (I worked 30-40 hours a
> week while doing all of this!). I saw lots of younger students burning out
> with half the workload I had, and I really chalk that up to my non-
> traditional status.

He went on to note that, "I think that age gives students a different perspective on life. As a 33 year old college student, I was much more focused than a lot of the students who were 17-18." He continued by explaining that, "I had been in the 'real world' and it sucked, and I was super focused to succeed. Many of my (much brighter and more talented) teammates flunked out because they lacked this perspective." One other participant said his experiences were, "much more positive since I was a non-traditional student. I enjoyed everything more since I knew what it had taken to get me there." He went on to explain that achieving his goals was easier because, "I had learned the value of hard work in the Navy. I had more experience to relate to my studies and forensics. I was able to do what I wanted."

I relate to all of these participants because it took many years and a lot of work to return to college. When I returned, I had a much greater appreciation for education and I was much more determined to succeed because the road to my return was not an easy one. As an older student, I had more focus on my studies and less on the social aspects than my traditional counterparts. I also brought with me more life experience that I could apply to concepts being discussed in class or on the forensic circuit. As an older student I

was also much more open to trying new things and getting the most out of my college experience. I also found that while I may have had more responsibilities to deal with outside of school than younger, traditional students, I also had far less drama to deal with in my life. Moving past this stage before going to college was a big factor in my success as a student and a forensic competitor.

The analysis of participant interviews show three larger categories: reasons to participate in forensics, conflicting emotions concerning participation, and the nontraditional experiences. Through their stories and my own we can see that students choose to participate in forensics in order to continue their high school forensic experience, to take advantage of what college has to offer, for the enjoyment of the activity, for success and competition, and/or for the camaraderie. While we may have experienced barriers to participation such as the difficulty in learning to navigate through the world or forensics, exclusionary language, and tensions relevant to generational differences, we all agreed that because of supportive teammates and coaches and an accepting forensic community we were able to continue our participation in forensics.

My participants and I also shared stories about our conflicting emotions concerning participation in forensics. Negative aspects that caused conflict included the difficulty in learning the forensic culture, norms, and procedures as well as dealing with personality clashes. Despite some negative aspects, we all agreed that there were many positive aspects surrounding forensics. We shared stories about our learning experiences, professional development, and interpersonal and personal development. Over all, my experiences and those of my participants all seem to point to very positive experiences in

collegiate forensics as well as in academics. Despite misgivings about being the oldest person in the classroom, or member of a forensic team, the benefits seem to outweigh the anxieties or negative aspects.

Finally, my participants and I discussed the most unique aspect of our situations: our nontraditional experience. We shared stories about the experience that comes with being a nontraditional student as well as the expectations that come along with being an older student, the maturity and socialization aspects of being an older member of a forensics team, as well as the work ethic nontraditional students have. The nontraditional student differs in many ways from their traditional counterparts. In the following chapter I will discuss the implications of nontraditional students in forensics and the classroom and how educators can create an inclusive environment for all students.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

Using autoethnography with participant interviews worked well to answer my research question concerning the participation of nontraditional students in forensics. The participants in my study viewed their forensic participation as positive as well as being an important aspect in their educational experience and for their future goals. Our stories illustrate the importance of the activity to students as well as the influence members have on each other. Our stories all highlight the importance of encouraging nontraditional students to participate in forensics. Nontraditional students often have more drive, desire, and focus than their traditional counterparts which allows for the possibility of higher retention rates of team members. The forensic community also offers a way for nontraditional students to connect to other students on campus when nontraditional students often feel disconnected from collegiate life. In this chapter, I will discuss conclusions drawn from my analysis of the data along with suggestions for how to improve the forensic experience for nontraditional students, limitations of this study, as well as areas of future research.

Conclusions

Forensic Involvement

When discussing why a person would invest the amount of time it takes to fully participate in forensics, issues regarding the development of skills, making the most of college, and the love of performing and competition were listed. We discussed forensics

as a learning opportunity with the ability to improve public speaking skills, writing skills, and critical thinking skills. These skills are not only important to forensics, but also in academics and employment. I argue that adult learners are more likely to succeed in these skills and in a quicker fashion than their traditional counterparts. Nontraditional students are more serious and more motivated because they have a specific reason to attend college. Subsequently, these students do not need much encouragement. They are self-motivated (Jinkins, 2009). Traditional students, in contrast, usually lack experience. They are often not able to understand complex/comprehensive issues as well as nontraditional students because of their lack of experience. Subsequently, they are less serious and less motivated because they do not understand the importance of things as much as the nontraditional, more experienced student (Jinkins, 2009). While forensics is a great educator for participants, the life experiences that nontraditional students bring with them to the activity may give them an added advantage for which traditional students will have to work harder and wait longer. This advantage may further a participant's skill development, success in the activity, and enjoyment of the activity. Along with the higher motivation that nontraditional students typically have, the likelihood of participant retention and recruitment of other nontraditional students may also increase.

Assimilation

My participants and I shared stories about the assimilations process into forensics and our initial feelings of joining. We all shared the feelings of being nervous, panicked, and apprehensive. Some of those feelings came from embarking on a journey into an activity with which we were unfamiliar. We were worried about having to learn new

rules and norms, the unwritten rules, and a new language used in this activity. Some of our apprehensions came from the fact that we were older than our teammates and in some cases even our coaches. We worried about our ability to fit in and be accepted. Adult students are potentially more vulnerable to difficulties in the management of these transitions because of their (often) minority status in higher education (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). Following any initial anxieties, most nontraditional students become more comfortable engaging in the practices of being a student. However, most of them revealed an awareness of the difference between being a student, in terms of just engaging in such practices, and really feeling like a student (O'Donnell & Tobbell, 2007). I argue that forensics offers a better opportunity for nontraditional students to connect more to their campus as well as members of the student body. Participants noted that despite their age or the amount of time they spent on campus, they felt highly connected to their forensic teammates. They were made to feel accepted, wanted, and integral members of the group. The integration of students into extracurricular and cocurricular activities, peer friendships on campus, and relationships with instructors outside of class was positively related to persistence in college (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Thus, forensics can offer students, both traditional and nontraditional, a place to become more integrated with their university as well as members of the student body, thereby giving students a better chance at remaining in school and achieving their desired degree. Because of previous research findings, it would be useful for university administrators to consider ways to enhance students' sense of belonging (Pittman & Richmond, 2008). Or if universities have programs, such as forensics, that are proven to enhance a student's

sense of belonging, then those programs must continue to be funded and promoted for the overall well being of the institution and its students.

Negative and Positive Aspects of Forensics

We shared stories about the time consuming, complex, and demanding nature of forensics as well as the difficulties in learning the culture as being negative attributes that may keep students from participating in forensics. In the case of time demands, older students often have work, family, and community responsibilities outside of the educational environment which makes it harder for them to attend college. Adult students also voice similar reasons for leaving higher education. According to one study, 44% of those who had withdrawn from a program cited a conflict between the time demands of a job and college, and 25% felt that family responsibilities were too great to devote enough time to studying (Spanard, 1990). Adding a cocurricular activity such as forensics to the demands of academics, work, and family responsibilities could increase stress levels of nontraditional students which are already reportedly higher than stress levels of traditional students (Chartrand, 1992).

As for the complex nature of forensics, navigating the norms, unwritten rules, and unique culture can be difficult and frustrating for any first time collegiate competitor. For nontraditional students already working to navigate the college campus culture, adding another new activity such as forensics can be difficult. For the majority of nontraditional students, difficulties lie in making the transition to a new teaching and learning environment which were often described as "learning shock" and a huge culture change. Not knowing what standards were expected, or how to undertake everyday learning

activities, are bewildering experiences for many of the students, because they no longer know how to participate successfully. For these students, the move into university disrupts their sense of being competent learners, because their learning environment is no longer familiar or negotiable. Instead they experience a crisis of confidence in a new context that felt unfathomable and alien to them (Christie, Tett, Cree, Hounsell, & McCune, 2008). Nontraditional students who are experiencing these feelings upon entering college, will often need to negotiate these feelings again when entering the forensic community. It is also possible that students may need to negotiate the newness of both cultures at the same time in the case of joining forensics during the first year of attending college.

In order for forensic programs to be more accommodating to new students, both traditional and nontraditional, a training program should be implemented that covers the intricacies of forensics. Unwritten rules, norms, and the language of forensics should be covered with new competitors in order to alleviate some of the stress and questions that many students have but are often unwilling to address on their own. Programs can also offer on-campus mock tournaments or mini tournaments for students that allow them to practice competing in a tournament setting for educational purposes before traveling to a "real" tournament in order to minimize some of the stress and anxiety that comes with tournament competition. Programs from different campuses could also collaborate to offer a novice tournament that would give new competitors a chance to attend a tournament with more equalized competition. Also, smaller one day tournaments like those hosted by the Twin Cities Forensic League (TCFL) are low-key tournaments that

are ideal for new competitors. For me, the TCFL tournaments were valuable tournaments in which I could easily navigate the forensic system, there was no overnight travel required so I did not have to be away from home or school for longer periods of time, the number of competitors was smaller so I felt less anxiety, and it was a great place to get my first "break" and motivate me to continue competing. Implementing these suggestions could help new competitors ease into the forensic community and help with the retention rates of new students.

While negative aspects were discussed by participants, it was also discussed that there were far more positive aspects in forensics that outweighed the negatives. We shared stories about our positive experiences that included our learning experiences, professional development, and personal and interpersonal development. Being involved in cocurricular activities is important for students to "supplement and enrich their development as persons within the educational environment" (Glass & Hodgin, 1977, p. 254). Since outside the classroom activities are a crucial aspect of every student's educational experience (Glass & Hodgin, 1997), it is important to create and maintain opportunities for students to participate in cocurricular activities. While some students may be able to devote enough time to participate fully on a forensic team, others, such as nontraditional students, may only have limited time to participate. It is therefore important for director's of forensics to create programs that can include limited participation team members. Programs should include smaller tournaments or on-campus tournaments that do not require travel time or the need to have multiple events in order to participate. When promoting forensics or working to recruit members, directors should

emphasize that all levels of participation are welcome and the benefits of forensic participation should be emphasized. Campus-wide recruitment will always be necessary for programs, however, specific recruitment should be implemented in specific departments. Recruitment should be emphasized with international centers, business colleges, and nontraditional centers on campuses in order to increase team diversity as well as promoting the program to students who may not otherwise know about the activity and its benefits. Increasing the diversity on a forensic team is beneficial to both the program and its members.

The Nontraditional Experience

My participants and I shared stories concerning the differences we felt as nontraditional students. We had both positive and negative experiences within academics as well as in our forensic communities. We discussed our apprehensions about being the oldest person in the classroom or on the team as well as anxieties about fitting in. We also shared stories of how, as nontraditional students, we are often more focused, have more experience, and more drive and motivation to succeed in school than our traditional counterparts do.

Adults are going to school in record numbers for additional education and training (Schaefer, 2010). Entering higher education can be a shock, accompanied by a sense of personal powerlessness. Evidence indicates that higher education is experienced in different ways than by standard 18 year-old entrants (Bowl, 2001). Adult learners are an underserved student population in that they negotiate a system of higher education that is geared toward traditional aged students (Schaefer, 2010). There are several differences

between traditional and nontraditional students. While traditional students are primarily students, returning students are not. The role of student has to take its place among other roles such as homemaker, parent, business person, volunteer, and a host of other roles. The broad range of differences between traditional and returning students centers around four main areas: life experience; motivation; academic behavior; and problems faced (Apps, 1981).

Anyone who has worked with returning students is immediately aware of the great wealth of experiences that adult learners bring to the classroom. Nontraditional students bring with them a much broader sense of what life's all about. Traditional students are more oriented toward taking tests. Returning students are much richer in terms of their personalities. They are more diverse in terms of class, social background, culture, and occupational experience. The traditional students have typically led cookie-cutter lives, and as students they are not as intrinsically interesting (Apps, 1981). As my participants indicated, life experience was beneficial to them both in the classroom and in forensic competition since they had more experiences upon which to draw and which to share with others.

The difference in motivation between the traditional and the nontraditional student is often related to the reason for being in school. Many traditional students are in school because their families expect them to be there, they haven't thought of any alternative to being in school, their friends are in college, and so on. For the nontraditional student the goal for being in school is usually much more clear, and thus the motivation is much more goal specific (Apps, 1981). Nontraditional students typically

enter higher education in order to gain employment, for a change in career, in order to gain job promotions, or to fulfill personal educational goals. My interview participants indicated that they were much more motivated to learn and succeed because they knew how much work it had taken them to get to college and/or because they were paying for college on their own.

Several differences are apparent when nontraditional and traditional students are compared in terms of academic behavior. The traditional student's learning approach is highly influenced by formal education while nontraditional students learning approach is more often influenced by informal education. Traditional students are well acquainted with academic rules, regulations, and campus routing. For nontraditional students the entire process of returning to campus can be a bewildering experience. Nontraditional students are serious students. They've allocated time and money to getting a degree or at least improving their marketability as a professional. Nontraditional students are more inclined to question material that is presented. They are more inclined to sort or filter material that is presented through their own life experience and reject or accept it on the basis of that kind of criteria (Apps, 1981). Participants discussed how they were often more focused on academics than their younger counterparts. They also noted that while they often did not feel connected to classmates socially, that was not their priority in school. Older students have outgrown this stage and are far more focused on their academics than the social aspects of college.

In addition to academically related problems that set nontraditional students apart from more traditional students, four major categories of problems faced by nontraditional

students can be identified: unrealistic goals; poor self-image; social-familial problems; and a sometimes excessive practical orientation (Apps, 1981). Some nontraditional students have unrealistic goals, especially those who have been out of school for a while. When a person returns to school and begins to discover that it's going to take much more time than originally anticipated, they are likely to modify their program because time is more important to them than it is to a younger person. Negative self-image is a problem for many nontraditional students as well. There is kind of a negative self-image that's been developed from years out of academia and now as they come back in to academia, they are wondering will I look dumb? Will I fail? Attention needs to be paid to helping nontraditional students build a positive self-image and giving them some success experiences early in their tenure as students. The most common nonacademic problem faced by nontraditional students has to do with changing life-styles and problems related to spouse and children. Most nontraditional students have been established for some period, carrying on careers and having a means of livelihood. Then they return to school and try to be a "real student" again and encounter a number of stresses in their home life. Nontraditional students have a wider variety of constraints than traditional students. They have other claims on their time and they move back and forth between these and that may produce considerable tension. Nontraditional students are serious and highly motivated. They also tend to be highly practical. They want to see a direct relationship of what they are studying to a possible career or job opportunity. Some returning students are in search of easy answers that appear to be practical and allow them to move forward in their studies (Apps, 1981).

Forensics offers an opportunity for nontraditional students to highlight their life experiences, a place where high motivation is rewarded, a place to apply their academic abilities, and to improve their self-image through competitive success and social bonding with other students. Forensics is a welcoming community that accepts all types of people with many different ideas. It allows for people to speak about any topic and allows them to promote issues that are important to them. Institutions of higher education need to create a similar environment for the growing number of nontraditional students on their campus. In the next section I discuss nontraditional students and their relationship with higher education.

Nontraditional Students and Higher Education

Established originally for the exclusive purpose of serving teenage youth, our institutions of higher education have in the recent past become institutions serving predominantly adult learners. As the pool of teenagers has begun to shrink, colleges and universities have aggressively been recruiting adults to maintain tuition income as a matter of economic survival. In this recruitment process, they have found the adult population most responsive, for in a world of accelerating change adults have become aware that higher education is a matter of survival for them too (Knowles, 1984).

Until fairly recently, there has been relatively little thinking, investigating, and writing about adult learning. This seems odd considering that the education of adults has been a concern for such a long time. Great teachers of ancient times perceived learning to be a process of mental inquiry, not passive reception of transmitted content. Because their experiences were with adults, they developed a very different concept of the

learning/teaching process from the one that later dominated formal education (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). It is perhaps a sad commentary that of all of our social institutions, higher education has been among the slowest to respond to adult learners (Knowles, 1984). Colleges and universities cannot continue with business-as-usual given the increasing number of nontraditional students working on undergraduate and graduate degrees.

Learning environments for nontraditional students must be thought of holistically; that is all that affects the lives of the student also affects them as learners. Educators cannot view nontraditional students in isolation from the rest of their lives. The learning environment for the nontraditional student is complex. It compels instructors and administrators first to be aware of the influences and, second, to work toward changing those influences that can be changed in a way that will enhance the learning environment. The learning environment for the nontraditional student included much more than student, teacher, classroom, and textbook (Apps, 1981).

As nontraditional students transition from work back to school, the process can create a large amount of stress. Consequently, nontraditional students often have complex support needs. Degree completion can be hampered by a lack of work-school-family balance and financial concerns. There are three primary functions of support for these transitions: affect (expressions of liking, admiration, respect, or love), affirmation (expressions of agreement or acknowledgement received from others), and aid (assistance in the form of money, time, and entitlements) (Schaefer, 2010). Family members often serve as mentors, encouraging students to start and/or finish school. However, if a

nontraditional student does not have that type of family support, a secondary source of affective support may come from traditional age students. While many nontraditional students feared returning to college partly because they may not fit in, most come to feel solidarity with traditional-age students who seem to like and respect them (Schaefer, 2010). Educators can also display this same type of affect behavior to all students with whom they are in contact.

A significant source of affirmation for nontraditional students is faculty members who acknowledge their assistance needs while transitioning back into college. Students may also be affirmed by a sense that faculty members appreciated the presence of adult learners in the classroom. Some students also view faculty as a key source of moral support and friendship (Schaefer, 2010). Positive, supportive relationships with faculty and traditional age students are important aspects of student affirmation.

Advisors also play a critical support role for students offering consistency and assistance. It is important for advisors to recognize the motivations of adult learners and respect their sense of urgency about degree completion. Nontraditional students are typically first generational students and have a need for accurate information about how the higher education process works. Advisors are instrumental in providing such information, thereby helping students overcome their fear of failure and isolation (Schaefer, 2010).

Other than providing support needs for students, educators can also become exemplary instructors for adult learners. Both younger and older students prefer instructors who are student-oriented. Both younger and older students prefer teachers

who are organized but not overly structured. The type of teaching strategy or method employed is highly related to student preferences. Student-oriented methods receive the highest marks by students. Apps (1981) describes exemplary instructors of adult learners as: more concerned about learners than about things and events (they believe it is important to help returning students find personal meaning in what they are studying and experiencing); knowing their subject matter; relating theory to practice in their own field and others; confident as instructors; open to a wide variety of teaching approaches; sharing their whole person; encouraging learning outcomes that go beyond objectives; and creating a positive atmosphere for learning.

Research regarding nontraditional students in higher education and specifically in the forensic culture will benefit more than the nontraditional students. Research focusing on forensic and higher education environments will benefit all students associated with forensics and the classroom. Students, instructors, organizations involved, and ultimately the student culture will all benefit from the creation of welcoming environments for nontraditional and many other students.

Limitations

Before I discuss areas for future research, I will review limitations that I encountered in my research process. Due to the nature of ethnography, autoethnography, and participant interviews, it is inevitable that limitations will be encountered. Limitations in my research include: the number of participants and underrepresented populations.

The first major limitation of the study was the number of participants who participated in the interviews. I was only able to get interviews from a total of six participants which seems like a very small number considering the number of forensic competitors that have participated. While the number of participants seems small in comparison, it may be that it is representative of the percentage of nontraditional students who actually participate since the majority of competitors are the typical traditional student.

The second major limitation was the underrepresentation of female participants and participants who were parents during their forensic career. Only two of the six participants were female thus limiting the perspective of women. While I can only speculate as to why so few women participated in the study, I believe it may be an indication of larger issues. It may be an issue that nontraditional female students do not have the same opportunities to partake in cocurricular activities as nontraditional male students due to a higher level of constraints at home that women often have. Another underrepresented group in the research was parents. None of the participants in my study were parents of minor children at the time they participated in forensics. Again, this may be due to the limitations of participating in cocurricular activities due to family constraints.

While I limited my nontraditional participant pool to those who were 25 years of age and older and/or the parents of minor children during their forensic participation because I felt these were the two highest barriers for forensic participation, it also proved to limit the number of research participants for this study. Of course this may also

establish that it is difficult for women with children to return to college and even more difficult for them to actively participate in collegiate activities such as forensics.

Despite the limitations that I encountered, I argue that my research shows that nontraditional students add value to college classrooms as well as to the forensic community. At the same time, nontraditional students can enhance their collegiate experience by participating in collegiate activities such as forensics.

Future Research

The implications of this study show that future research needs to focus on the strengths that nontraditional students add to the college classroom and to the forensic community. Research should focus on how more nontraditional students can be recruited into cocurricular activities in order to help both the activity thrive and help the integration of nontraditional students into the collegiate culture. Further research should also be conducted in order to see how colleges and collegiate organizations can create welcoming environments for the growing number of nontraditional students. Creating this kind of environment will not only offer nontraditional students a successful and positive college experience but will also do the same for the traditional student body. Studies that assess college stressors on nontraditional students need to be conducted in order to find ways to reduce the stressors often faced by this growing population of students. Research should also be conducted to compare the needs and barriers faced by male and female nontraditional students. This research would be important to find ways to help more women attend college and participate in more collegiate activities such as forensics. Another research area would be to see the correlation between students' participation in

cocurricular activities and grades and retention rates. This research is important to see if the participation of nontraditional students in activities such as forensics would contribute to students remaining in college.

Nontraditional students and forensic competitors need to continue sharing their stories to increase awareness for the importance of forensic participation as well as the benefits of having nontraditional members in the activity as well as on college campuses. Another research area to be considered is that of organizational loyalty, support, and belonging as it concerns attrition rates. Previous studies (Adler & Adler, 1988; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Chartrand, 1992; Pittman & Richmond, 2008) have looked at how feelings of belonging, support, and loyalty can lessen attrition rates of students. However, these are older studies that need to be updated in order to take into account the changing college demographics. Nontraditional students may benefit from activities such as forensics that offers its members support, a sense of belonging, and loyalty to the team as well as the university.

It is important for me, as a nontraditional student, to have college administrators and student bodies know that older students have a great deal to offer to their communities and their institutions of higher education and that their participation should be both welcomed and encouraged.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

Interview Consent Form
Nontraditional Students Participating in College Forensics

You are being asked to participate in a research study concerning nontraditional student competitors in college forensics. You are being asked to participate in an interview asking about your current or former participation in college forensics. You will be asked questions about your age, your working status, if you have/had children while a participant in college forensics, and about your experiences while participating in college forensics. The interview, which will be audio recorded and/or recorded through printed documentation through email, is anticipated to last approximately 60 minutes. Your participation will be kept anonymous and can be terminated at any time during the study without penalty. You have the right to refuse to answer any question(s) at any time during the interview without penalty. All documentation of your interviews, including audio recordings, emails, and transcriptions will be kept in a locked cabinet in the possession of the primary researcher for three years after which time the documents will be destroyed (shredded and/or erased).

Your participation is strictly voluntary and there will be no compensation for your participation and no penalty for not participating or stopping participation any time during the research process. The researcher anticipates less than minimal physical or emotional risks to participants. The benefits of participating include the ability for those who participate to give voice to nontraditional students both those who participate in forensics and those who do not. A second potential benefit is to the forensic community as a whole. The research conducted along with the personal interviews may, in the long run, help the forensic community understand the needs of nontraditional students and make positive changes to their programs to benefit more student participants.

If you have any questions about the study you may contact Laura Pelletier by calling 507-304-5077, emailing laura.pelletier@mnsu.edu, or writing to 25 Eginton Road, Mankato, MN 56001 at any time. You may also contact Leah White by calling 507-389-5534 or emailing leah.white@mnsu.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), contact: MSU IRB Administrator Minnesota State University, Mankato, Institutional Review Board, 115 Alumni Foundation, (507) 389-2321.

By signing this form you consent to being interviewed for this study and consent to the researcher using the information and direct quotations you provide in the published results of the study (your name and any other identifying information will be kept confidential).

I have read the above information and understand that this survey is voluntary and I may stop at any time. I consent to participate in the study.

Name (Print):_____
Signature:_____ Date:_____

APPENDIX B

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS:

1. Tell me your name, year in college, and how long you have/did you participate in
   college forensics.

2. Did you participate in forensics in high school? Why or why not? If yes, how long did
   you participate in high school?

3. What are/were your reasons for participating in forensics in college?

4. What keeps/kept you involved in college forensics?

5. Describe your initial feelings and experiences when you started college forensics.

6. How do/did you feel about being a nontraditional student on the team?

7. What were your team mates' reactions to your joining?

8. What were your coaches' reactions to your joining?

9. Describe your most memorable positive interactions, if any, with your team mates.

10. Describe your most memorable negative interactions, if any, with your team mates.

11. Describe your most memorable positive interactions, if any, with your coaches.

12. Describe your most memorable negative interactions, if any, with your coaches.

13. Describe your experiences regarding the process of assimilation into college forensics.

14. Do you feel your experiences would have been better, worse, or different if you had not been a nontraditional student? How and why?

15. What are/were your personal goals in forensics and have/did you accomplish them?

16. Do you think it is/was easier or harder to accomplish your goals because you are a nontraditional student? Why?

17. Do you have any advice for new forensic participants about the activity or assimilating into college forensics?

18. How would you describe the activity of forensics to others?

19. Is there anything you would like to change about the activity or the process of adapting to the forensic culture?

20. Is there anything that I may have missed that you would like to tell me about?

APPENDIX C

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION, NCES REPORTS

National Center for Education Statistics

Table 13. Actual and high alternative projected numbers for total enrollment in all degree-granting institutions, by sex, age, and attendance status: Selected years, fall 1998 through fall 2018

[In thousands]

Sex, age, and attendance status	Actual			Projected (high alternative)	
	1998	2003	2007	2013	2018
Total enrollment	**14,507**	**16,911**	**18,248**	**20,338**	**21,341**
14 to 17 years old	119	150	179	146	166
18 and 19 years old	3,382	3,479	3,978	4,179	4,337
20 and 21 years old	2,811	3,472	3,761	4,292	4,278
22 to 24 years old	2,377	3,482	3,362	3,862	3,949
25 to 29 years old	1,991	2,107	2,522	2,884	3,198
30 to 34 years old	1,195	1,369	1,428	1,764	1,914
35 years old and over	2,632	2,853	3,017	3,212	3,499
Men	**6,369**	**7,260**	**7,816**	**8,505**	**8,671**
14 to 17 years old	45	60	75	75	82
18 and 19 years old	1,535	1,557	1,805	1,798	1,818
20 and 21 years old	1,374	1,491	1,633	1,857	1,805
22 to 24 years old	1,127	1,605	1,551	1,727	1,702
25 to 29 years old	908	930	1,020	1,159	1,267
30 to 34 years old	463	592	659	781	827
35 years old and over	917	1,025	1,074	1,108	1,171
Women	**8,138**	**9,651**	**10,432**	**11,833**	**12,670**
14 to 17 years old	74	91	104	71	84
18 and 19 years old	1,847	1,921	2,173	2,381	2,519
20 and 21 years old	1,437	1,981	2,129	2,435	2,474
22 to 24 years old	1,250	1,877	1,811	2,134	2,248
25 to 29 years old	1,083	1,177	1,502	1,725	1,932
30 to 34 years old	732	777	770	983	1,086
35 years old and over	1,715	1,828	1,943	2,104	2,328
Full-time, total	**8,563**	**10,326**	**11,270**	**12,707**	**13,438**
14 to 17 years old	93	120	153	104	120
18 and 19 years old	2,794	2,953	3,379	3,584	3,772
20 and 21 years old	2,271	2,766	3,021	3,488	3,540
22 to 24 years old	1,564	2,144	2,133	2,487	2,618
25 to 29 years old	890	1,072	1,263	1,440	1,606
30 to 34 years old	367	512	549	703	775
35 years old and over	584	758	772	903	1,006
Men	**3,934**	**4,638**	**5,029**	**5,450**	**5,601**
14 to 17 years old	39	50	58	54	60
18 and 19 years old	1,240	1,307	1,532	1,531	1,562
20 and 21 years old	1,129	1,218	1,344	1,532	1,505
22 to 24 years old	777	1,041	1,007	1,127	1,132
25 to 29 years old	424	503	585	621	697
30 to 34 years old	141	242	228	283	311
35 years old and over	184	277	275	303	334
Women	**4,630**	**5,688**	**6,240**	**7,257**	**7,836**
14 to 17 years old	54	71	95	49	60
18 and 19 years old	1,555	1,645	1,847	2,054	2,211
20 and 21 years old	1,142	1,548	1,677	1,956	2,035
22 to 24 years old	787	1,103	1,127	1,360	1,487
25 to 29 years old	466	569	678	819	909
30 to 34 years old	226	270	320	420	464
35 years old and over	400	482	497	600	672
Part-time, total	**5,944**	**6,585**	**6,978**	**7,630**	**7,904**
14 to 17 years old	26	30	26	43	46
18 and 19 years old	588	526	600	595	565
20 and 21 years old	540	706	740	804	739
22 to 24 years old	813	1,338	1,229	1,375	1,331
25 to 29 years old	1,101	1,035	1,259	1,445	1,592
30 to 34 years old	828	856	880	1,061	1,138
35 years old and over	2,048	2,094	2,245	2,309	2,493
Men	**2,436**	**2,622**	**2,786**	**3,054**	**3,070**
14 to 17 years old	5	10	17	21	22
18 and 19 years old	296	250	273	267	256
20 and 21 years old	245	274	288	324	300
22 to 24 years old	350	564	544	601	570
25 to 29 years old	485	427	435	538	569
30 to 34 years old	322	350	430	498	516
35 years old and over	733	748	799	805	837
Women	**3,508**	**3,963**	**4,192**	**4,576**	**4,834**
14 to 17 years old	21	20	9	22	24
18 and 19 years old	292	276	327	328	308
20 and 21 years old	295	433	452	479	439
22 to 24 years old	463	774	685	774	761
25 to 29 years old	617	608	824	906	1,023
30 to 34 years old	506	507	449	563	622
35 years old and over	1,315	1,346	1,446	1,504	1,656

NOTE: Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding. Some data have been revised from previously published figures. Data by age are based on the distribution by age from the Census Bureau. Mean absolute percentage errors of selected education statistics can be found in table A-2, appendix A.

SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, "Fall Enrollment Survey" (IPEDS-EF:98), Spring 2004 and Spring 2008; Enrollment in Degree-Granting Institutions Model, 1973–2007; and U.S. Department of Commerce, Census Bureau, Current Population Reports, "Social and Economic Characteristics of Students," various years. (This table was prepared January 2009.)

Table 11. Actual and middle alternative projected numbers for total enrollment in all degree-granting postsecondary institutions, by sex, age, and attendance status: Fall 1989 to fall 2014

[In thousands]

Sex, age, and attendance status	Actual												
	1989	1990	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001
Total enrollment	13,539	13,819	14,359	14,486	14,305	14,279	14,262	14,368	14,502	14,507	14,791	15,312	15,928
14 to 17 years old	185	177	125	186	127	138	148	231	171	119	143	145	133
18 and 19 years old	3,041	2,950	2,864	2,784	2,840	2,787	2,894	3,038	3,061	3,382	3,414	3,531	3,595
20 and 21 years old	2,550	2,761	2,920	2,883	2,674	2,724	2,705	2,659	2,875	2,811	2,989	3,045	3,408
22 to 24 years old	2,185	2,144	2,306	2,527	2,570	2,482	2,411	2,324	2,475	2,377	2,435	2,617	2,760
25 to 29 years old	1,979	1,982	2,072	1,985	2,002	1,985	2,120	2,128	1,999	1,991	1,870	1,960	2,014
30 to 34 years old	1,305	1,322	1,415	1,456	1,345	1,414	1,236	1,196	1,109	1,195	1,145	1,265	1,290
35 years old and over	2,293	2,484	2,656	2,665	2,747	2,750	2,747	2,791	2,814	2,632	2,796	2,749	2,727
Men	6,190	6,284	6,502	6,524	6,427	6,372	6,343	6,353	6,396	6,369	6,491	6,722	6,961
14 to 17 years old	77	87	50	89	54	62	61	92	56	45	72	63	54
18 and 19 years old	1,433	1,421	1,299	1,305	1,288	1,302	1,338	1,354	1,414	1,535	1,541	1,583	1,629
20 and 21 years old	1,261	1,368	1,387	1,342	1,284	1,264	1,282	1,228	1,374	1,374	1,392	1,382	1,591
22 to 24 years old	1,084	1,107	1,232	1,272	1,344	1,238	1,153	1,177	1,200	1,127	1,090	1,293	1,312
25 to 29 years old	993	940	1,049	955	903	936	962	991	972	908	874	862	905
30 to 34 years old	562	537	614	627	584	601	561	477	443	463	517	527	510
35 years old and over	782	824	870	933	970	969	986	1,033	938	917	1,005	1,012	961
Women	7,349	7,535	7,857	7,963	7,877	7,907	7,919	8,015	8,106	8,138	8,301	8,591	8,967
14 to 17 years old	108	90	76	97	73	75	87	139	115	74	72	82	79
18 and 19 years old	1,608	1,529	1,565	1,479	1,552	1,485	1,557	1,684	1,647	1,847	1,874	1,948	1,966
20 and 21 years old	1,290	1,392	1,533	1,541	1,391	1,461	1,424	1,430	1,501	1,437	1,597	1,663	1,817
22 to 24 years old	1,101	1,037	1,074	1,255	1,226	1,243	1,258	1,147	1,275	1,250	1,344	1,324	1,448
25 to 29 years old	986	1,043	1,022	1,030	1,098	1,049	1,159	1,137	1,027	1,083	995	1,099	1,110
30 to 34 years old	743	784	800	828	761	812	675	719	666	732	627	738	780
35 years old and over	1,511	1,659	1,786	1,732	1,777	1,781	1,760	1,758	1,877	1,715	1,791	1,736	1,767
Full-time, total	7,661	7,821	8,115	8,161	8,128	8,138	8,129	8,303	8,438	8,563	8,786	9,010	9,448
14 to 17 years old	154	144	117	179	92	118	123	166	123	93	129	125	122
18 and 19 years old	2,671	2,548	2,466	2,382	2,370	2,321	2,387	2,534	2,534	2,794	2,848	2,932	2,929
20 and 21 years old	2,064	2,151	2,342	2,267	2,148	2,178	2,109	2,117	2,275	2,271	2,362	2,401	2,662
22 to 24 years old	1,300	1,350	1,467	1,594	1,612	1,551	1,517	1,598	1,606	1,564	1,662	1,653	1,757
25 to 29 years old	667	770	830	731	839	869	908	911	897	890	854	878	883
30 to 34 years old	332	387	382	409	424	440	430	383	377	367	338	422	494
35 years old and over	474	471	513	598	643	660	653	575	626	584	593	599	602
Men	3,740	3,808	3,929	3,926	3,891	3,855	3,807	3,851	3,890	3,934	4,026	4,111	4,300
14 to 17 years old	60	71	41	86	37	51	54	72	48	39	63	51	43
18 and 19 years old	1,289	1,230	1,141	1,130	1,079	1,081	1,091	1,126	1,154	1,240	1,271	1,250	1,329
20 and 21 years old	1,017	1,055	1,103	1,084	1,003	1,029	999	969	1,074	1,129	1,125	1,106	1,249
22 to 24 years old	696	742	817	854	896	811	789	858	770	777	788	839	854
25 to 29 years old	366	401	465	378	443	457	454	444	475	424	416	415	397
30 to 34 years old	151	156	174	174	180	193	183	143	160	141	149	195	216
35 years old and over	162	152	187	220	253	232	238	240	210	184	213	256	212
Women	3,921	4,013	4,186	4,235	4,237	4,283	4,321	4,452	4,548	4,630	4,761	4,899	5,148
14 to 17 years old	93	73	76	93	55	67	69	95	75	54	66	74	78
18 and 19 years old	1,383	1,318	1,325	1,253	1,291	1,240	1,296	1,426	1,380	1,555	1,577	1,682	1,600
20 and 21 years old	1,047	1,096	1,239	1,183	1,145	1,149	1,111	1,148	1,201	1,142	1,237	1,296	1,413
22 to 24 years old	604	608	650	739	716	740	729	740	836	787	875	814	903
25 to 29 years old	301	369	364	353	396	412	455	467	422	466	437	463	486
30 to 34 years old	182	231	208	235	244	247	247	240	217	226	190	227	277
35 years old and over	311	319	325	377	390	428	415	336	416	400	380	343	390
Part-time, total	5,878	5,998	6,244	6,325	6,177	6,141	6,133	6,065	6,064	5,944	6,005	6,303	6,480
14 to 17 years old	32	32	9	7	35	19	25	65	48	26	14	20	11
18 and 19 years old	370	402	399	402	470	466	507	485	526	588	566	599	666
20 and 21 years old	487	610	578	616	526	546	596	542	600	540	627	644	746
22 to 24 years old	885	794	840	933	958	930	894	727	869	813	772	964	1,003
25 to 29 years old	1,312	1,213	1,242	1,254	1,163	1,116	1,212	1,217	1,101	1,101	1,016	1,083	1,132
30 to 34 years old	973	935	1,033	1,046	921	973	805	813	732	828	806	843	796
35 years old and over	1,819	2,012	2,143	2,068	2,104	2,091	2,093	2,216	2,188	2,048	2,203	2,150	2,126
Men	2,450	2,476	2,572	2,597	2,537	2,517	2,535	2,502	2,506	2,436	2,465	2,611	2,661
14 to 17 years old	17	16	9	4	17	11	7	20	9	5	8	11	11
18 and 19 years old	144	191	158	176	210	220	246	228	260	296	269	333	300
20 and 21 years old	244	313	285	258	281	235	283	260	300	245	267	276	342
22 to 24 years old	388	365	415	417	448	427	365	319	430	350	302	454	458
25 to 29 years old	627	539	584	577	460	479	508	547	497	485	458	447	508
30 to 34 years old	411	381	440	453	404	408	378	334	283	322	369	332	294
35 years old and over	619	672	682	713	717	737	748	793	728	733	791	757	749
Women	3,428	3,521	3,671	3,728	3,640	3,624	3,598	3,563	3,559	3,508	3,540	3,692	3,820
14 to 17 years old	15	17	0	3	18	8	18	45	39	21	6	9	1
18 and 19 years old	226	211	241	226	261	245	261	257	267	292	297	266	366
20 and 21 years old	243	297	294	358	245	311	313	282	300	295	360	368	404
22 to 24 years old	497	429	425	516	510	504	529	407	439	463	470	510	545
25 to 29 years old	685	674	658	677	702	637	704	670	605	617	558	636	624
30 to 34 years old	562	554	593	593	517	565	427	479	449	506	438	511	502
35 years old and over	1,200	1,340	1,461	1,355	1,386	1,354	1,345	1,423	1,460	1,315	1,411	1,393	1,377

See notes at end of table.

Table 200. Total fall enrollment in degree-granting institutions, by level of enrollment, sex, age, and attendance status of student: 2007 and 2009

Age of student and attendance status	Fall 2007 All levels			Fall 2009 All levels			Undergraduate			Postbaccalaureate		
	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females	Total	Males	Females
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
All students ...	18,248,128	7,815,914	10,432,214	20,427,711	8,769,504	11,658,207	17,565,320	7,595,481	9,969,839	2,862,391	1,174,023	1,688,368
Under 18	668,426	277,582	390,844	757,239	314,150	443,089	756,952	314,045	442,907	287	105	182
18 and 19	3,963,371	1,794,001	2,169,370	4,300,248	1,946,838	2,353,410	4,298,311	1,946,160	2,352,151	1,937	678	1,259
20 and 21	3,642,872	1,647,492	1,995,380	4,003,222	1,814,622	2,188,600	3,971,829	1,802,523	2,169,306	31,393	12,099	19,294
22 to 24	3,009,713	1,381,504	1,628,209	3,315,227	1,520,388	1,794,839	2,725,760	1,282,572	1,443,188	589,467	237,816	351,651
25 to 29	2,550,482	1,091,510	1,458,972	2,961,851	1,277,580	1,684,271	2,044,157	881,057	1,163,100	917,694	396,523	521,171
30 to 34	1,365,912	551,208	814,704	1,635,355	663,459	971,896	1,177,534	457,992	719,542	457,821	205,467	252,354
35 to 39	980,818	368,814	612,004	1,128,666	426,387	702,279	841,719	305,628	536,091	286,947	120,759	166,188
40 to 49	1,266,171	423,603	842,568	1,449,671	498,553	951,118	1,097,374	371,599	725,775	352,297	126,954	225,343
50 to 64	627,603	208,067	419,536	734,572	247,034	487,538	536,289	184,110	352,179	198,283	62,924	135,359
65 and over	77,379	31,040	46,339	69,844	29,251	40,593	61,650	25,505	36,145	8,194	3,746	4,448
Age unknown	95,381	41,093	54,288	71,816	31,242	40,574	53,745	24,290	29,455	18,071	6,952	11,119
Full-time	11,269,892	5,029,444	6,240,448	12,722,782	5,670,644	7,052,138	11,143,499	4,976,727	6,166,772	1,579,283	693,917	885,366
Under 18	171,784	69,033	102,751	177,445	71,603	105,842	177,332	71,566	105,766	113	37	76
18 and 19	3,383,318	1,522,297	1,861,021	3,640,621	1,636,522	2,004,099	3,638,867	1,635,905	2,002,962	1,754	617	1,137
20 and 21	2,964,697	1,346,897	1,617,800	3,249,604	1,477,485	1,772,119	3,221,556	1,466,453	1,755,103	28,048	11,032	17,016
22 to 24	1,986,776	949,700	1,037,076	2,198,573	1,047,143	1,151,430	1,737,688	855,243	882,445	460,885	191,900	268,985
25 to 29	1,284,698	584,798	699,900	1,540,444	705,203	835,241	980,396	444,069	536,327	560,048	261,134	298,914
30 to 34	565,710	235,321	330,389	725,901	304,439	421,462	505,141	197,344	307,797	220,760	107,095	113,665
35 to 39	347,864	130,397	217,467	447,946	169,775	278,171	332,217	118,170	214,047	115,729	51,605	64,124
40 to 49	380,043	125,982	254,061	501,869	173,301	328,568	379,205	126,766	252,439	122,664	46,535	76,129
50 to 64	145,757	47,812	97,945	207,365	70,665	136,700	145,838	50,045	95,793	61,527	20,620	40,907
65 and over	4,868	2,260	2,608	6,642	2,871	3,771	4,378	1,853	2,525	2,264	1,018	1,246
Age unknown ...	34,377	14,947	19,430	26,372	11,637	14,735	20,881	9,313	11,568	5,491	2,324	3,167
Part-time	6,978,236	2,786,470	4,191,766	7,704,929	3,098,860	4,606,069	6,421,821	2,618,754	3,803,067	1,283,108	480,106	803,002
Under 18	496,642	208,549	288,093	579,794	242,547	337,247	579,620	242,479	337,141	174	68	106
18 and 19	580,053	271,704	308,349	659,627	310,316	349,311	659,444	310,255	349,189	183	61	122
20 and 21	678,175	300,595	377,580	753,618	337,137	416,481	750,273	336,070	414,203	3,345	1,067	2,278
22 to 24	1,022,937	431,804	591,133	1,116,654	473,245	643,409	988,072	427,329	560,743	128,582	45,916	82,666
25 to 29	1,265,784	506,712	759,072	1,421,407	572,377	849,030	1,063,761	436,988	626,773	357,646	135,389	222,257
30 to 34	800,202	315,887	484,315	909,454	359,020	550,434	672,393	260,648	411,745	237,061	98,372	138,689
35 to 39	632,954	238,417	394,537	680,720	256,612	424,108	509,502	187,458	322,044	171,218	69,154	102,064
40 to 49	886,128	297,621	588,507	947,802	325,252	622,550	718,169	244,833	473,336	229,633	80,419	149,214
50 to 64	481,846	160,255	321,591	527,207	176,369	350,838	390,451	134,065	256,386	136,756	42,304	94,452
65 and over	72,511	28,780	43,731	63,202	26,380	36,822	57,272	23,652	33,620	5,930	2,728	3,202
Age unknown ...	61,004	26,146	34,858	45,444	19,605	25,839	32,864	14,977	17,887	12,580	4,628	7,952
	Percentage distribution											
All students ...	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 18	3.7	3.6	3.7	3.7	3.6	3.8	4.3	4.1	4.4	#	#	#
18 and 19	21.7	23.0	20.8	21.1	22.2	20.2	24.5	25.6	23.6	0.1	0.1	0.1
20 and 21	20.0	21.1	19.1	19.6	20.7	18.8	22.6	23.7	21.8	1.1	1.0	1.1
22 to 24	16.5	17.7	15.6	16.2	17.3	15.4	15.5	16.9	14.5	20.6	20.3	20.8
25 to 29	14.0	14.0	14.0	14.5	14.6	14.4	11.6	11.6	11.7	32.1	33.8	30.9
30 to 34	7.5	7.1	7.8	8.0	7.6	8.3	6.7	6.0	7.2	16.0	17.5	14.9
35 to 39	5.4	4.7	5.9	5.5	4.9	6.0	4.8	4.0	5.4	10.0	10.3	9.8
40 to 49	6.9	5.4	8.1	7.1	5.7	8.2	6.2	4.9	7.3	12.3	10.8	13.3
50 to 64	3.4	2.7	4.0	3.6	2.8	4.2	3.1	2.4	3.5	6.9	5.4	8.0
65 and over	0.4	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3
Age unknown	0.5	0.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.6	0.6	0.7
Full-time	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 18	1.5	1.4	1.6	1.4	1.3	1.5	1.6	1.4	1.7	#	#	#
18 and 19	30.0	30.3	29.8	28.6	28.9	28.4	32.7	32.9	32.5	0.1	0.1	0.1
20 and 21	26.3	26.8	25.9	25.5	26.1	25.1	28.9	29.5	28.5	1.8	1.6	1.9
22 to 24	17.6	18.9	16.6	17.3	18.5	16.3	15.6	17.2	14.3	29.2	27.7	30.4
25 to 29	11.4	11.6	11.2	12.1	12.4	11.8	8.8	8.9	8.7	35.5	37.6	33.8
30 to 34	5.0	4.7	5.3	5.7	5.4	6.0	4.5	4.0	5.0	14.0	15.4	12.8
35 to 39	3.1	2.6	3.5	3.5	3.0	3.9	3.0	2.4	3.5	7.3	7.4	7.2
40 to 49	3.4	2.5	4.1	3.9	3.1	4.7	3.4	2.5	4.1	7.8	6.7	8.6
50 to 64	1.3	1.0	1.6	1.6	1.2	1.9	1.3	1.0	1.6	3.9	3.0	4.6
65 and over	#	#	#	0.1	0.1	0.1	#	#	#	0.1	0.1	0.1
Age unknown ...	0.3	0.3	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.3	0.4
Part-time	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Under 18	7.1	7.5	6.9	7.5	7.8	7.3	9.0	9.3	8.9	#	#	#
18 and 19	8.3	9.8	7.4	8.6	10.0	7.6	10.3	11.8	9.2	#	#	#
20 and 21	9.7	10.8	9.0	9.8	10.9	9.0	11.7	12.8	10.9	0.3	0.2	0.3
22 to 24	14.7	15.5	14.1	14.5	15.3	14.0	15.4	16.3	14.7	10.0	9.6	10.3
25 to 29	18.1	18.2	18.1	18.4	18.5	18.4	16.6	16.7	16.5	27.9	28.2	27.7
30 to 34	11.5	11.3	11.6	11.8	11.6	12.0	10.5	10.0	10.8	18.5	20.5	17.3
35 to 39	9.1	8.6	9.4	8.8	8.3	9.2	7.9	7.2	8.5	13.3	14.4	12.7
40 to 49	12.7	10.7	14.0	12.3	10.5	13.5	11.2	9.3	12.4	17.9	16.8	18.6
50 to 64	6.9	5.8	7.7	6.8	5.7	7.6	6.1	5.1	6.7	10.7	8.8	11.8
65 and over	1.0	1.0	1.0	0.8	0.9	0.8	0.9	0.9	0.9	0.5	0.6	0.4
Age unknown ...	0.9	0.9	0.8	0.6	0.6	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.5	1.0	1.0	1.0

#Rounds to zero.
NOTE: Degree-granting institutions grant associate's or higher degrees and participate in Title IV federal financial aid programs. Detail may not sum to totals because of rounding.
SOURCE: U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2007 and 2009 Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS), Spring 2007 and 2009. (This table was prepared September 2010.)