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## Perceptions of College Readiness and Social Capital of GED completers in entry-level college courses

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Perceptions of College Readiness and Social Capital of GED completers in entry-level  
college courses

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Graduate Faculty of the  
University of New Orleans  
In partial fulfillment of the  
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy  
In  
Educational Administration

by

Donalyn Leufroy Lott

B.S., Xavier University of Louisiana, 1986  
M.A., Xavier University of Louisiana, 2001

May 2012

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## **Abstract**

Examining the efficacy of literacy improvement, general education development (GED) completion, and GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital was the purpose of this study. The participant sample ( $n=321$ ), derived from the target population ( $N=1050$ ), consisted of former participants of Adult Literacy Education (ALE)/GED programs in the Greater New Orleans area (GNO), who have earned the GED credential, and, are currently enrolled in entry-level courses at two community colleges in Southeast Louisiana; specifically, in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes. The study was framed by the social capital theoretical perspective.

The study used quantitative methodology, with a descriptive, cross-sectional research design. Specific quantitative analyses were employed including; descriptive statistics which were used to characterize the sample and to describe the features of the data; preliminary analysis using principal axis factoring (PAF), to determine survey items that cluster together and to identify relevant factors that influence perceptions of college readiness and social capital; Cronbach's alpha, to test internal consistency and reliability of the survey instrument; regression analysis, to investigate the relationships between GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital and their literacy level; and finally, a one-way ANOVA, to compare the means of groups within literacy levels. Using a researcher-created survey instrument with a Likert scale rating of 1-4, perceptions of college readiness and social capital of GED completers were assessed. A field test of 10 participants and an expert panel review ensured validity and reliability of the instrument. The results of this study could serve as a framework for strategic planning of ALE/GED programs, ALE/GED curriculum alignment with

high school content and entry-level introductory or developmental college courses, and post-secondary (community college) recruitment endeavors.

Keywords: community involvement, functionally illiterate, human capital, life-long learning, literacy

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

Literate adults contribute economic, political, social and cultural elements to communities and society. Adults in the United States are expected to successfully perform literacy tasks in order to adequately function, that is, to meet personal and employment goals as well as contribute to the community (White & Dillow, 2005). Even the most basic jobs in the United States today, for example, require workers to speak in English so others can understand them, to use basic math skills to solve problems, to be able to use a computer and other electronic equipment, and to have the ability to follow basic work procedures; these requirements often pose a barrier to employment and community involvement for adults with limited literacy skills.

All levels of the educational enterprise, K-12 through higher education, have been criticized for the inability to assure that students reach proficiency in these fundamental and workforce skills (Louisiana Board of Regents (LBOR) & Louisiana Department of Education (LDOE), 2001). Adult literacy is the foundation of learning and knowing for personal growth and self-fulfillment of adults. Varied types and levels of adult literacy reflect how an individual performs multiple tasks that differ in complexity, situations, and purpose. Communities have a stake in the literacy capabilities of their citizens because literate adults are able to participate more fully in the life of their community and contribute to its economic, social, and educational health (Fingeret, 1992).

Learning opportunities in K-12 are enhanced by teaching strategies and educational policies that provide opportunities for learners of all ages. Sadly, many individuals are unable to manage and endure the K-12 experience for many reasons such as learning disabilities,

behavioral issues, educational apathy, and generational illiteracy. According to Johns, Morphet, and Alexander (1983) the intergenerational effect can be understood as a process whereby the quality of life of children whose parents have attended college and value education is transmitted between generations. This is not always true, given that some individuals decide to attend college in order to “break the cycle.” The transition into school and the experience in schooling have a reciprocal impact on the intergenerational effect (Freeman, 2006).

The decision to leave or drop out of school occurs far too frequently. Nationwide, nearly one in three high school students drop out before graduating (United States Department of Education (USDOE, 2000). In Louisiana, with a 10% dropout rate, the statistics are even more disheartening; Louisiana ranked 35<sup>th</sup> in the nation, with a graduation rate of 69%. (USDOE, 2000). Regardless of the dropout rate, any failure to earn a high school diploma should cause concern. A high school diploma or its equivalent is understood to be the minimum education level needed for full and productive participation in society. Dropouts more often have minimum academic skills to function in today’s society, are more likely to be unemployed, live in poverty, receive government assistance and be involved in crime (Laird, Kienzl, DeBell, & Chapman, 2007). Increases in crime rates in communities with less-educated populations are also associated with under-utilization of human potential and human capital and, therefore, increased costs to society (Freeman, 2006).

Subsequently, many dropouts choose to obtain a GED certificate later in life. The 2000 U.S. census reported that 18% of the entire adult population in the nation did not have a high school diploma; of this number, it was estimated that approximately 15% earned a GED certificate. According to the Adult and Family Literacy Initiative (AFLI) (2001), there is a critical need for adult basic education (ABE) services in Louisiana; a lack of basic skills is a

principal barrier to obtaining vocational training at the state's community and technical colleges (Miller, 2004). The AFLI designed a program called Partnerships for Literacy that serves as a bridge to allow low-literate adults in Louisiana an opportunity to improve their basic education, by earning a GED, and have options to subsequently enroll in a Louisiana community or technical college program (Miller, 2004). Unfortunately, many individuals who qualify for this program are reluctant to or have no interest in improving basic skills. Others are apprehensive because they do not consider college as a foreseeable option. The hope is that the state of Louisiana can get to a point where students need less remedial/developmental education, thus allowing them to concentrate on earning portable college credits and industry based certification in a timely manner (LBOR & LDOE, 2011).

More recently, the 2011 Louisiana legislature passed Act 187 that recognized that Louisiana must greatly increase the numbers of its citizens who hold a post-secondary education credential by creating an environment supportive to educational engagement in lifelong learning (LBOR & LDOE, 2011). Individuals who are adaptable to changing skills, understanding of techniques of lifelong learning, and acutely aware of technology are what all societies will increasingly require (Freeman, 2006). In a study by Tyler et al. (2000), it was reported that acquisition of a GED could lead to higher average levels of human capital through increased access to post-secondary education and training programs.

While many researchers have examined the high school to 4-year college transition; few have examined the high school to community college transition. Fewer still, have examined the transition experiences of GED completers who have participated in an adult literacy education (ALE) program and have decided to continue their learning in post-secondary education on a community college campus; thus the need for this study. In recent years, community colleges

have become a more viable option for GED completers, as well as high school graduates, due to the outcry for school reform. Many local school districts and college systems have championed this educational pathway to help improve the overall educational terrain. The Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) has a plan to prepare to become the state's primary provider of developmental education services for adults and post-secondary students in 2014 (LBOR & LDOE, 2011). The hope is that such pathways lead to a smooth and seamless matriculation into post-secondary education for individuals who may not have considered college as an option.

Community colleges across the nation have developed articulation agreements with ALE/GED programs to place participants in developmental education courses while they are pursuing the GED. Knowing the kinds of support that ALE/GED programs and community colleges need to provide in helping GED completers become college-ready is important to an understanding of the GED to college articulation. The open-admissions policies at community colleges often ensure the enrollment of at-risk and underserved students having low literacy skills, and those who are often economically disadvantaged. An understanding of the college readiness of GED completers enrolled in community college and how they transitioned to a two-year college environment could provide insight that may strengthen the GED-to-college connection.

Within the current discourse regarding GED acquisition, it is apparent that many adults face academic struggles as they attempt to bridge the gap between “common knowledge” (as acquired in the everyday life, cultures of family, work, and community), “college knowledge” (information, contextual skills, human relations skills, and awareness required to navigate the rigors of the college process) (Conley, 2005), and “college readiness” (capabilities, skills,

knowledge, and behaviors needed to pursue higher learning) (Conley, 2010). Greene and Forster (2003), using enrollment data and diploma counts collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD), a national clearinghouse for education data, found that only 70% of all students in public high schools graduate, and only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college; with a large racial disparity among Hispanics and Blacks; only 20% of all Black students and 16% of all Hispanic students graduate college-ready. The specific constructs of college readiness used in this study, academic behaviors (self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control) and contextual skills and awareness (college knowledge) are described in greater detail in Chapter II of this study.

My study highlighted critical issues within our local secondary, adult literacy, and post-secondary educational systems, and could precipitate much needed research at each level in the Greater New Orleans (GNO) area. Adult literacy in the nation has not been assessed since the 2003 NAAL; therefore, I consider this study an essential attempt to shed light on the status of adult literacy in the Greater New Orleans (GNO) area. Understanding the impact of adult literacy, the potential of adult literacy education (ALE) programs to encourage more college going, and the production of social capital as a means of improving quality of life is essential to this study and to the continued rebuilding and subsequent re-growth of our local communities.

Social capital theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study in order to highlight the connection between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Social capital is useful in understanding college choice for three reasons; first, social capital provides the currency students can use to make decisions about going to college and being successful, once enrolled; second, social capital is available outside of the home, whereas socioeconomic status is not; third, social capital provides a mechanism for the interaction of



students and their families that goes beyond the discrete effects usually considered as determinants in the educational aspiration literature (Hossler, Schmit & Vesper, 1999).

Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) model of social capital was used as a guide to develop a conceptual framework that graphically represents the concepts examined in this study and their relationships. The constructs of social capital used in this study, individual dispositions (skill development through adult education, aspirations, and self-concept) and community connectedness (participation in community action activities, community development processes, and building social networks) are discussed, at length, in Chapter II.

To review, in this study I examined the impact of adult literacy and acquisition of the GED on GED completers' perceptions of their college readiness and social capital. Specifically, the constructs of college readiness addressed in this study were academic behaviors (self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control) and contextual skills and awareness (understanding of the post-secondary educational system and culture). The factors of social capital included individual dispositions (skill development through adult education, aspirations, and self-concept) and community connectedness (participation in community action activities, community development processes, and building social networks). Throughout this study, I focused on GED completers' perceptions of the influence of their literacy level on being college ready, and on their perceptions of social capital as they enter post-secondary education in a community college environment.

### *Statement of the Problem*

Low adult literacy has a definite impact on families and the workplace; however, it also hinders an individual's ability to be college-ready and enter into post-secondary education. It creates a lasting effect on individual communities, as well as society as a whole; those who are

illiterate may not be able to fully contribute to the economic, political, or social aspect of a community (Bernardo, 2000). Additionally, illiteracy can be an absolute barrier to the production of social capital (e.g., economic progress, family cohesiveness, productive community involvement, and ultimately, active participation in society). Adult literacy levels are crucial measures to enhance an individual's social capital and improve community involvement. In the United States, civic participation, work, learning, and critical thinking require sophisticated reading comprehension, expressive writing, oral language, and computational skills that are usually cultivated within higher education settings. Embedded within the context of this study is the unyielding problem of low adult literacy and its impact on college readiness, entry into post-secondary education, community involvement, and active participation in society.

The problems attributed to adult literacy, or the lack thereof, in Greater New Orleans are similar to the problems facing the United States as a whole. According to the data in Table 1, approximately 56% of the local population has a high school diploma or a GED. The 2000 U.S. census reported that 18% of the entire adult population did not have a high school diploma; of this number, it was estimated that approximately 15% earned a (GED). Table 1 represents Pre-Katrina data from the local, state and national levels that provide an overview of the adult literacy problem. As indicated, the national, state and local percentage of adults with less than a 9th grade education is, on the average, between 7% and 8.5%. The national average is 7.1%. Statistically, approximately 22% of adults in the Louisiana, particularly in the GNO area, are not in school or have not graduated from high school, which is more than double the national average of 9.8%. When compared to the national average, the outlook for adults with minimal educational skills is bleak for Orleans Parish, as well as for the entire state of Louisiana. Given the percentage of individuals in the state who lack basic literacy skills, there is no doubt that

individual productivity, happiness and social well-being of the least-literate adults are impacted negatively because of their inability to participate actively and effectively in society.

Table 1  
*Population and Secondary Education Percentages*

	<u>Orleans Parish</u>	<u>State of Louisiana</u>	<u>United States</u>
Total population ages 18 years and older	355,507	3,250,523	209,279,149
Less than 9 <sup>th</sup> grade education	7.2%	8.4%	7.1%
9 <sup>th</sup> to 12 <sup>th</sup> graders who did not receive a high school diploma	18.2%	17.2%	13.2%
Adults with high school diploma or GED	24.0%	32%	28.6%
Residents without high school diploma, ages 16-19	30,841	289,111	15,930,450
Percentage of adults not in school and not high school graduates	10.2%	11.7%	9.8%

*Note.* Population and high school rates taken from the Greater New Orleans Community Data Center. Retrieved (11/3/2010) from [www.gnocdc.org/index.html](http://www.gnocdc.org/index.html)

According to the 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL), Louisiana has a 28% rate of individuals in the lowest level of literacy. The national average of individuals functioning at the lowest level of literacy (below 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level) is between 21 and 23% (Miller, 2004). The rate for New Orleans is 44%, which means that approximately 60% of the population can read the local newspaper with understanding. An inability to read and compute hinders millions of individuals from reaching their potential as parents and citizens and prevents them from participating fully in society (Miller, 2004).

Individuals with a desire to become more productive participants in society often cannot because they lack skills that would help them academically; especially if they want to attend college to further increase their potential. Low adult literacy also contributes to an increase in the

number of individuals who are underprepared for college. GED completers often struggle to understand and manage the rigors of post-secondary education if they do, in fact, plan to attend college. The American Association of College and Universities (AAC&U) (Miller & Murray, 2005) reports that 53% of students entering colleges and universities are academically underprepared (i.e., lacking basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of reading, writing or mathematics) and are not college ready (i.e., lacking maturity, awareness and persistence) (Conley, 2007a; Tritelli, 2003).

In the next 15 years, one to two million young adults will be seeking access to higher education with a large portion of them having low literacy skills (Tokpah & Padak, 2003). Guiding this study, was the curiosity of the researcher to determine the relationships between the literacy level of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness skills and behaviors that enable them to enter into and navigate through the rigors of post-secondary education. Additionally, the desire to assess GED completers' perceptions of the production of social capital for the benefit of the individual to effectively engage in his/her community and society was also an impetus for this study.

Cowan (2006) highlighted an example of the effects of low adult literacy using the GNO area as the background. Cowan explained how Avondale Shipyards, Louisiana's largest private employer, "has difficulties hiring workers from the New Orleans area due to the lack of qualified applicants" (p. 243). "The Shipyard is forced to import a substantial proportion (1/6 of its 6,000 personnel) of its workforce from outside of the local community", says Cowan (p.245). The literacy barrier has proven to be the most difficult to address; it is the Achilles heel of efforts by this company to find the workers it needs, and for workers to gain access to these good jobs (Cowan, 2006). This example is one of many that signal the problem of low adult literacy and

the need for greater efforts to provide quality adult literacy education programs. Basic adult literacy education is the critical piece missing from local workforce programs that offer job-training skills. Wagner and Venezky (1999) affirmed that America faces a serious literacy problem that is likely to have continuing consequences for this nation's economic capacity, social well-being, and ability to educate future generations. The pressure on society, and on individuals, to achieve a higher level of literacy skills is present today and continuously growing. In order that globalization might be successful for individual countries and countries collectively, the potential of all of their citizens must be utilized (Freeman, 2006).

Addressing low literacy levels and encouraging ALE participation among high school dropouts could result in more adults acquiring secondary schooling credentials after the GED. Individuals may then see how improved literacy skills are relevant to improving their quality of life. ALE programs should be sensitive to the issue of low literacy and be structured to provide awareness regarding the improvement of literacy skills (Denny, 1992). Awareness of the issue could increase the number of individuals prepared for entry into post-secondary education. More educated citizens in the GNO area would strengthen the pool of educated, skilled workers. Employers in the area would not be forced to seek workers from outside the GNO area and sometimes outside of the state, as previously discussed (Cowan, 2006). Therefore, college readiness behaviors and skills must be improved to ensure success in post-secondary education. Additional research that explores the complexities and relationships of these concepts, and places the results within the current discussions regarding adult literacy, college readiness, and social capital is greatly needed.

The assumption of the researcher was that an increase in adult literacy leads to the production or activation of social capital. A deeper understanding of the connections between

knowledge development and social capital is paramount to the survival of our community and our nation. The driving force behind the 21<sup>st</sup> century economy is greater social capital (Portes, 2000); post-secondary education is the best way to fuel it. Access to adult literacy development means access to social and academic knowledge. It also means full participation in society and an increase in the production of social capital. Literacy cannot be viewed out of the context of the social and political climate of our cities and nation (Denny, 1992). An explanation of social capital theory was presented in order to justify and clarify its use as the frame for this study. Social capital theory was appropriately used in my study to demonstrate how the acquisition of knowledge (human capital) can lead to the development of social networks which enhances community and societal engagement.

### *Research Questions*

My research questions explored how one group of community college students who have completed their GED certificate perceived college readiness and social capital skills and behaviors as they transitioned from an ALE program to the first semester of a community college curriculum. The following research question and sub-questions were answered in my study:

RQ1: What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?

- A. What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?
- B. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their college readiness based on literacy level?
- C. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their production of social capital based on literacy level?

If one goal of ALE/GED programs is to help students increase their literacy and improve their college readiness and social capital skills and behaviors, thereby easing their transition to college, then it makes sense that ALE/GED program administrators and community college educators better understand how GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital can be assessed and supported. This study should be considered in that context.

### *Study Purpose*

The purpose of my study was to investigate the significance of GED completion, as an indicator of literacy improvement, and the perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital after entry into post-secondary education. I used a quantitative approach to examine the perceptions of GED completers regarding their readiness for college and the production of social capital that has been activated through acquisition of the GED. Specifically, I sought to determine if participants' literacy levels, after participating in an ALE program and GED completion, were associated with their perceived college readiness knowledge and behaviors and the production of social capital. High levels of social capital are related to a high sense of belonging to a community, a sense of receiving help from others and the element of trust in others (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). A quantitative approach was used in order to quantify information regarding demographic characteristics, literacy levels, and perceptions, attitudes, feelings and experiences regarding college readiness and social capital of GED completers.

This study had two goals. The first goal was to gain a better understanding of the perceptions of college readiness and social capital of GED completers during the first semester of enrollment in post-secondary education. The second goal was to determine the relationships among literacy level, college readiness factors, and elements of social capital. Such goals emphasize the relevance of the relationship between adult literacy development (GED

certification) and entry into post-secondary education (college readiness) and how factors in producing social capital vary among GED completers.

### *Conceptual Framework*

The empirical work of Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) was used as the foundation for the development of the conceptual framework for my study. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) used a model that was created at the Center for Research and Learning in Regional Australia to show the relationship of knowledge and identity resources to the activation and production of social capital (see Figure 1). The model consists of three components: the interaction among participants, the resources available (knowledge and identity), and the desired outcome of the interaction; the desired outcome defines the qualities of social capital (Balatti & Falk, 2002). The focus of this model is on the micro-processes involved in the production of social capital (Balatti & Falk, 2002). In the model, social capital is the knowledge and identity resources available to the community for a common purpose; the networks are considered a knowledge resource, and social capital refers to both the networks and the resources generated through those networks (Balatti & Falk, 2002).

The resources normally defined as human capital constitute a subset of the knowledge resources and are identified as “skills and knowledge” (Balatti & Falk, 2002). Learning occurs when social capital is built; when the set of interactions calls on existing knowledge and identity resources and adds to them (Balatti & Falk, 2002). The changes to the knowledge and identity resources, viewed as social capital, that contribute to the achievement of a common purpose are indicators that learning is taking place (Balatti & Falk, 2002). The three concepts of knowledge resources, interaction, and identity resources which framed my study were used to explain the



relationships among GED completion, increased college readiness and social capital, and entry into post-secondary education.

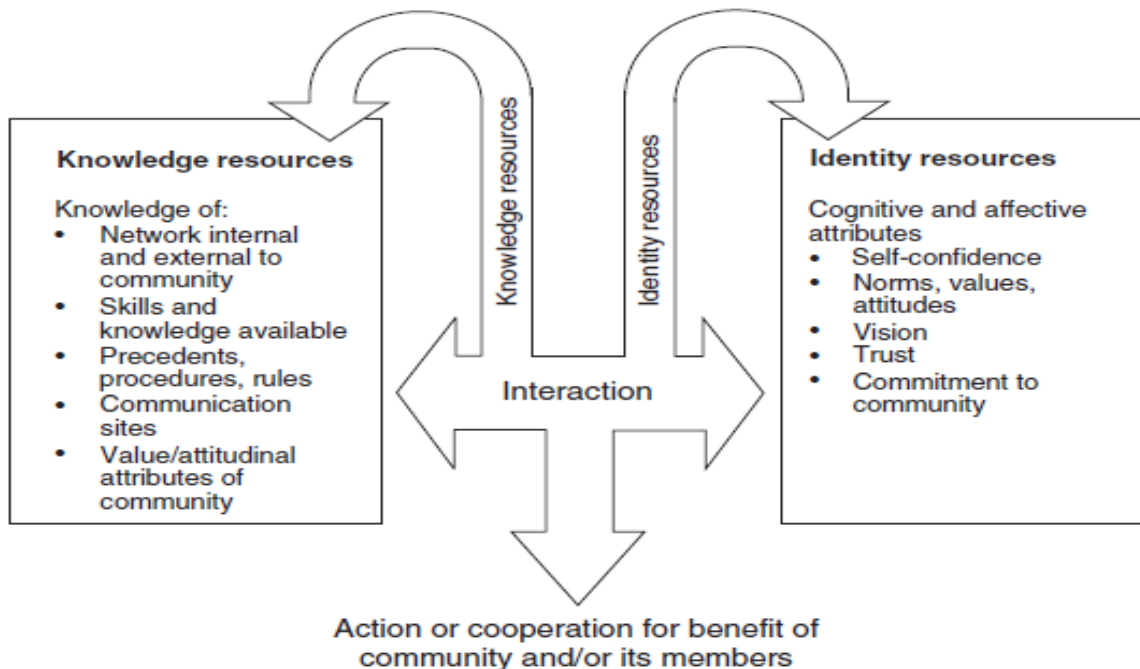


Figure 1. The Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) model of building and using social capital. Adapted from “Socioeconomic contributions of adult learning to community: A social capital perspective,” by J. Balatti & I. Falk, 2002, *Adult Education Quarterly*, 52(4), p. 285.

I chose this particular model of social capital in order to exemplify the relevance of the production or activation of social capital through educational attainment by improving adult literacy skills and knowledge. My conceptual framework employed the following five concepts (i.e., adult literacy education, GED completion, college readiness, social capital, and post-secondary education) as a way to explain the relationship among GED completion, increased college readiness and increased social capital in order to facilitate successful entry into post-secondary education. The conceptual model for my study built on Falk and Kilpatrick’s (2000) model of social capital in order to provide an understanding of the concepts and processes of using knowledge to produce social capital. The decision to use Falk and Kilpatrick’s model was based on the premise that knowledge resources, such as adult literacy education and GED

completion, interact with identity resources, such as college readiness and social capital, to produce the desired outcome of successful entry into post-secondary education. Successful entry into post-secondary education is defined as enrolling in and navigating through the complexities of higher education with the intent to earn a degree. The five central issues that framed my study and the intersection of the issues created a complex system of assumptions for future research involving ALE/GED programs and post-secondary education; specifically, community colleges. If left unaddressed, the issues may hinder GED completers in reaching their full potential, as well as, cause them to be underprepared for post-secondary education and community and global participation.

It is important for me to make a distinction between being academically college ready and being knowledgeable about college. For the purpose of my study, the relevant factors of being “college ready” include academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness. Academic behaviors reflect greater self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control; these behaviors tend to be more completely independent of a particular content area (Conley, 2007b). Contextual skills and awareness include a systematic understanding of the post-secondary educational system combined with specific knowledge of the norms, values, and conventions of interactions in the college context, and the human relations skills necessary to cope within this system even if it is very different from the community the student has just left (Conley, 2007b)- hence, the term “college knowledge.” Both forms of college readiness include knowing that college is an option, having the maturity to understand college processes (i. e., the registration process, academic advising, and financial aid procedures), and understanding how to socially adapt into the college environment through interactions with others. The interactions are the beginnings of the activation or production of social capital. My assumption is that when

individuals with GED credentials enter into post-secondary education knowing that college is an option (contextual skills and awareness) and having the self-confidence (academic behaviors) to pursue such an undertaking, this makes for successful entry into and subsequent completion of post-secondary education endeavors.

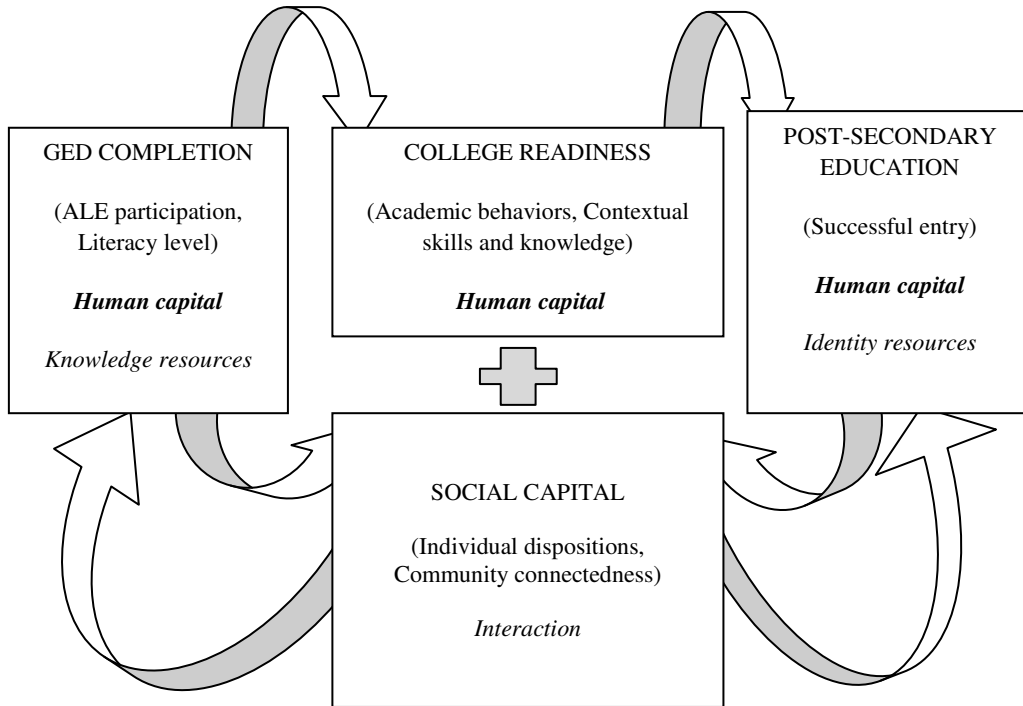
In my study, the constructs of social capital used to operationalize the relationships were control and self-efficacy (individual dispositions) and participation, social engagement, and commitment (community connectedness). Ruston (2002) uncovered these constructs when analyzing surveys used to measure social capital. The constructs emerged as five themes (participation, social engagement, commitment; control, self-efficacy; perception of community level structures or characteristics; social interaction, social networks, social support; and, trust, reciprocity, social cohesion) which were grouped together to connect the relevant indicators of social capital (Ruston, 2000). Ruston concluded that these five themes are the most widely used indicators of social capital when used for analysis. The themes were then used to create a matrix highlighting the major indicators of social capital.

The individual dispositions of control and self-efficacy, as evidenced in my study, are the individual's self-processes that include confidence and aspirations in help-seeking (education, advice, and training from ALE participation) and self-improvement (literacy, GED completion, being college ready). Also, I believe that GED completers possess the social aspects (interaction, networking and support) needed to integrate into post-secondary education. The production of social capital (community connectedness) manifests itself as increased civic and community participation, engagement and commitment in order to develop and maintain useful social networks.

Three existing social capital frameworks (American Educational Research Association (AERA), 2008; Bullen, 2007; Franke, 2005) were examined and components of each were used to conceptualize the constructs for my study. Within the context of the AERA (2008) model, individual dispositions and self-processes were linked to school-based forms of social capital (human capital) in order to produce the mediating variables used to provide individuals with more valuable forms of social capital. For my study, I believe, as did the researchers of the AERA study, that access to institutionally-based social capital interacts with institutional and academic social capital. The Bullen (2007) model described community connectedness as connections between people through community development and participation in community activities. My study hypothesized that people in the community are connected through participation in adult education and/or training as a means to improve community participation and development of social networks. Finally, Franke's (2005) model placed the individual as the determinant of the network structure (social capital) operating through complementary resources (human capital, information) in order to reach the social outcomes (social cohesion, civic engagement). In my study, the complementary resource was adult literacy education; specifically GED certification. I hypothesized that this form of human capital (GED acquisition) is a catalyst to GED completers' achieving additional knowledge resources in post-secondary education and improved community connectedness through the activation of social capital.

To better understand the variables my study sought to explore, I developed a conceptual framework based on a review of the literature, which captured the interconnectedness among the features of adult literacy education and GED completion, college readiness and social capital, and post-secondary education (see Figure 2). The modeling framework for this research united

the concepts and attempted to clarify and justify the use of social capital theory as the framework for my study.



*Figure 2.* Model of the relationships among adult literacy education, GED completion, post-secondary education, college readiness and social capital. *Note.* Model created by D. Lott using components from AERA, 2008; Bullen, 2007; Franke, 2005.

The model combines the dynamics involved in GED completion; more specifically ALE participation and literacy level (knowledge resources). It also links college readiness (academic behaviors, contextual skills and knowledge) with specific components of social capital (individual fulfillment and community involvement) (the interaction). And, it emphasizes successful entry into post-secondary education (identity resources), as addressed throughout the study. The conceptual framework was used to analyze how increased literacy levels through participation in ALE/GED programs (knowledge resources) and GED completion enhances college readiness (college knowledge in preparation for post-secondary education) and social capital (self and community attributes) (the interaction). Knowledge resources and the

interactions that occur in ALE/GED programs help individuals successfully enter post-secondary education and produce social capital through individual fulfillment and increased community involvement (identity resources).

The proposed framework may also be used to evaluate the relationships between knowledge resources present and available in a community and enhanced through community involvement. Favorable relationships help to improve a community's human capital resources (literacy, GED completion, college readiness and post-secondary education) and enhance important aspects of social capital (individual fulfillment, and community involvement). An attempt to produce or activate social capital results from individual gains in knowledge resources and the connections made through social networks established in learning environments. Social networking builds trust and shared values. Social capital, as defined in my study, originates from an educated person making decisions, solving problems and accomplishing common goals for participation in a community. This definition represents social capital in its purest form. Social capital enhances self fulfillment in an individual and improves his/her sustainable value to the community through involvement and personal interest.

In order to better explain the concepts embedded in the goals of my study, it was important to examine how other researchers have studied the concepts from both theoretical and empirical perspectives. Chapter two provides a review of the relevant literature regarding adult literacy education (the significance and history), literacy (definitions and impacts), the GED credential (benefits and values), college knowledge and readiness (academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness), and social capital theory (individual dispositions and community connectedness). Chapter three presents the methodology for the study, including the research design and research questions, sampling procedures, instrument development,

description and measurement of the variables, data collection and analysis procedures, study limitations, and explanations of reliability and validity assurances.

### *Significance/Implications of the Study*

This study was significant because it will contribute to the current discussions regarding adult literacy education theory and practice, college readiness skills and knowledge, and the production of social capital through attainment of knowledge. A gap existed in the literature where the components of adult literacy and GED completion were not correlated to or associated with perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The empirical and theoretical literature was minimal, at best. The available literature has focused primarily on the effects of socioeconomic status (SES), race and gender on adult literacy rates, the economic benefits associated with GED acquisition, and the theoretical definitions of social capital.

This study was designed to, first, focus on the relationship between adult literacy development and GED acquisition; then, to make a connection to the GED credential and college readiness behaviors and skills and the production of social capital; and finally, to determine if entry into postsecondary education is influenced by college readiness and social capital factors. This study will serve to assist ALE/GED program planners, secondary education and community college curriculum designers, higher education (community college) administrators and policy makers in recognizing the issues and concerns surrounding adult literacy and the possible implications for the GNO area. Also, this study has policy implications for further evaluation and subsequent improvement of ALE/GED programs in order to facilitate improvement in adult literacy rates, increase college readiness skills, and enhance the level of social capital of GED completers.

The results of this study could provide a deeper understanding of the current state of adult literacy in the GNO area, the impact of low literacy on community involvement, and the college-going trends of GED completers. The findings could also be used to evaluate the objectives of local adult literacy education programs to improve literacy rates of adults in the GNO area, to increase the number of GED completions, and to enhance participants' college readiness skills and the production of social capital. Literacy rates in the GNO have not been formally assessed since the 2003 NAAL; therefore, the results of this study may provide current data essential to adult literacy education providers, community college administrators and policy makers to increase the number of available adult literacy programs, enhance program objectives, align ALE outcomes to secondary education curriculum, and reach goals that are consistent with current adult literacy and adult education trends.

My intent was to offer a challenge to professionals and practitioners to transform adult literacy education programs into community-based organizations. Such organizations would seek to build relationships between community colleges and workforce investment programs, and would develop social networks that extend beyond the coalitions created within the social capital realm into greater community involvement, civic participation, and productivity in today's society. The results would also provide post-secondary education institutions (community colleges) with information needed to increase support services for students with the GED credential in the first year and expand counseling and recruitment efforts. The goal was to assist in improving support for GED completers in higher education and to gain a better understanding of who GED graduates are and how to support them in college. Additionally, the results would benefit the GNO area in ways that will show a definitive move toward improving adult literacy



rates, college readiness skills and social capital of ALE/GED participants in order to improve participants' participation in community development efforts and society.

#### *Definitions of Related Terms*

***Community involvement*** is the collaboration of members in an identified setting, who facilitate activities which are mutually beneficial to all members (Balatti & Falk, 2002).

***Functionally illiterate*** describes a member of society who possess limited cognitive skills and is able to minimally contribute to its movement and development; this person is an outsider in many functions and his sense of identification with the community is restrained by the lack of important skills (Bernardo, 2000).

***Human capital*** measures the value of education in terms of the generation of aggregate resources and personal resources, including the ability to escape resource deprivation (Wigley & Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006). Baptiste and Nyanungo (2007) defined human capital as the knowledge, skills and attitudes people possess.

***Lifelong learning*** is the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual; it is the formal (training, tutoring, higher education) and informal (work experiences, family situations) experiences that adults bring to the learning environment that should be capitalized on (Ross-Gordon, 2003).

***Literacy***, or competency with printed materials, appears to provide an efficient mode of improving one's quality of life by enabling an individual to obtain and communicate knowledge and enjoy cultural- aesthetic satisfactions (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1977).

## **Chapter II**

### **Review of Literature**

The following literature review is presented with the expectations of demonstrating the impact of low adult literacy skills, participation in ALE/GED programs, the rise in academic under-preparedness and college-readiness of first-time college students, and social capital for personal and community fulfillment. The literature will give theoretical and empirical understanding and meaning to adult literacy, college readiness, and social capital and provide the foundation on which the research is built. This study is informed by five bodies of literature: 1) the definition and impact of adult literacy; 2) the significance and history of adult literacy education (ALE); 3) the values and benefits of the GED; 4) college readiness and college knowledge; and, 5) social capital theory. Additionally, the literature regarding social capital theory will be presented as a means for understanding the conceptual model developed for this study.

#### *Definitions and Impact of Literacy*

Attempts to characterize or define literacy must include several historical and important works on literacy in the United States (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1977; Scribner, 1984; Sticht, 1988; Wallendorf, 2001). Kirsch and Guthrie (1977) and Scribner (1984) offered adequate definitions for the terms literacy, functional literacy and functional competency. Literacy, or competency with printed materials, appears to provide an efficient mode of improving one's quality of life by enabling an individual to obtain and communicate knowledge and enjoy cultural- aesthetic satisfactions.

Functional literacy, on the other hand, relates more to levels of skills that individuals or populations need in order to complete some specified real-life task (Kirsch & Guthrie, 1977). Literacy, according to Wagner (1992), is a characteristic acquired by individuals in varying degrees from just above none to an indeterminate upper level; some individuals are more or less literate than others. Later, Wallendorf (2001) theorized that literacy is typically regarded as an individual skill that tends to remain stable during adulthood; there are people who care about being literate in society and others who do not. The importance and advantages of literacy in our society cannot be denied. However, this value of literacy is not shared; opinions vary greatly with regard to the necessary skills that individuals need in order to be successful in work, their personal lives, and in society. Rather than viewing literacy as a confined cognitive skill, we now realize that literacy is embedded in activities and practices of a community (Bernardo, 2000). Literacy acts are interactions among people, sometimes face to face, but often at a distance; this leads to the notion of literacy as a community resource, an aspect of social capital (Hamilton, 2006).

Since early studies by Bowman and Anderson (1963) and Blaug (1966) were published investigating the link between literacy and economic and social development, other researcher(Fingeret, 1983; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Scribner, 1984; Torres, 1994; Wagner, 1992) has examined the nature and the impact of low rates of literacy. Hunter and Harman (1979) affirmed that the one undisputed fact about illiteracy in America is its concentration among poor, black, elderly, and minority-language groups, groups without effective participation in our country's economic and educational institutions. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society and offered a fresh perspective and a new way of thinking about the phenomenon (Hunter & Harman, 1979). They

also presented data on which and how many adults needed help and characterized these adults in ways designed to foster a deeper understanding of them (Hunter & Harman, 1979). With a concentrated effort on the educational needs of the most disadvantaged poor, Hunter and Harman recommended a national educational policy that would seek out and give support to community-based initiatives with a call for a long-range strategy that would not only involve programs for victims of social ills, but that would enable national leaders and citizens at every level to address questions of social inequality. Keep in mind that low educational attainment is also associated with high rates of unemployment and poverty (Prince & Jenkins, 2005a).

An example of the effects of low adult literacy on the Greater New Orleans (GNO) area is outlined by Wright and Bullard (2007). The researchers reported that “before Hurricane Katrina, the city had a median household income of only \$18,477, with over 31% of the households having annual incomes under \$10,000; the overall unemployment rate was 12.4%” (p. 189). Despite efforts to combat poverty that focused on housing and community development, more than 28% of all families lived at or below the poverty level in GNO (Wright & Bullard, 2007). Of this, 84% were African American families living in the older neighborhoods of the city (Wright & Bullard, 2007). Katrina laid bare the “dirty little secret” of poverty in the United States (Sauer, 2005). Coupled with the grim statistics, as previously mentioned, that 44% of the GNO population functioned at the lowest level of literacy; the statistics representing the poverty level in the Southeast Louisiana region amplify the impact of low adult literacy on an adult individual’s quality of life.

The economic impact of adult functional illiteracy in the United States reverberates throughout the country’s economy; public assistance in the form of welfare, food stamps,

Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF), and Medicaid constitute the majority of the budgets for most local governments (ProLiteracy, 2005). Illiteracy most often leads to limited education, unemployment, and poverty- making these services essential to the survival of many US citizens living in the lowest socioeconomic realm.

Functionally illiterate is a term used to describe someone who is deemed to lack the reading and writing skills needed to meet daily demands (Ozanne, Adkins, & Sandlin, 2005). The individual is capable of functioning in society at a minimal level. Job skills are mainly geared towards service and technical industries. The idea of functional illiteracy became fully legitimized with the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS), which classified between 45% and 50% of the United States population as functionally illiterate, scoring in the lowest two levels of literacy function tested (Ozanne et al., 2005). Poor basic skills are a fundamental problem for many adults who live in poverty and receive welfare. A more immediate issue confronting adult literacy practitioners is how to support welfare recipients in their pursuit of personal growth and self-realization; at a time when they are being denied access to education and relegated to dead-end workfare jobs (Hacker & Yankwitt, 1997).

The 2003 National Assessment of Adult Literacy (NAAL) reported the status and progress of adult literacy in the United States. The NAAL assessed the English literacy of adults (ages 16 and older) in the United States for the first time since the 1992 National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) (Kutner, Greenberg, Jin, Boyle, Hsu, & Dunleavy, 2007). The literacy skill levels (grade equivalents of 1-12) of American adults (including the least-literate adults), and various factors (SES, family literacy, educational attainment) associated with literacy, are the focus of the 2003 NAAL (White & Dillow, 2005). The 2003 NAAL reported an 86% literacy rate for the United States, which revealed that an estimated 14% of U.S. residents can legally be

defined as illiterate; 24% to 26% of adults in Louisiana demonstrated the lowest level of literacy skills (Kutner et al., 2007). These statistics alone should send a resounding alarm to state and local educators, political leaders and the entire nation for a more comprehensive and stringent attack on our educational system.

Problems of poverty and political powerlessness, according to Scribner (1984), are inseparably intertwined with problems of access to knowledge and levels of literacy skills. More recently, Baptiste and Nyanungo (2007) pointed out that educational investment is the strategy employed by Workforce Investment Act (WIA)-funded programs to reduce poverty. “It is a strategy,” they explained, “which treats poverty as largely a literacy crisis, requiring the poor to simply gain marketable skills- defined as skills, attitudes, and dispositions that employers want” (pg. 27). Education, so conceived, is an important factor in any political struggle (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007). Using human capital theory as their framework, Baptiste and Nyanungo concluded that literacy programs framed as workforce investments are an adequate strategy for alleviating poverty, particularly for persons who are severely economically disadvantaged. Unfortunately, three-fourths of all welfare/food stamp recipients perform at the lowest levels of literacy, as defined by the National Adult Literacy Survey, and this is not solely a problem of race and ethnicity; the largest numbers of welfare mothers who will soon be required to be skilled enough to join the work force are white (Lewis, 1997).

In attempting to correlate social capital to low adult literacy skills, it is necessary to discuss how researchers have investigated the connections between these two concepts. Fingeret (1983) and Wagner (1992) described social networks that adults with low literacy skills participate in and benefit from in accomplishing reading-mediated activities in their

communities. The researchers pointed out the limited common sense, abstract reasoning, and problem-solving abilities that many functionally illiterate adults display in accomplishing work and community activities in collaboration with others. In a community with a high degree of literacy integration, an illiterate person can be viewed as one member of society who is not able to fully contribute to its movement and development; this person is an outsider in many functions and his sense of identification with the community is restrained by the lack of an important skill (Bernardo, 2000). Torres (1994) reminded us that illiteracy is not pathology but a social condition; it is not an individual problem of those who are illiterate, but a social problem derived from the economic and political structures of given societies.

While most adults decide to participate in ALE programs for basic literacy improvement and job training, still others seek further personal validation and self-fulfillment by entering ALE programs to obtain a GED certificate. For many who drop out of school, the GED provides similar advantages often afforded only to high school completers. The following section explains the values and benefits of the GED and its merit to completers of ALE programs.

### *Significance of Adult Literacy Education*

Adult literacy education (ALE) is an intervening process that influences change in individuals, groups, and communities; it has the potential to affect the way that individuals, groups, and communities live, inform, and educate themselves (Cowan, 2006). ALE can serve as a means for self-fulfillment as well as for social, political, and psychological empowerment (Kruidenier, 2002a). Adults who enroll in basic literacy skills education programs do so for many reasons, including to satisfy personal needs or to meet others' expectations (Hamilton, 2006). Some adults seek to improve their reading, writing, and computational skills. Others see

improved literacy as an avenue to better jobs, improved parenting skills, or more enjoyable lives. A variety of motivations often determine not only the type of program in which adults will participate, but also how long they participate and whether or not they complete their program of learning (Knowles, 1984). Whatever the reasons for participating in adult education, it is reasonable to assume that most adults who complete a basic literacy skills program expect that their literacy skills will be improved.

Several researchers (Caffarella, 2002; Galbraith, 1990; Tuijnman, 1990; Zemke & Zemke, 1984) have theorized why adults enroll in adult literacy education programs. According to Caffarella (2002) there are five primary purposes for adult literacy education programs: (1) to encourage ongoing growth and development of individuals; (2) to assist people in responding to practical problems and issues of adult life; (3) to prepare people for current and future work opportunities; (4) to assist organizations in achieving desired results and adapting to change; and, (5) to provide opportunities to examine and foster community and societal change. Zemke and Zemke (1984) proposed that adults seek out learning experiences in order to cope with specific life-changing events, (i.e., marriage, divorce, a new job, a promotion, being fired, retiring, losing a loved one, moving to a new city). Galbraith (1990) and Tuijnman (1990) believed that adult literacy education is a unique relationship that is developed to offer communities and individuals a sense of hope and dignity, a sense of responsibility for their own communities and lives, and a voice in the social and political arenas. Tuijnman (1990) asserted that adult literacy education seeks to promote social, cultural and political participation as an end in itself and as a means for improving the welfare of people; it aims to increase the general ability and willingness of people, in their role as citizens, to become involved in and to influence the further development of society.



Adult literacy development is a form of lifelong learning, not a set of skills one learns but never enhances except in a structured, intentional way (Wikelund, Reder, & Hart-Landsberg, 1992). Adult literacy is not a single skill or quality that one either possesses or lacks; it encompasses various types of skills (reading, writing, and computation) that different individuals possess to varying degrees (White & Dillow, 2005). Lifelong learning is the continuous building of skills and knowledge throughout the life of an individual; it is the formal (training, tutoring, higher education) and informal (work experiences, family situations) experiences that adults bring to the learning environment that should be capitalized on (Ross-Gordon, 2003).

Malcolm Knowles (1980, 1984) proposed a set of assumptions about adult learners that highlighted reasons for participation in lifelong learning activities. First, adult learners are responsible for making decisions in day-to-day life that also affect others (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984). This assumption holds true within the context of the family and the workplace. Second, adults bring to the learning environment a multitude of experiences- experiences that are embedded in social, cultural, and political activities (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984). These experiences are essential characteristics of a productive member of society.

Third, adults are ready to learn when a need arises to expand knowledge or skill (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984). For instance, adults react to demands for new knowledge and skill in the workplace as progress (i.e. technology, innovations, and inventions) develops. Fourth, adult learning situations are usually task or problem-centered, such as the need for an increased salary, volunteering in a community effort, or filing taxes (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984). A fitting example in the GNO area, is the need, post-Katrina, for adults to be able to navigate the rigors of the federal disaster programs (i.e., FEMA, Road Home) offering assistance in rebuilding homes and lives. With a reported literacy rate in Orleans Parish of 39%, the New

Orleans post-Katrina recovery effort is hampered by the 61% of residents who are unable to participate in the recovery effort.

Fifth, and finally, external and internal motivators steer adults to learn (Knowles, 1980; Knowles, 1984). Job promotions, economic fluctuations, birth of children, and self-improvement may be indicators for increased knowledge. An adult's life situations, life experiences, and social and cultural influences must be taken into consideration when investigating how and why adults learn. For the purpose of this study, I will examine two aspects of social capital, individual dispositions (self-processes) and community connectedness (participation, social networks). The two constructs of social capital being investigated in this study will be used to answer the how, through examining individual fulfillment and lifelong learning, and the why, through examining community involvement and the development of social interactions and networks.

Rubenson (2005) argued that a fundamental assumption in the present discourse on lifelong learning is a directive enlisting individuals to become responsible for creating and preserving their own human and social capital. Baptiste and Nyanungo (2007) defined human capital as the knowledge, skills and attitudes people possess. Human capital measures the value of education in terms of the generation of aggregate resources and personal resources, including the ability to escape resource deprivation (Wigley & Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006). Increases in human capital enhance the productivity of social capital. Coleman (1988) defined social capital as the ability of people to work together for common purposes in groups and organizations. In 1995, Putnam expounded on this definition of social capital referring to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. Putnam (1995) declared that "life is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock in social capital" (p. 66). Within the context of social capital,

adult literacy, as well as all educational opportunities (human capital), is viewed as an impetus for social, economic, cultural, and political empowerment. Thus, social capital theory has three implications: 1) a source of social control; 2) a source of family-mediated benefits; and, 3) a source of resources mediated by nonfamily networks (Portes, 2000). Sparks (2002) noted that the emphasis on the functional needs for adult social roles and individual growth drives the literacy effort. Earlier research and practice (Gee, 1992; Perez, 1998; Zanger, 1994) defined literacy within a socio-cultural context; the dominant social and political interests intervened in defining content, direction, and prevailing values in the literacy curriculum.

The realm of adult literacy also expands into the areas of family life, poverty, crime, and community involvement. According to Diekhoff (1988), “the ultimate goals of adult literacy training is to improve people’s lives; improve employment, increase community involvement, foster home ownership, heighten parental involvement in children’s education, and increase use of books, magazines, and libraries” (p. 629). These are just a few of the criteria for adult literacy education (ALE) that have been studied in the discourse regarding literacy and community involvement. Community involvement is the collaboration of members in an identified setting, who facilitate activities which are mutually beneficial to all members (Balatti & Falk, 2002). These activities prove to be vital to the existence of civic participation, social interaction, and political influence, all aspects of social capital. Social issues, such as environmental problems, crime, and education are usually the major concerns of community groups. Working to address these issues often dictates that the community members unite in a concerted effort.

Wikelund et al. (1992) theorized that adult literacy development must be seen as an ongoing aspect of adult life in this society. Individuals in this society, they added, acquire and hone their literacy skills and knowledge on a continuous basis, both overtly and inadvertently

(Wikelund et al., 1992). McCook and Barber (2002) predicted that by 2010, a system of high quality adult literacy, language, and lifelong learning services will help adults in every community make measurable gains toward achieving their goals as family members, workers, citizens, and lifelong learners. Adult literacy will then become the foundation for learning in our environment and community; pivotal to the pursuit of lifelong learning and central to gaining personal fulfillment, developing strong family units, building political empowerment, and participating in economic and community development.

More recently, in an empirical study of the relationship between adult literacy instruction and its subsequent use by adults, Purcell-Gates, Degener, Jacobson, and Soler (2002) sampled 159 adult literacy students, ages 18 to 68, in 22 states. The ALE students represented the range of adult education class types including adult basic education (ABE), English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), general education development (GED), and family literacy classes (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). The mixed-methods study used questionnaires and interviews to elicit information about specific literacy activities and their purposes (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). The researchers found that instruction can indeed affect change in adults' practices if the instruction reflects real-life, out of school usage. This was the first attempt to examine literacy practice as an outcome of instruction within the ALE population (Purcell-Gates et al., 2002). Perin (2002) noted that adult literacy education programs are provided by local education authorities, universities, community-based organizations such as labor unions and religious organizations, correctional facilities, public libraries, and volunteer tutoring organizations; with classes held in high school buildings, homeless shelters, sheltered workshops, churches, prisons, storefronts, corporate offices, factories, and community college continuing education departments. Each of these providers has real-life implications to adults in a community. Some ALE programs include

bi-directional family literacy for both children and their parents (Gadsden, 2002). Family literacy is a key component for school success of young children.

Results of a report titled *The Condition of Education*, United States Department of Education (USDOE) (2000) revealed that overall participation in adult literacy education among individuals age 16 or older increased from 40% in 1995 to 46% in 2001 and then declined to 44% in 2005. In 2005, among the various types of ALE activities, individuals age 16 or older participated most in work-related courses (27%), followed by personal interest courses (21%), part-time college or university degree programs (5%), and other activities (3%) (USDOE, 1996). Participants in ALE programs in the United States are a unique group because they have committed to improving their literacy skills by choosing to attend ALE programs (Mellard, Patterson, & Prewett, 2007). Adults who enroll in basic ALE programs do so for many reasons, including to satisfy personal needs (e.g., to improve their reading, writing, and computational skills) or to meet others' expectations (e.g., employers, welfare agencies); still others see improved literacy as an avenue to better jobs, improved parenting skills, or more enjoyable lives (Sheehan-Holt & Smith, 2000). A discussion of adult literacy and adult literacy education would not be complete without an understanding of the Adult Education Act (AEA). A historical journey from its beginnings, as The Economic Opportunity Act, to its most current state, The Workforce Investment Act (WIA), will be presented in the next section. This journey will signify the important changes and developments of the AEA that have occurred in the 1960s, 70s, 80s, and 90s.

## *History of Adult Literacy Education*

The Federal government has been involved in adult education for over 100 years. Although the nature and extent of federal attention to the needs of adult learners have varied over this period, the government from its earliest days has provided funds to establish, encourage, and expand programs to assist adults. All programs seek to assist adults in overcoming educational deficiencies that may hinder their ability to be a productive and responsible participant in the life and growth of the nation (National Advisory Council on Adult Education, 1980). The AEA brought adult educators at the local, state, and federal levels together to work under an agreed set of common rules and regulations that began the process of systemizing adult education in the United States (Sticht, 2001). The statement of purpose and the basic program provisions, which have never changed despite the many name changes, of the AEA are stated in Sec. 311/Part A of the Act and reads as follows:

It is the purpose of this title to assist the states to improve educational opportunities for adults who lack the level of literacy skills requisite to effective citizenship and productive employment, to expand and improve the current system for delivering adult education services including delivery of such services to educationally disadvantaged adults, and to encourage the establishment of adult education programs that will:

1. enable these adults to acquire the basic educational skills necessary for literate functioning;
2. provide these adults with sufficient basic education to enable them to benefit from job training and retraining programs and obtain and retain productive employment so that they might more fully enjoy the benefits and responsibilities of citizenship; and
3. enable adults who desire to continue their education to at least the level of completion of secondary schools (National Institute for Literacy, 104<sup>th</sup> Congress).

Although the AEA has been amended many times since its passage in 1966 (Beder, 1996; Rose, 1992), the basic purpose, structure, and administration of the Act have not changed

substantially since its inception. Funding for Adult Basic Education (ABE) and ALE programs comes directly from the federal government. In the United States, adult literacy programs are funded by the federal government through grant monies. The money is then distributed to local programs through the individual states. The Adult Education Act (AEA) was created to improve the educational skills of adults in the United States with a focus on programs designed to provide basic skills for adult learners. Its primary purpose was to authorize funds to create programs that would enhance the opportunities for illiterate adults to strengthen their literacy skills in order to become productive members of society. Over its decades old history, the AEA has proven to be a workable, adaptable tool (Rose, 1991). The Act has undergone changes, through various amendments, that have continually focused on increasing adult literacy skills.

Some state public school systems offer adult education programs, while others provide adult education on community college campuses, (i.e. Delgado Community College and Nunez Community College in the GNO area). Secondary and post-secondary institutions began in 1970 to offer Adult Basic Education (ABE) and Adult Literacy Education (ALE) programs, which are regulated by the provisions of the AEA (Rose, 1992). Table 2 highlights the historical journey of the Adult Education Act of 1966 to its current name and provisions as the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) of 1998.

Table 2  
*History of the Adult Education Act*

<u>Name</u>	<u>Amendment</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Provisions</u>	<u>Source</u>
Economic Opportunity Act	P.L. 88-452	1964	Created the first ABE/ALE program as a state grant	Imel, 1991
Adult Education Act	P.L. 100-297	1966	Provided funding for adult education programs serving educationally disadvantaged adults	Imel, 1991
	P.L. 89-750	1966	Established the National Advisory Council on Adult Education	Imel, 1991
House Bill (A.R. 7819)	P.L. 90-247	1967	Private non-profit agencies were deemed eligible to receive local grants	Rose, 1992
	P.L. 90-576	1968	Changed the definition of an adult from 18 to 16 years and older	Rose, 1992
	P.L. 91-230	1970	Expanded educational opportunities and encouraged post-secondary education	Rose, 1992
	P.L. 92-318	1972	Addressed the issues of education for adult Native Americans	Sticht, 2001
	P.L. 93-380	1974		
	H R 15 (P.L. 95-561)	1978	Expanded the statement of purpose of the AEA	Sticht, 2001
	P.L. 97-35	1981	Supported English as a Second Language (ESL) programs	Sticht, 2001
	P.L. 99-50	1986	Continued the provisions of the AEA	United States Department Of Education (USDOE), 1996
	P.L. 100-297	1988	Created the National Workforce Literacy Grants Program and the English Literacy Grants Program	USDOE, 1996
National Literacy Act	P.L. 102-73	1991 1992	Rules and regulations were approved; NLA was incorporated in the AEA	USDOE, 1996
Workforce Investment Act (WIA), The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA)	P.L. 105-220 Title 2	1998	Replaced the Jobs and Training Partnerships Act (JTPA)	Frank, Rahmanou & Savner, 2003

*Note.* PL=Public law.



The AEA was first introduced as the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964. This act created the first ABE/ALE program funded as a state grant (Imel, 1991). In 1966, the act was renamed the Adult Education Act and underwent two major provision changes for funding of adult education. It established the National Advisory Council on Adult Education (Imel, 1991). In 1967, the AEA was attached to House Bill (A.R. 7819) in order to create the provision for eligibility of non-profit organizations to receive local grant monies to fund adult literacy programs (Rose, 1992). In twenty years, from 1968 through 1988, the AEA was amended eight times with provisions including changing the definition of adult age from 18 to 16 for the purpose of ALE participation; addressing Native American and English as Second Language (ESL) issues; and creating grant monies for the National Workforce Literacy and English Literacy programs (Sticht, 2001; USDOE, 1996). By 1991, the National Literacy Act (NLA) was incorporated into the AEA renamed the NLA. In 1992, the National Institute for Literacy was established and provisions for state literacy resource centers and prison ALE programs were enacted (USDOE, 1996). Finally, in 1998, the name was once again changed to the Workforce Investment Act (WIA), The Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) which replaced the Jobs and Training Partnerships Act (JTPA) (Frank, Rahmanou & Savner, 2003). The WIA/AEFLA categorized ALE participants into three groups: adults, dislocated workers, and youths (Frank et al., 2003). Under the Workforce Investment Act, members of these groups are eligible to receive three levels of ALE services: core (basic), intensive (ABE), and training (ALE/GED) (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007). Core and intensive services are intended to provide job readiness and job preparation, attitudes, knowledge, skills, and opportunities; training services are designed to improve academic literacy skills and prepare for secondary school curriculum completion (GED certification) (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007).

### *Values and Benefits of the GED*

The General Educational Development (GED) tests were developed in the 1940s for the Army during World War II, in part to enable veterans who had not finished high school to attend college under the planned GI Bill (Boesel, 1998). The General Educational Development (GED) tests were designed for veterans to complete their studies and re-enter civilian life (Tokpah & Padak, 2003). The GED provides a second chance for individuals to obtain a high school equivalency credential in order to advance their educational achievement and personal goals (Hsu & George-Ezzelle, 2007).

The GED program is a second-chance program that administers a battery of cognitive tests to self-selected high school dropouts to determine whether or not they are academic equivalents of high school graduates (Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001). According to Tyler (2003), “the GED credential has become an exceedingly important credential for school dropouts in the United States; about one in every seven high school diplomas issued each year is a GED credential” (p.369). Until the 1970s, a high school diploma or its equivalent, the GED, was seen as terminal, sufficient preparation for a good job and a middle class life (Wilson, 2006). There are various strands of GED research. The GED has been extensively studied over the past decade to determine its economic value; however, research is scarce in regards to the GED and post-secondary education. For my study, I will review the literature regarding the economic value and labor market value of the GED (Clark & Jaeger, 2006; Murnane, Willett, & Boudett, 1997; Murnane, Willett, & Tyler, 2000; Sticht, 2001; Tokpah & Padak, 2003; Tyler, Murnane, & Willett, 2000; Tyler, 2004) and the value of the GED in post-secondary education (Baycich, 2003; Boesel, 1998; Fine, 2010; Hamilton, 1998; Joost, 2009; Kist, 2004; Maralani, 2003; McElroy, 1990; Perin, Flugman, & Spiegel, 2006; Reder, 1999; Wilson, 2006).

## *Economic and Labor Market Value of the GED*

The GED has been previously investigated for its economic and labor market value. Researchers have sought to determine how acquisition of the GED can increase an individual's earnings in the workplace. In a study by Tyler et al. (2000), it was reported that acquisition of a GED could lead to higher average levels of human capital through increased access to post-secondary education and training programs. Tyler and his colleagues tested the labor market signaling value of the GED, using GED test scores and Social Security Administration earnings data, and found that the signaling value of the GED increased the 1995 earnings of young white dropouts on the margin of passing the exams by 10% to 19%; there was no statistically significant evidence that the credential impacted the 1995 earnings of young minority dropouts in the same scoring range. A similar study by Tyler (2004) revealed that acquisition of a GED leads to greater earnings and higher probability of employment; however, obtaining a GED is no quick fix for low earnings. The study examined a data set developed by the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) that links GED test information to quarterly earnings records collected by Florida's Unemployment Insurance (UI) system (Tyler, 2004). The GED records of all male candidates were used and matched with the UI earnings records from 1993 through 2002 (Tyler, 2004). Results from the descriptive statistics and regression analyses performed indicated that the earnings of GED completers and those who did not complete the exam are the same; with no significant increase for GED completers. However, quarterly earnings for GED completers began to increase around the 9<sup>th</sup> quarter (Tyler, 2004).

Results from the Adult Education & Literacy System (AELS), as reported by Sticht (2001), suggested that through the generative power of adult literacy education, governments can

expect multiple returns on investments (ROI) in at least five areas: 1) improved productivity at work, at home, and in the community leading to higher tax bases for communities; 2) improved self confidence and other psychological and physiological aspects of health of adults; 3) improved health of the adults' children due to learning, leading to better prenatal and postnatal care; 4) improved productivity in the schools by providing adults with the knowledge they need to better prepare their children to enter school; and, 5) improved criminal justice system due to less recidivism as a result of providing education for prisoners in correctional institutions to permit them to acquire skills and knowledge needed to get along better with others, perform jobs, overcome social exclusion, and join the mainstream of society.

#### *GED value in Post-secondary Education*

The GED could also have a positive impact on the economic outcomes of dropouts indirectly by increasing access to post-secondary education or training, which in turn increases earnings (Tyler, 2004). Other researchers have expanded on the original studies completed by Tyler (2004) and Tyler et al. (2000) by examining transition projects designed to assist GED completers in overcoming obstacles between them and college (Wilson, 2006); by presenting perceptions of GED completers regarding their education and career options (Baycich, 2003); and, by exploring ways for GED completers to successfully persist and complete college (Joost, 2009). Perin and colleagues (2006) studied four urban ALE programs, using 16-20 year old participants, and found that the programs were poorly equipped to assist youth in their attempts to complete secondary education, which limited their access to postsecondary education. The major themes that emerged from this case study were the growing presence of 16 to 20 years old students in the participating programs, the severe challenges in the lives of these students, their low reading and math skills, the stresses created by the increased presence of a troubled

population in already under-resourced programs, and the poor outcomes for this younger group (Perin et al. 2006).

A 1998 study conducted by the Louisiana Department of Education of the 2006-2007 school term found that only 65.9% of students who had entered the 9th grade four years earlier actually graduated; this means that 34.1% of the nearly 190,000 students that annually enroll in public high schools in Louisiana either drop out, graduate with a general education development (GED) certificate or something other than a diploma or do not graduate on time (Greene, 2002). Boesel (1998) pointed out that the GED credential can open the door to post-secondary education for dropouts, with most colleges accepting the GED diploma and requiring other evidence of ability to perform in college, such as SAT scores. Murnane et al. (2000) confirmed that postsecondary education pays off for GED holders as well as for high school graduates; consequently, those GED recipients who use the credential to gain access to postsecondary education benefit from this investment. The Louisiana Department of Education provided data on GED/High school diploma attainment and transition to a post-secondary education program; based on national data, 4% of high-school aged students attained a GED or high school diploma and 6% went on to post-secondary education (Miller, 2004).

Although several studies have focused on the performance of GED students in postsecondary settings, as measured by college GPA, few studies have examined the college readiness of GED graduates (Tokpah & Padak, 2003). Hamilton (1998), in a study using college placement as a measuring tool, discovered that first-time students, entering a two-year public college with a GED credential, were more likely to be placed in developmental reading, English, and math courses than traditional high school graduates. Although Hamilton's study used GED

completers at two-year colleges, the researchers did not take into account college readiness and social capital. This may, in fact, be due to a lack of preparation by ALE/GED programs to equip GED completers with the necessary skills and behaviors to function in post-secondary settings.

Reder (1999) used data from the National Adult Literacy Survey (NALS) 1992 and the Beginning Postsecondary Student Survey (BPS) to determine the persistence of GED holders in postsecondary education. Reder reported that GED holders have dramatically lower rates of persistence and completion in postsecondary programs than traditional high school graduates; which may be a result of their being older, less likely to be full-time students, and more likely to be full-time workers and single parents. Reder's research strongly advocates helping adult education students and GED graduates prepare to enter and succeed in postsecondary education (Reder, 1999).

Two qualitative studies, (Baycich, 2003; Kist, 2004), explored the first year experiences of GED graduates at four-year universities. Both studies used interviews and focus group discussions to collect data that would offer a more complete understanding of GED students' academic needs and aspirations (Baycich, 2003; Kist, 2004). Respondents revealed the reasons why they decided to pursue postsecondary education and non-academic challenges faced by GED students with several themes including, bureaucratic and logistical roadblocks upon entering higher education; the challenge of working with others; the support, or lack of, that GED graduates receive while attending college; and, economic and family pressures (Baycich, 2003; Kist, 2004). These themes appear to be common concerns of, not only GED completers, but all first-year college students.

In a study by Joost (2009), the researcher explored how GED scores in the domains of reading and math might be predictive of college readiness skills. Joost (2009) used data from completers of the current version of the GED who were enrolled at Houston Community College in credit bearing college classes, during the 2006 calendar year. The results confirmed that GED scores are positively linked to the Computer-adaptive Placement, Assessment, and Support System (COMPASS) placement test scores at a significant level; this means that GED scores can meaningfully predict COMPASS scores with some measure of reliability (Joost, 2009). The COMPASS is actually a group of exams created by the American College Test Program (ACT) that are designed to evaluate a particular individual's math, reading, and writing skills. The exam is most commonly used in university settings as a means of determining exactly what courses a particular student should be placed in based on their level of ability (Joost, 2009). Because students preparing for the GED possess many of the characteristics identified as being barriers to success in college, postsecondary institutions, especially community colleges, need to create early identification processes that will help GED completers overcome those barriers (Joost, 2009). A method of predicting college readiness of GED completers based on their GED Test scores could help align the curricula of GED preparation courses with community college developmental and college level courses (Joost, 2009). By remaining in no cost adult education classes and achieving college readiness before completing the GED and entering college, those students would save a considerable amount of money by avoiding costly developmental coursework (Joost, 2009).

In the GNO area, students preparing for the GED who wish to enter college could be advised to remain in no cost GED preparation classes available through the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS) and to attempt the GED examinations only

after completing the curricula designed to prepare them to be college ready. ALE/GED program curricula should be aligned to both high school and entry-level college curricula. Students enroll in Louisiana's colleges and universities needing remediation in basic reading, English and math skills to be college-ready, and too many do not succeed (LBOR & LDOE, 2011). In two-year colleges, 63% of the students entering in 2006 enrolled in developmental courses, and only 14% of them had completed a college-level course in the same subject within two years of entry (LBOR & LDOE, 2011).

The groundwork has been laid for continued exploration into the academic, social, and personal benefits of the GED certificate as a major component of adult literacy education. More high school dropouts seeking to improve their circumstances could be encouraged to develop and enhance their social, as well as, human capital through acquisition of the GED and entry into and completion of post-secondary education. Discussions regarding the GED credential continue to evolve, and the need for knowledge of post-secondary education, as an option for completers, must be included in those conversations. However, being college-ready is paramount to an individual's success in post-secondary education. A significant barrier to post-secondary education among underprepared and nontraditional students is that they are not aware of the many college opportunities open to them; nor do they know how to apply for and utilize the opportunities. The elements of college success, including the psychological preparation and the cognitive knowledge needed for college readiness, have been the focus of more recent research (Conley, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008, 2010; Conley, Lombardi, Seburn & McGaughy, 2009; Greene & Forster, 2003; Lundell, Higbee, Hipp, & Copeland, 2004; Venezia, Kirst, & Antonio, 2004). The following section will explore and give meaning to the concept of college readiness.



## *Understanding College Readiness*

College readiness is a relatively new term. In 2005, Conley established one of the earliest definitions of college readiness as the level of preparation a student needs in order to enroll and succeed, *without remediation*, in a credit-bearing general education course at a post-secondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or transfer to a baccalaureate program. Conley's definition of college readiness incorporates the attitudes and academic behaviors of successful students, as well as general institutional knowledge about navigating the world of college, described as contextual knowledge, and related to social capital concepts. The four domains of college readiness are identified as key cognitive strategies, key content, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness.

Key cognitive strategies are the intellectual skills that students need to be successful in college; they include ways of thinking, patterns of asking questions, analysis, reasoning, argumentation, interpretation and problem solving. Key content areas are the subjects (English, math, science, social studies, world languages, and the arts) used to develop foundational skills of students through teaching and learning. Academic behaviors are the students' abilities to make choices, monitor behavior and progress, apply study skills, reflect on self-awareness, practice self-monitoring and increase self-control necessary for academic success. Contextual skills and awareness include being able to function in a post-secondary system, understand academic culture, and navigate through college. Only two of the domains, academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness, are used in the focus of my study to operationalize college readiness. My assumption is that the academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness are

needed prior to entry into post-secondary education, and are strongly associated with college transition and the production of social capital.

Conley (2007a) posited that the college-ready student envisioned by this definition is able to understand what is expected in a college course, can cope with the content knowledge that is presented, and can take away from the course the key intellectual lessons and dispositions the course was designed to convey and develop. The likelihood that students will make a successful transition to the college environment, Conley (2007c) noted, is often a function of their readiness; the degree to which previous educational and personal experiences have equipped them for the expectations and demands they will encounter in college. Access to higher education in the US is widespread, but access to success in higher education has proven to be less common and more frequently limited by a student's degree of proficiency in the core academic skills: reading, writing, and math (LBOR & LDOE, 2011).

Kuh (2007) and Cline, Bissell, Hafner and Katz (2007) examined student engagement data and basic eligibility requirements for colleges to make connections to college-readiness and college success. Kuh (2007) determined, based on student engagement surveys, for example, the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which has been used by about 1,100 different four-year colleges and universities in the U. S. and Canada, that success in college is strongly related to pre-college academic preparation and achievement, as well as other factors, such as family income and parents' education. Cline et al. (2007), realizing the disconnect between college eligibility and college readiness, suggested sustained and intensive efforts to help high schools make the conceptual shift from preparing students to be college eligible to educating them to be college ready. The researchers found that the dropout rate at the university level is significantly higher among those who arrive at college academically underprepared, compared to

those students who have the academic skills to be successful in a post secondary climate (Cline et al., 2007).

Other researchers proposed and studied different aspects of college readiness. For example, Byrd (2005) explored the nature of college readiness from the perspectives of first-generation college students. The qualitative, phenomenological study was conducted at a small urban university, using eight volunteer participants from an undergraduate liberal arts program. The participants were (a) of junior or senior year status, (b) had earned an Associate of Arts degree from a community college, (c) were older than 25, and (d) were first-generation college students (Byrd, 2005). The results of the study yielded ten relevant themes that were categorized into three areas; skills and abilities perceived as important for college readiness, background factors and life experiences that contribute to college readiness, and nontraditional student self-concept (Byrd, 2005). This study provided insight into the development of nonacademic skills that had been recognized as important to college success. Although the results of this study did not emphasize academic skills, college reading was an area in which participants felt underprepared (Byrd, 2005).

Based on the results of a study completed by Greene and Forster (2003), using enrollment data and diploma counts collected by the U.S. Department of Education's Common Core of Data (CCD), a national clearinghouse for education data, only 70% of all students in public high schools graduate, and only 32% of all students leave high school qualified to attend a four-year college, with a large racial disparity among Hispanics and Blacks; only 20% of all Black students and 16% of all Hispanic students graduate college-ready. The CCD provides enrollment numbers for every grade level as well as diploma counts; this information is provided separately for each state, and in most states is also provided broken down by racial group (Greene & Forster, 2003).

Greene and Forster confirmed that there is a gap between what high schools teach and require for graduation and what colleges require before they can consider students' applications; causing many students to graduate from high school unable to apply to college (Greene & Forster, 2003).

However, Greene and Forster noted one hindrance to their method. High school completion rates include both regular high school graduates and GED recipients; with the problem being that GED recipients are fundamentally different from regular high school graduates in their expected life outcomes (Greene & Forster, 2003). But no research suggests that GED recipients are even close to equivalent to regular high school graduates in terms of future prospects (Greene & Forster, 2003). Since college is a key to greater opportunity throughout the rest of a student's life, this gap in the educational pipeline has serious consequences for those students whose high schools fail to prepare them. President Obama has voiced a belief that regardless of educational path after high school, all Americans should be prepared to enroll in at least one year of post-secondary education or job training to better our workforce for a 21<sup>st</sup> century economy (LBOR & LDOE, 2011). Other researchers (Murnane, Willett, and Boudett, 1997) have found that GED recipients are statistically indistinguishable from high school dropouts in their expected employment prospects and earnings. The researchers also noted seeing modest advantages for GED recipients over dropouts in the area of job attainment.

Later, Conley (2007c) presented four strategies to help high schools increase the numbers of college-ready students and align their programs for college success: first, schools should create a culture focused on intellectual development which involves student interactions, a carefully organized program of study, and demonstration of student control and responsibility for their learning; second, schools should specify core knowledge and skills; this means that the curriculum must be organized and a formal set of exit standards must be adopted; third, schools

should provide the necessary supports to students including specialized information in order for high school graduates to access the college admission system, knowledge of college requirements and financial aid options, and an understanding of the tiered nature of postsecondary education; and finally, schools should provide necessary supports to teachers; that is they should properly prepare and equip teachers with knowledge and resources through continuous professional development. Conley (2007c) argued that these strategies would help individuals to achieve better academic success and more complete readiness.

Many ethnic minority students are either first-generation or first-time college students and, thus, face the challenge of not having a reference to navigate the higher education system (Goodall, 2009). This makes the prospect of college even more challenging when these same students left high school early and did not have sufficient opportunities to gain awareness or develop a level of confidence that could have resulted from continued interaction and participation in the educational setting (Goodall, 2009). Roderick, Nagaoka, and Coca (2009) discussed the importance of improving college access and readiness for low-income and minority students in urban high schools. The researchers explored the results of several studies (Allensworth, 2007; Alon & Tienda, 2005; Avery & Kane, 2004; Bound, Lovenheim, & Turner, 2006; Geiser & Santelices, 2007; Greene & Forster, 2003; National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), 2008; NCES, nd; Pallais & Turner, 2006; Plank & Jordan, 2001). All of these studies consistently supported previous literature regarding the importance of college preparation at the high school level. Roderick et al. (2009) used the results to offer recommendations to high school educators for K-16 curriculum alignment. The researchers created four strategies that provide guidelines for how states and school districts can focus their efforts to increase college readiness. The strategies, presented as a prescription for increasing college readiness in urban

high schools, include: 1) developing valid indicators of college readiness and building accountability; 2) helping high school educators meet the instructional challenge; 3) bridging the information and social capital gap; and , 4) using incentives and strong signals for students (Roderick et al. 2009). The strategies offered are consistent with the dependent variables that I proposed to show a relationship between- college readiness and social capital. I am proposing that there is a correlation between literacy skills and college readiness based on the perceptions of GED completers regarding their college ready behaviors, knowledge and skills.

For many, knowing what skills or behaviors constitute college readiness is difficult due to various descriptions and criteria associated with the term. For instance, in a longitudinal study conducted in Texas, Dougherty (2008) reported ways in which college and career readiness benchmarks could be identified by using statewide assessment data. By linking SAT, ACT and state knowledge and skills assessment scores, Dougherty developed a correlation table that indicated how the scores from the assessments and predictions of performance on college –entry placement tests aligned with statewide standards for English, math and reading for 11<sup>th</sup> grade students. The predicted scores represent the chance of meeting the state standard indicating that the student was “college ready” (Dougherty, 2008). College readiness benchmarks were set using this data by weighing the advantages of setting higher and lower standards. The benchmarks were then set after considerations by policymakers regarding false positives and false negatives were analyzed and subsequently ruled out. Following this study, similar benchmarks were identified in earlier grades to indicate whether a student is on track to being college and career ready by the time he or she leaves high school (Dougherty, 2008).

Conley, Lombardi, Seburn and McGaughy (2009) later collaborated to conduct a field-test, with a sample of 1,795 students at 13 New York City high schools, of the College-readiness

Performance Assessment System (C-PAS) in order to determine the validity of the design. The C-PAS was designed to enable teachers to monitor the acquisition of five-key cognitive strategies (problem-solving, research, interpretation, reasoning, and precision with accuracy) through the use of content-specific performance tasks embedded into the curriculum (Conley et al., 2009). The researchers reported that the C-PAS assessed cognitive skills necessary for college readiness and reliability was established. The results of the field-test defined and clarified college readiness, and as a result, Conley et al. (2009) presented four key dimensions of college readiness: 1) key cognitive strategies (analytic reasoning, problem solving, inquisitiveness, precision, interpretation, evaluating claims); 2) key content knowledge (writing skills, algebraic concepts, key foundational content and “big ideas” from core subjects); 3) academic behaviors (self-management, persistence, time management, study group use, awareness of performance); and, 4) contextual skills and awareness (college knowledge, admissions requirements, cost of college, purpose and opportunities of college, types of colleges, college culture, relations with professors). Conley and colleagues (2009) concluded in the research that students who have some mastery of these strategies, knowledge, skills and behaviors fare better in entry-level college courses. The components of each of the dimensions represent the characteristics of college-ready students (Conley et al., 2009).

More recently, Conley (2010) expanded on his earlier work of college knowledge. In his book, *College and Career Ready*, Conley sought to help students make logical and effective college and career decisions. College and career readiness is a multifaceted concept comprising numerous variables internal and external to the school environment (Conley, 2010). “These facets, according to Conley, are not mutually exclusive or perfectly nested; they interact with one another extensively” (p. 31). Conley suggested tips and strategies for successful transition to

postsecondary education presented in a four-dimension model that serves as the basis for determining how prepared students are for college and careers. Conley stated that “the model considers the capabilities, skills, knowledge, and behaviors that students need to demonstrate to be ready to pursue learning beyond high school” (p. 19). Conley (2010) offered a challenge to postsecondary institutions, policy makers and community colleges to assess standards and entrance requirements in order to align with high school preparation criteria.

For the purpose of my study, two of the five dimensions from Conley’s work were used to identify college readiness; academic behaviors and contextual skills and knowledge. Here, I am interested in discovering whether GED completers possess the basic self confidence and awareness needed to become college ready, successfully enter into post-secondary education, and produce greater social capital through community involvement. I chose these two dimensions of college readiness primarily because of my experiences as an administrator and instructor in developmental education at a local community college. Before a first-time college student, especially those who are academically underprepared, can develop content knowledge and cognitive strategies, he/she must be able to understand the context and culture of college going, as well as, possess the maturity to self-manage through the initial college process and integrate into the college community. Without these behaviors, skills and knowledge in place, I believe that entry into post-secondary education is difficult for GED completers, if not impossible. Researchers have both, theoretically and empirically, used all four dimensions of Conley’s model to frame issues of college readiness. I found, however, no existing empirical data using academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness solely as constructs for research; therefore, a brief description of the two domains for this study follows with a more



detailed explanation given in Chapter three to justify their use as constructs for college readiness and in the development of the survey instrument.

### *College Knowledge*

Conley (2005) expanded the realm of higher education by presenting the concept of “college knowledge.” Conley’s book, of the same name, defines the key cognitive skills that are college knowledge: analytical thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving. Conley (2005) also highlighted the importance of high school curriculum alignment with entry-level college courses; the experience of and preparation for the first year of college, and the knowledge and skills necessary for success in the six major academic content areas: English, math, second languages, natural sciences, social sciences, and the arts. The overall goal of the book was to support and assist high school educators, teachers, counselors, and administrators in preparing their students for college (Conley, 2005).

### *Academic Behaviors*

Academic behavior management is an area that lends itself to discussions between teachers (or advisors) and students to assess better behavior in practice versus espoused behavior (Conley, 2007b). This dimension of college readiness encompasses a range of behaviors that reflects greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control of a series of processes and behaviors necessary for academic success; the key academic behaviors consist largely of self-monitoring skills and study skills (Conley, 2010). According to Conley, self-monitoring is a form of metacognition which includes awareness, understanding, reflection, persistence, problem solving and transfer of learning. Other measures of academic behaviors relate to self-assessment of competence relative to a range of academic skills (Conley, 2007b). Study skills, for the

purpose of college success, include learning strategies, time management, test-taking strategies, using resources, note-taking, and communication (Conley, 2010).

### *Contextual Skills and Awareness*

Contextual knowledge of the entire process of college admissions, financial aid, and successful functioning in college can be gauged relatively simply through questionnaires; however, the larger issue is how this information is used (Conley, 2007c). Contextual factors encompass primarily the privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and culture (Conley, 2010). Contextual skills and awareness, or “college knowledge”, encompasses an understanding of processes such as college admission, including curricular, testing, and application requirements; college options and choices, including the tiered nature of post-secondary education; tuition costs and the financial aid system; placement requirements, testing, and standards; the culture of college; and the level of challenge present in college courses, including the increasing expectations of higher education (Conley, 2010).

The college readiness skills, or lack thereof, of GED completers have been an area of ongoing debate; however, GED graduates are increasingly considering college as an option (Tokpah & Padak, 2003). Currently, one in every twenty first-year college students is a GED recipient (GED Testing Service, 2005). Examining the planning and preparation of high school students and dropouts for entry into postsecondary education is crucial in understanding the many aspects of college readiness. Even more critical, is the need for investigations into the college readiness of GED completers as an individualized group having its own unique characteristics. Knowledge acquired in post-secondary education is the impetus for the production or activation of social capital; therefore, encouraging more college-going is necessary

in communities and society. Presented in the following section is an understanding of social capital theory and how it will be used to frame this study.

*Theoretical Framework/ Social Capital Theory*

Social capital is enhanced by human capital, environmental capital, and mental capital, embodying the idea that every social relation or interaction can be treated as an asset to be invested in for advantage (Fine, 2010). Figure 3 illustrates the many forms of social capital with descriptions of each. As shown in Figure 3, social capital is the core of the relationships of all other forms of capital. Each form contributes to the overall structure/concept of social capital.

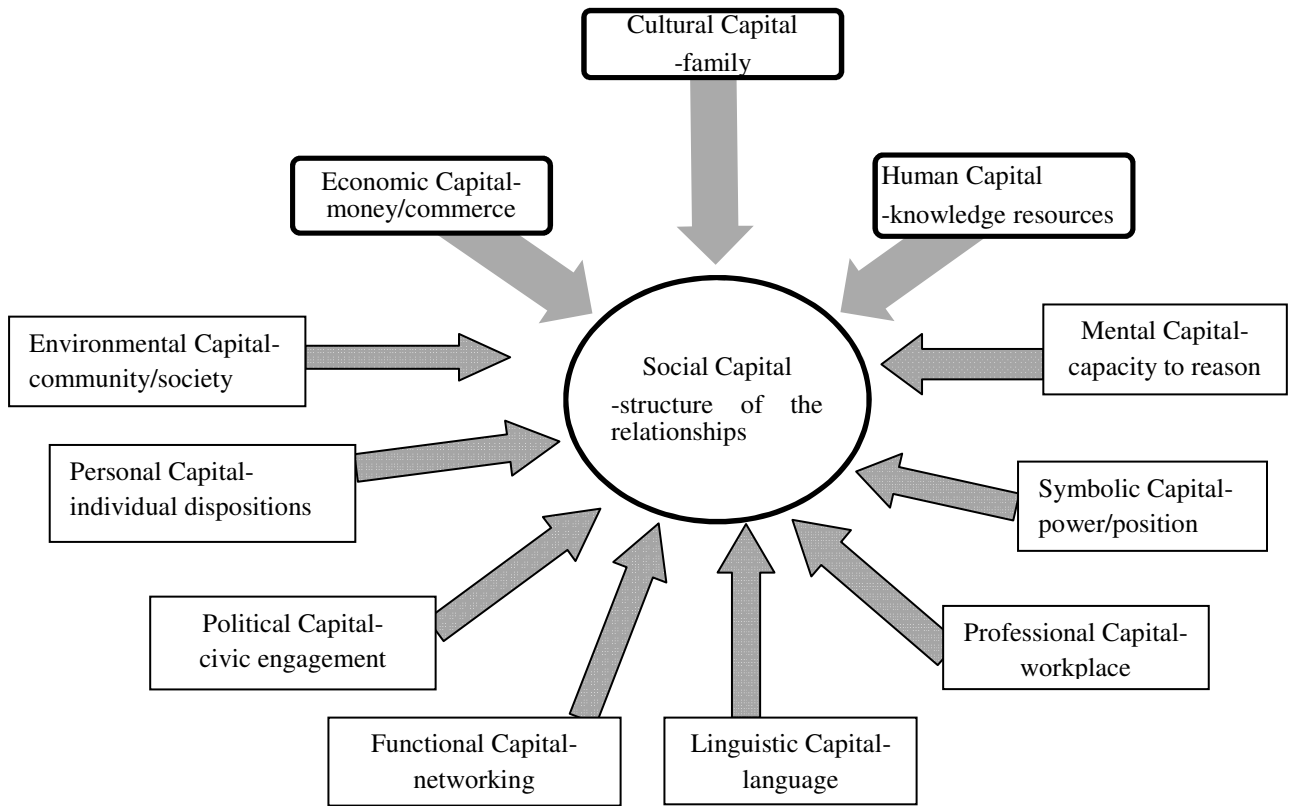


Figure 3. Forms of social capital.

My study hypothesized that individuals build social networks while participating in adult literacy education programs, and they maintain and use those relationships to enter and navigate the rigors of post-secondary education with new knowledge gained from the interactions within

the network. In my study, the individuals being investigated are GED completers currently enrolled in entry-level, college courses. The human (educational) capital factor involved is participation in adult literacy education and post-secondary education as a means to improve one's literacy level and eventually, his or her quality of life. The trade-off is the investment of the human capital factors (ALE participation and GED completion) into the mediating factors (college readiness and post-secondary education), with the expectation of producing social capital that includes the environment (self-fulfillment and community involvement) and personal (individual dispositions) forms of capital.

The modeling framework for my study (see Figure 2) showed first, how ALE participation can increase literacy and knowledge resources, namely GED completion. Secondly, the model linked GED completion to college readiness skills and knowledge, and to social capital attitudes and behaviors. This link was the beginning of the interaction as more GED completers realized post-secondary education as an option. Finally, my conceptual model connected the interactions that occur in post-secondary education with the production of social capital networks that are essential to community participation and action, and are the attributes associated with identity resources. The constructs of social capital that were used in my study, as highlighted in the conceptual model, are individual dispositions and community connectedness. A brief description of these constructs follows, with a more elaborate explanation and justification forthcoming in the Chapter three.

### *Individual Dispositions*

Individual dispositions arise as a factor of personal social capital. Studies conducted by the American Educational Research Association (AERA, 2008; Bullen, 2007; Franke, 2005 & Ruston, 2002) identified individual dispositions as self-processes. Self-concept, trust, and help-

seeking orientation were the factors used by the researchers to characterize individual dispositions. Dispositions which may foster access to institutionally-based social capital; high self-concept, trust, and help-seeking orientation; are modeled interactively with forms of institutional or academic social capital (academic support and school belonging (AERA, 2008). In my study, individual dispositions are characterized by control (self) and self-efficacy.

### *Community Connectedness*

Community development was distinguished by Bullen (2007) as incorporating seven models/approaches used to assess social capital as an individual, as well as, social construct. Strengthening community connectedness is one of the seven models. The goals of this model are to make connections between people, to build connections, and to develop community identity. Community connectedness (involvement) is a factor of environmental social capital. I chose this aspect of social capital as a construct for my study because I believe that the individual connections made and built through gaining knowledge are related to the social elements of participation and engagement in community development.

Developed by Bourdieu (1980) and Coleman (1988), social capital is an extant theory used in the study of economics, education, politics, and community development. Much of the controversy surrounding social capital has to do with its application to different types of problems and its use in theories involving different units of analysis (Portes, 2000). A subtle transition took place as the concept was exported into other disciplines where social capital became an attribute of the community itself (Portes, 2000). The concept of social capital is arguably one of the most successful exports from sociology to other social sciences and to public discourse during the last two decades (Portes, 2000). The emphasis on the functional needs for adult social roles and individual growth drives the literacy effort; dominant social and political

interests intervene in defining content, direction, and prevailing values in the literacy curriculum (Sparks, 2002).

Bourdieu (1980), Coleman (1988, 1994), and Putnam (1995, 2001) offered literature that helped me to understand the realm of social capital. The researchers used social capital theory widely in the study of economics, education, politics, and community development. Additionally, Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1994) took different avenues when conceptualizing social capital. Bourdieu focused on individuals or small groups as the units of analysis; Coleman, on the other hand, emphasized community ties that benefitted individuals.

Bourdieu (1980) specifically dealt with the interaction among money capital, social capital, cultural capital, and later, educational (human) capital (Portes, 2000). He affirmed that all forms of capital can be traded for one another. Such trades, without the investment of some material resources, however, seldom lead to the production of social capital (Portes, 2000). Social capital, according to Bourdieu (1986), consists of two dimensions: 1) social networks and connections/relationships, and 2) sociability (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Bourdieu (1986) specifically explained that people must not only have relationships with others, they must further understand how these networks operate and how one can maintain and utilize these relationships over time. Social networks must be constructed and then skillfully maintained in order for the actor to utilize their resources (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004).

Coleman (1988, 1994), on the other hand, viewed social capital as a source of social control. Coleman used the family system as the basis for his research (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). He presented the family system as a makeup of a) financial capital (financial resources for household and child rearing expenses); b) human capital (parental education and economic skills); and, c) social capital (any kind of social relationship that is a resource to an individual)

(Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004). Coleman also connected social ties with community ties, and studied the importance of the benefits they yielded to individuals (Portes, 2000). Later, Putnam (1993, 1995) extended the theory by focusing on the “stock” of social capital possessed by communities and even nations and the consequent structural effects on their development (Portes, 2000). Putnam noted that close or collective communities have greater social capital; social capital is a public good with beneficial outcomes for the community, such as reduced crime, higher employment and increased political participation (Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004).

For the purpose of this study, the GED completer’s decision to participate in an adult literacy education program is predicated on the need of the individual to improve his/her financial and human capital resources in order to produce greater social capital resources for the benefit of the community. Therefore, the individual is of greater cultural, economic and political benefit to society. Throughout the literature, (Berger, 2000; Dika & Singh, 2002; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Portes, 2000; Putnam, 2001) several terms are used to indicate increases social capital; (e.g., terms such as enhance, produce, gain, activate, develop, and access). In the text of my study, I will use the terms produce and activate, interchangeably, along with all derivations of each word. Social capital theory provides a reliable framework of analysis for my study because I believe that adult learners can produce social capital as a result of participation in adult literacy education programs and post-secondary education (i.e., human capital).

Robert Putnam (1993, 1995) expanded the original theories of Bourdieu and Coleman by introducing the “stock” of social capital possessed by communities and even nations and the consequent structural effects on their development. He defined social capital as the networks of trust and cooperation in a community, a necessary condition for and a product of a successful

community; further expounding that higher education is a social circumstance that fosters associational involvement (Putnam, 1993). Putnam (1995) further claimed that social capital refers to features of social organization such as networks, norms, and social trust that facilitate coordination and cooperation for mutual benefit. American social capital in the form of civic associations has significantly eroded over the last generation (Putnam, 1995).

Several years later, Putnam (2001) studied the effects of social capital across all the American states, using 13 different measures of social capital. He combined the measures by factor analysis, into a single measure and used multivariate regression analysis to analyze the power of each effect. Putnam then developed a social capital map of the United States. He argued that the best single predictor of the level of social capital in American states is the distance to the Canadian border; being closer to the Canadian border means more social capital. For instance, in northern-most states such as Minnesota, North Dakota and Montana, Putnam found high levels of social capital evident using all measures. However, in southern-most states such as Louisiana, Mississippi and Alabama, Putnam correlated the low levels of social capital with the institution of slavery. Putnam (2001) asserted that slavery as a system and the post-slavery reconstruction period were institutionally designed to destroy social capital. “This is what slavery was about; it was about destroying social capital, because social capital, among Blacks at least, and later in post-slavery, social connection between Blacks and poor Whites, would have threatened the structure of power” (p. 10).

After Putnam’s research on social capital, Freeman (2006) explored the relationships among social capital, human capital and race by investigating the social, economic and educational problems experienced by underachieving Black American children. The researcher used the issues of social justice and cultural assimilation to highlight the continuing problem of



the under-utilization of Black American children's educational and human potential. Freeman's research explored how the effects of cultural alienation and annihilation of Black children results in the loss of their identity and causes the under-utilization of their potential.

Freeman (2006) "used the physical characteristics, such as color, hair, and/or other distinguishing features that define race" (p. 51). Additionally, using characters, themes, and symbolism from Toni Morrison's novel, *The Bluest Eye*, (1970), Freeman uncovered two very important dynamics: that all that was worth learning was to separate body, mind, and spirit from all that suggested Africa; and that the undervaluing of Black culture in the educational system was devastating to Black children's educational opportunities (Freeman, 2006). This discovery means that schooling for Black children is often designed to separate them from their Black culture and heritage. Due to cultural depreciation, Black children begin to identify all that's white is right. This issue may have relevance to my study because Black adult learners may feel inferior to their White counterparts when attempting to improve their quality of life through literacy development. African American participants in my study may not perceive themselves as able to produce social capital due to cultural devaluing. Freeman's research was supported by Putnam's (2001) assertion that the system of slavery was designed to destroy social capital.

Through his analysis of social capital indices, Putnam (2001) concluded that schools work better in high social capital states; that violent crime is rarer; that social capital and economic equality go together; and, that social capital and civic engagement go together. All of this makes sense because the participants in my study have evidently dropped out of traditional school; are often prone to violence as a means of survival; are usually economically disadvantaged; and, are rarely civically engaged within their community. My study will highlight the need for improvement in education in order to dispel the negative stereotypes usually

associated with dropping out, crime, poverty and apathy towards community development and action.

Kilpatrick, Field, and Falk (2003) theorized that the value of social capital for community development is threefold; it represents both an existing set of resources within the community on which intervention may be based, a public good goal in its own right, and also a resource that can contribute towards sustained autonomous development after the intervention is deemed complete. Within the context of my study, these resources are represented as adult literacy education and GED completion. The GED certificate is the public good that, upon completion, affords the recipient the opportunity to enter into and succeed in post-secondary education. The researchers postulated that there are two sorts of positive outcomes possible from interactions that use social capital; one is some action or cooperation for the benefit of the community or its members; the other is the building or strengthening of knowledge and identity resources, such as constructing an agreed or shared vision for the future (Kilpatrick et al., 2003). In my study, the action or cooperation is being college-ready in order to enter post-secondary education; and the knowledge and identity resources are strengthened through the social networks that are developed in post-secondary education. These two outcomes, I postulate, will lead to the activation of social capital.

Consequently, Kilpatrick et al. (2003) also argued that social capital remains a highly appropriate analytical tool for analyzing community social assets (particularly relationships, networks, rules and procedures, and norms) and devising strategies for community development. The researchers stated that “the particular knowledge and skills, or human capital, that are an expected outcome of community development education are the very knowledge and skills that can be used to promote personal development in others, build networks and set up procedures

and structures that enable people to work together for mutual benefit; that is, community development education is expected to foster the building of social capital” (p. 423).

Several researchers (Balatti and Falk, 2002; Baptiste and Nyanungo, 2007; Canada Policy Research Initiative (CPRI), 2003; Rubenson, 2005; Van Der Veen and Preece, 2005) have utilized social capital theory to describe social capital as a means of creating intellectual (human) capital which is advantageous for organizations and institutions. Balatti and Falk (2002) studied the impact of adult learning on socioeconomic domains and found that social capital provides the resources needed to build networks essential to community interactions. The two-year, qualitative study was commissioned by the government of the State of Victoria in Australia, and concerned the impact on communities of the learning experienced by participants in 10 programs in the Adult and Community Education (ACE) sector. The purpose of the research was to investigate the range of individual and community benefits that can be experienced as a result of participating in ACE programs delivered in Victoria (Balatti & Falk, 2002). The results of the study highlighted eight areas of social concern of adult learners that necessitate lifelong learning; health, education and learning, employment and the quality of working life, time and leisure, command over goods and services, physical environment, and social environment and personal safety.

A draft discussion paper by the CPRI (2003) introduced an analogy of social capital to human capital that may be helpful in evaluating the two approaches. It was reported that failure to conceive of the acquisition of knowledge and skills as a capital investment and to evaluate their productive potential as such has blinded researchers and public policy practitioners to their full importance (CPRI, 2003). Human capital, according to the CPRI (2003) paper, has proven a robust concept over the past forty years because its core elements have more or less been clearly

identified as knowledge and skills, and this has allowed researchers to organize their efforts to evaluate the productive potential of this form of capital and to study the dynamics by which individuals invest in and accumulate human capital. The Government of Canada sought to better organize and coordinate social capital research efforts.

Through the initiative of the CPRI (2003) paper, an analytical framework was developed to operationalize the concepts. The framework depicts social capital as the networks of social relations that provide access to needed resources and supports (CPRI, 2003). The framework encompasses the investments that people make in establishing and maintaining these networks, the norms and institutional frameworks in which such networks operate, and the returns to those investments in the form of economic, social and health outcomes for individuals, communities and societies (CPRI, 2003). This framework fits into the context of my study because I propose that the investment in increasing literacy skills and educational attainment helps to establish critical networks and norms needed to perceive the return on the investment in the form of social capital. This individual social capital then becomes beneficial to communities and society.

In 2005, Van Der Veen and Preece argued that adult education successfully contributes to poverty reduction. The researchers theorized that adult education is much more than literacy or basic education; it includes agricultural extension, vocational education, community development and training for active citizenship (Van Der Veen & Preece, 2005). The researchers hypothesized that a more extended and more targeted system for basic education, agricultural extension and vocational training is urgently needed to help people to generate income; this development of social capital can contribute to poverty reduction in terms of income and developing trust and reciprocity (Van Der Veen & Preece, 2005). Van Der Veen and Preece (2005) also stated that “social capital is a potential resource for bridging boundaries between

state and civil society, between middle classes and the poor” (p. 387). Rubenson (2005) also affirmed that the development of adult literacy education has been closely linked with the aspirations of the working class. From the 1900s through the 1960s, adult education served as intellectual weaponry in the struggle for political rights and improved working conditions and started to become a concern for the state (Rubenson, 2005). This interest was to a large extent driven by the first wave of human capital theory and a growing awareness of the injustices of a hierarchical school system that had diminished the life chances of many adults (Rubenson, 2005).

In a three-part paper that examined the relationship between literacy and poverty reduction, Baptiste and Nyanungo (2007) concluded that as an anti-poverty strategy, WIA-funded programs are a miserable failure. The researchers theorized that it is unrealistic to expect adult literacy programs, by themselves, to alleviate poverty. First, the researchers used human capital theory to identify issues in the relationship between adult literacy and poverty reduction. This evaluation led to the identification of three sets of issues relating to the alleviation of poverty: 1) an economy must produce an adequate supply of good-paying jobs; 2) there must be an adequate pool of quality persons to fill those jobs; and 3) proper mechanisms must be in place to ensure that individuals get what they deserve (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007). Secondly, they described and assessed the impact of federally-funded literacy programs and concluded that education may serve only to increase the stock of human capital, but it has no role to play in job creation or political mobilizing (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007). Finally, the researchers offered suggestions to improve literacy’s impact on poverty reduction; namely, turn literacy programs into community organizations; create networks of community organizations; and, focus on doing and not learning (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007). Educational institutions, they argue, know how

to help learners produce human capital; the challenge is to help them produce human capital that holds the greatest productive potential, and helps them produce the other forms of capital (i.e. social capital) as well (Baptiste & Nyanungo, 2007).

An examination of a number of organizational studies (Berger, 2000; Goddard, 2003; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007; Wells, 2008) of postsecondary institutions in America revealed how institutional attempts to maximize human capital resources affect student enrollment, experiences, and outcomes in American higher education. Using Bourdieu's theory of social reproduction, Berger (2000) examined how the optimization of human capital resources affects undergraduate retention. The researcher developed a new theoretical perspective on retention that considered cultural capital at the individual level, as well as, at the institutional level of higher education as a means to explain persistence and as a way to improve retention (Berger, 2000). Berger pointed out that "the educational arena, including higher education, is one of the primary forums where individuals strive to optimize their access to levels of economic and cultural capital" (p. 121). Later, Goddard (2003) elaborated on a theoretical rationale for relational networks, norms, and trust as structural and functional forms of social capital that can facilitate student achievement. The main hypothesis of this study was confirmed: schools characterized by high levels of social capital had higher pass rates for their students on the high-stakes state-mandated assessments (Goddard, 2003). Although Goddard's research focused on elementary schools, the methods and findings could be used to assess the relationship between social capital and student achievement across institutional levels.

A study that focused on the contributing factors of social capital in education and public policy was conducted by Tett and Maclachlan (2007). It explored the interconnections between literacy learning, self-confidence, and identity as a learner and social capital. The study focused

on 600 literacy learners and their perceptions of the impact that learning had on their lives. Results of the mixed-methods study revealed that learners showed an increase in self-confidence; an increase in social contact and accessing help when needed; and, an increased level of social engagement- all factors that contribute to the activation of social capital. The researchers reported that these interconnections lead to positive social capital through building both knowledge resources of who, when and where to go to for advice or resources and through being willing to act for the benefit of the community and its members (Tett & Maclachlan, 2007). Tett and Maclachlan's study is similar to my study, with the exception of assessing the perceptions of college readiness of GED completers.

Wells (2008) used data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (1988 to 1994) to determine the effects that social and cultural capital have on persistence from first to second year in postsecondary education between community colleges and 4-year institutions. The total sample size of the study was 1,726 students; persistence was defined as enrollment at any postsecondary educational institution (2- or 4-year). A four-step regression analysis was conducted which concluded that social and cultural capital has a positive effect on student persistence in postsecondary education; this supports the majority of past research concerning social class and persistence (Wells, 2008). The results indicated that, on average, students with higher levels of valued social and cultural capital are more likely to persist from the first to the second year of college; lower persistence rates were associated with community colleges (Wells, 2008). The Wells (2008) study further exemplifies the importance of social capital on post-secondary education. My study will add to this research in order to better understand the link between literacy levels of GED completers and perceptions of college readiness and social capital outcomes.

For the purpose of my research, Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) model of social capital as the product of knowledge and identity resources was used to support the development of the study's conceptual framework. Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) model depicts social capital as an accumulation of the knowledge and identity resources drawn on by communities of common purpose. In this model, Falk and Kilpatrick posit that knowledge resources are a knowledge of who, when and where to go for advice or resources and knowledge of how to get things done (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Identity resources, they described, are the self-confidence, attitudes, ability and willingness needed to act for the benefit of the community and its members. New forms of social capital resources are formed when individuals participate in learning interactions, which results in the building of knowledge or human capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000). Knowledge and identity resources allow community members to combine their skills and human capital with the knowledge and skills of others to produce some action or cooperation for the benefit of producing social capital (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

I hypothesized that knowledge acquisition (through ALE/GED programs) assists in creating identity resources through post-secondary education opportunities. Falk and Kilpatrick's model, representing the relationships among learning, social capital, and human or intellectual capital has been widely used (Fevre, Rees, & Gorard, 1999; Field & Spence, 2000; Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998; Schuller & Banford, 2000). Falk and Kilpatrick's (2000) study examined the nature of the changes that occur through interactive processes in a rural community. Their study was based on three assumptions: first, interactions as sites for building social capital; second, the process and contextual dimensions of learning interactions; and finally, social capital as a resource that can be stored and drawn on. The qualitative study used a whole –community case study, ethnographic design to collect data. Five techniques were used for analyses due to the



richness of the data. The community was a small, Australian town with a population of around 2,500. The sample was selected through purposeful sampling using socio-demographic variables. The data were collected by interviews, personal tapes and diaries, and tape recorded meetings. The researchers concluded that social capital may result from interactions which draw on knowledge and identity resources; social capital is simultaneously used and built, and the interactions in which this occurs are the only possible occasions when the use and building can occur (Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000).

### *Summary*

This review of literature has provided support for the belief that literacy and learning affects changes in social capital. The importance of adult literacy education is not only significant to high school dropouts, but it also appears to be crucial to adults experiencing life changes. The theoretical and empirical works of this literature review indicate that the impacts of low literacy can be devastating (Fingeret, 1983; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Scribner, 1984; Torres, 1994; Wagner, 1992). In communities, low literacy can lead to increased poverty, crime, welfare dependence, and unemployment. Illiteracy hampers community growth and development and ultimately produces individuals who are unable to effectively contribute to society (Lewis, 1997; Sticht, 2001; Wagner & Venezky, 1999). Adult literacy education is the solution to the problem of illiteracy and of understanding the effectiveness and necessity of ALE programs to improve literacy skills (Caffarella, 2002; Galbraith, 1990; Tuijnman, 1990; Zemke & Zemke, 1984).

This literature review also brings to focus the educational values and economic benefits of the GED as ALE participants strive to improve their quality of life (Baycich, 2003; Boesel, 1998; Heckman & Rubinstein, 2001; Joost, 2009; Tyler, 2003, 2004; Tyler et al. 2000). The importance of college knowledge, college readiness, and college preparation are emphasized in

several studies and theoretical applications, as previously discussed (Byrd, 2005; Cline et al. 2007; Conley, 2005, 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2008; 2010; Conley et al. 2009; Dougherty, 2008; GED Testing Service, 2005; Goodall, 2009; Green & Forster, 2003; Kuh, 2007; Roderick et al. 2009; Tokpah & Padak, 2003). Finally, social capital theory was explored and presented as a means to improve individual fulfillment through enhanced educational resources (human capital) and as a means to improve community involvement and interaction through the production of social capital (Balatti & Falk, 2002; Bourdieu, 1980, 1986; Canada PRI, 2003; Coleman, 1988, 1994; Dika & Singh, 2002; Franke, 2005; Goddard, 2003; Kilpatrick et al 2003; Rubenson, 2005; Schaefer-McDaniel, 2004; Tett & Maclachlan, 2007; Wigley & Akkoyunlu-Wigley, 2006).

I propose that for literacy to contribute to college readiness and social capital, ALE programs, like the GED certification, must be instrumental in transforming economic and political participation through community involvement. Individuals participate in adult literacy education programs on a voluntary basis and for numerous reasons; however, since participation involves social interaction, the information in this literature review could support my hypothesis that learning positively influences social capital. With social capital theory as my framework, I argued that ALE programs, specifically GED preparation, provide not only academic skills, but skills that will affect a participant's ability to function in post-secondary education, as well as, in current social roles and community endeavors. A more complete understanding of adult literacy and its relationship to social capital is needed to extend the knowledge base on the value of the GED and college readiness. With an understanding of the specific needs of adults, educators and policy makers can provide optimal learning experiences for adult learners.

Given that previous research on the relationships between literacy, adult education, and the value of the GED, college readiness and social capital has used both quantitative and

qualitative methods, it is appropriate for me to use a quantitative form of inquiry to logically link the aforementioned literature to this proposed study. The validity and generalizability of this study, then, was increased since a quantitative methodology expanded on similar published and widely cited scholarly research.

## **Chapter III**

### **Methodology**

#### *Research questions/design*

For this research, I used a quantitative methodological approach to complete this descriptive, cross-sectional study. An explanatory, quantitative design offered a more comprehensive explanation and examination of GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital and the relationship to literacy. This approach addressed my study's purpose, which was to learn and better understand the perceptions of college readiness and social capital held by GED completers currently enrolled in entry-level college courses in a community college environment. My data sources included a researcher-developed, survey questionnaire that gathered demographic information, as well as assessed perceptions of college readiness and social capital on a 4-point Likert scale. GED participant files, used for accountability purposes within each ALE/GED program, were screened to gather TABE post-test scores of participants who were unable to self-report on the questionnaire. The study sought to answer one primary research question and several sub-questions:

RQ1: What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?

- A. What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?
- B. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their college readiness based on literacy level?
- C. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their production of social capital based on literacy level?

The elements of this quantitative research design are presented in this chapter in the following order: (1) research questions/design, (2) sampling procedures, (3) setting, (4) instrumentation, (5) study variables, (6) data collection and analysis methods, (7) study limitations, and (8) reliability and validity assurance.

A quantitative approach was employed to examine the relationships among the variables described throughout. The complexity of the issues investigated in this study takes into account factors that influence college readiness and social capital. Specifically, I investigated the perceptions of college readiness and social capital of GED completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education and the relationship of their perceptions to their literacy level.

#### *Sampling procedures*

The 321 subjects used for my study were derived from the target population (N=1050) of GED completers currently enrolled in entry-level, post-secondary, education courses at two area community colleges. The entire populations of (N=600) Delgado Community College (DCC) and (N=450) Nunez Community College (NCC) were accessible and available to the researcher; therefore, sampling was not necessary. A sample size table for proportions is helpful for estimating a sample size for survey work in which we want to estimate the percentage of individuals who have some trait (Patten, 2004). According to Patten (2004) and Zemke and Kramlinger (1986), for a population of 1000-1100, with a confidence level of 95% and a confidence interval of 5, a sample size of 277-284 is sufficient to make generalizations to the entire population. Therefore, my sample size of 321 is acceptable to generalize to the population of GED completers and NCC and DCC.

The subjects were former participants in adult literacy education (ALE) and general education development (GED) programs and had earned a GED certificate within the past three

years (2009-2011). My study focused on the group defined as adults- persons 18 years of age and older. Given the fact that study participants are currently enrolled in entry-level college courses, as indicated by COMPASS placement scores, enrollment was deemed as both successful entry into post-secondary education and as the primary criteria for participation in this study.

As Department Chair of Developmental Studies at Nunez Community College, I have had a professional relationship with the administration and instructors of students who have obtained a GED certificate at both colleges since 2009. I have also collaborated with the directors of the ALE/GED programs, at both NCC and DCC in order to discuss and plan study skills and literacy improvement strategies for students transitioning from an ALE/GED program into entry-level developmental education courses. These collaborations did not include students. Discussions have previously occurred regarding solicitation of students who have received the GED and successfully matriculated into entry-level courses at NCC and DCC to participate in my dissertation study; both directors gave me direct verbal permission, as well as written consent (see Appendix A). Therefore, I did not anticipate difficulty in gaining access to my prospective study participants. To ensure that I did not conduct “backyard” research, I did not select students that I have had direct contact with in the past three years. At Nunez, I recruited participants through recommendations from a wide variety of instructors of entry-level developmental and general education courses. At Delgado, I have not had contact with students who fit the criteria of my participants.

Participant recruiting efforts began with approval from the University of New Orleans’ Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix B). Due to the use of participants currently enrolled in two GNO area community colleges, I also sought approval from the appropriate IRB, institutional effectiveness dean, or administrative department heads at both colleges. After IRB

approval, I gained access to participants through the program directors from each ALE/GED program and through the Offices of Institutional Effectiveness at each community college. (see Appendices C, D & E).

A database of GED completers was developed by the administrative assistants and data research assistants at both colleges. ALE/GED program directors are required to track GED recipients through the first-year of completion of the program. GED completers at NCC and DCC adult education programs are tracked for three years after completion of the certificate and entry into post-secondary education. Tracking is used for evaluation of adult education programs, adult education curricula, and participants' successful entry into college. Tracking data are confidential and, therefore, are secure in each campus's Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Adult Education program databases.

### *Setting*

I chose the GNO area as the setting for the study because adult literacy rates have not been assessed since the 2003 National Adult Literacy Survey (NAAL). The 2003 NAAL reported that an estimated 24%-32% of people 16 years and older in the GNO, as many as 280,800 people, function at the lowest literacy level. In Orleans Parish alone, up to 44% of adults are at the lowest level of literacy; whereas the national average is 22% (Miller, 2004). Therefore, the need for this analysis was primarily to assess current data regarding adult literacy rates, adult literacy education in the GNO area. It was also significant so as to add to the current discussion regarding the need for increased college readiness and preparedness of GED completers in order to produce greater social capital, enter into post-secondary education, improve their quality of life, and assist in the post-Katrina rebuilding effort in the GNO community.

### *Instrumentation*

The data collection instrument created for this study was a self-reporting, two-part questionnaire consisting of 76 items designed to elicit the respondents' demographic attributes and attitudes towards college readiness and social capital. Each item addressed factors that connect literacy and college readiness to post-secondary education and social capital. Negative response statements were included to ensure reliability of participant responses. The first part of the questionnaire, (Q1-Q9), gathered demographic attributes which were used in order to characterize the sample and to describe the features of the survey items. Two open-ended questions on the survey were used to lend qualitative support to the findings of the quantitative analysis, and to provide a foundation for future qualitative research of the same constructs in order to gain a deeper and more meaningful insight into this phenomenon. The second part of the survey consisted of 65 statements, (Q10-Q74), rated on a 4-point Likert scale and developed to assess the perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The perception ratings ranged from a high score of 4 for strongly agree, to a low score of 1 for strongly disagree. Negatively worded items were reverse-coded. Items were delineated to identify the constructs of college readiness and social capital as described below.

Construct 1: ***College Readiness*** consisted of 43 statements designed to identify the participants' attitudes towards being prepared for college as a result of ALE/GED participation.

Construct 2: ***Social Capital*** was comprised of 37 statements designed to identify the respondents' perceptions about their individual and cooperative engagement within their community. Of the 80 items, fifteen were related to both constructs.

Table 3 shows the connection between each of the questionnaire items, the factors of college readiness and social capital, and the rationale for each construct. The first dependent



variable, college readiness, was assessed through the factors of Academic Behaviors and Contextual Skills and Awareness. Questionnaire items for college readiness were developed and justified through the research presented by Conley (2007). Social capital, the second dependent variable of the study, was assessed through the factors of individual dispositions and community connectedness. Social capital factors were rationalized by the AERA (2008) report and Bullen (2007). Several items on the questionnaire contained attributes of both college readiness and social capital.

Table 3  
*Questionnaire development*

<b>Dependent variable</b>	<b>Factor</b>	<b>Item number</b>	<b>Source/Rationale</b>
<b>College Readiness</b>	Academic Behaviors	10,11,12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 28, 29, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 44, 45, 46, 48, 49, 59, 66,74, 75	Encompasses a range of behaviors that reflects greater student self-awareness, self-monitoring, and self-control; self-monitoring skills and study skills (Conley, 2010).
	Contextual Skills and Awareness	17, 26, 29, 30, 31, 32, 42, 43, 47, 75	Contextual factors, “college knowledge”, of the college processes and the privileged information necessary to understand how college operates as a system and a culture (Conley, 2007c; Conley, 2010).
<b>Social Capital</b>	Individual Dispositions	15, 18, 21, 33, 37, 38, 40, 41, 43, 44, 46, 48, 50, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 63,65, 68, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74,76	Individual dispositions is a network variable theorized to link individuals with more valuable forms of capital (large networks, high occupational status, loose ties) are included as forms of social capital the student may access within and outside the school environment (AERA, 2008).
	Community Connectedness	51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 57, 59, 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 73, 74, 76	The connections between people characterized by the participation and social engagement in community development (Bullen, 2007). Social capital can be understood as a resource to collective action which may lead to a broad range of outcomes (Bullen, 2007).

### *Questionnaire Review and Field Test*

In developing items for the questionnaire, I enlisted a panel of experts consisting of both ALE/GED program directors, three colleagues from each community college (six total), and my dissertation committee in order to assure content validity. This panel of experts reviewed the items and provided suggestions that were used to revise the first draft. All of the experts were familiar with the concepts involved and the educational research that establishes readability of the researcher-developed survey.

I conducted a pilot field test of the instrument to gain feedback from (n=10) GED completers enrolled in entry-level courses at one of the community colleges to ensure face validity of the instrument. A pilot test must first be conducted to test both the instrument and the survey procedures before the actual survey is conducted (Levy & Lemeshow, 1999). I interviewed GED completers to identify their perceptions of college readiness and social capital as assessed by the survey questionnaire. Upon completion of the survey, questions were categorized in order to determine one score for each construct or factor. I used the feedback from the pilot test to modify the instrument as needed. Reliability and consistency in administration of the survey was maintained and documented accordingly. Feedback collected was used to rewrite the second and final questionnaire used in this study, thus, ensuring the applicability of questions asked to GED completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education.

Cronbach's *alpha* was conducted to determine the internal consistency of the survey items. The internal consistency reliability alpha of my instrument was acceptable at .894, when administered to 321 GED completers in the GNO area. As a newly developed survey, there were no reliability measures available for the instrument. I established content validity by ensuring that the items and scores of the survey were representative of all possible questions regarding

demographic information, college readiness and social capital needed for the analysis. Through the pilot test and use of the panel of experts, I ensured that all survey items were relevant to the constructs of college readiness and social capital; and that each item was well-designed and carefully worded for ease of understanding by participants. Good survey questions must be feasible to answer and respondents must be willing to answer them (Fowler, 1995). McIntyre (1999) also suggested that “survey questions use words that are consistent with the educational level of the intended respondents” (p. 78).

### *Study variables*

The independent variable for my study was literacy level. The purpose of my study was to examine if and how literacy level had the potential to predict college readiness and social capital of GED completers enrolled in post-secondary education. I found no evidence that other studies have used literacy level as a variable in the examination of college readiness and social capital. The post-test score on the Test of Adult Basic Education (TABE) represented the literacy level of each participant for the study. The post-test scores refer to the grade level and the corresponding literacy level, developed by the National Reporting System (NRS), from the TABE.

The TABE is the official measure of educational progress in adult literacy programs in the Greater New Orleans area and throughout the United States. The TABE assesses competencies in reading, math, and language skills. It is designed to measure the acquisition of skills normally obtained from the second grade through high school graduation (Philliber, Spillman, & King, 1996). The results are then used to plan individual instruction within the ALE/GED preparation program. The TABE was revised in 1986; the revision resulted in all new test items. The range of skill levels that can be assessed has been extended, and the specific skills

that are measured are more finely divided and identified (Sticht, 1990). The test contains adult-oriented reading material and a mix of material from educational, daily life, and employment-related contexts; alternate versions of the TABE are available that focus on work contexts: health, business, trade, and general occupational (Kruidenier, 2002a). The TABE provides norms for adults in adult basic education programs and other settings that permit test users to interpret scores both in grade levels (grade-school referenced norms) and in relation to adult performance on the tests (Sticht, 1990). It also provides separate, norm-referenced scores (percentile ranks), and its content reflects the literacy contexts represented (Kruidenier, 2002a). The results are usually presented in grade equivalent scores, making it easy to interpret the level of literacy (Philliber et al. 1996).

The literacy level variable was coded and entered as six levels. The National Reporting System (NRS) developed six levels of adult literacy for the specific purpose of placement in adult education programs (The Wright Group, nd). The six levels of adult literacy are beginning adult basic education literacy (0-1.9), which is below 2<sup>nd</sup> grade level; beginning basic education, which is comparable to grades 2-3.9; low intermediate basic education, grades 4-5.9; high intermediate basic education, grades 6-8.9; low adult secondary education, representing grades 9-10.9; and, high adult secondary education, which is equivalent to grades 11-12.9 (The Wright Group, nd). The NRS levels of literacy and corresponding grade levels are shown in Table 4. Grade equivalents are intended to indicate achievement levels related to typical educational structures: elementary and secondary schools. The levels do not have comparable meaning in non-graded programs, particularly programs that focus on the education and training of adults. Grade equivalents are commonly understood reference points for adult learners and teachers and can facilitate organization of instructional groups and selection of appropriate instructional

materials (McGraw-Hill, 2004). As indicated in the table, the six levels are denoted as grade levels.

Table 4  
*TABE pre- and post-test literacy levels*

<b>LEVEL</b>	<b>GRADE LEVEL</b>
1-Beginning ABE Literacy	0 – 1.9
2- Beginning Basic Education	2 – 3.9
3-Low Intermediate Basic Education	4 – 5.9
4-High Intermediate Basic Education	6 – 8.9
5-Low Adult Secondary Education	9 – 10.9
6-High Adult Secondary Education	11 – 12.9

*Source:* The Wright Group. Contemporary performance research of effectiveness

The pre-test of the TABE is considered to be the “anchor” test for participants and is used as the basis for planning instruction and remediation according to NRS guidelines. Once student instruction and remediation are complete, a TABE post-test is administered to determine gains and corresponding (scale score, grade equivalency) NRS literacy level (The Wright Group, nd). The post-test data were collected from participant records and assessed through a single item, Question 8, in the demographic section of the survey for recording TABE scores. The post-test score was self-reported, if known, or gathered from participant files by the researcher and administrative assistants. Self-reported scores were verified by the researcher from identifiers that were cross-referenced to names of participants in the databases. These data are used for accountability purposes for each ALE/GED program. Confidentiality was assured by the researcher by not discussing or disseminating any specifics gathered from these records. I was given permission to review student files by each program director for research purposes only.

My study examined two dependent variables: (1) perceptions of college readiness (academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness) and (2) perceptions of social capital

(individual dispositions and community connectedness). College readiness factors included “college knowledge”, self-interests, attitudes and behaviors (academic behaviors), college preparation and awareness. Social capital factors included knowledge resources (human capital), self-fulfillment and awareness (individual dispositions/attitudes), and elements of community involvement and participation (community connectedness). Each of these factors was measured by items included on the College Readiness/Social Capital survey developed for this study. The 66 survey items were formulated from concepts gleaned from previous research studies and from existing college readiness and social capital surveys and indices (Bernier, 2008, Bullen& Onyx, 1998, Conley, 2007c).

#### *Data Collection*

I began the data collection process by using a researcher-created, cross-sectional, self-reporting survey questionnaire developed to gather current demographic information from former adult, ALE/GED participants ages 18 and over, who are currently enrolled in entry-level college courses (see Appendix F). Demographic information is essential for understanding the personal and social characteristics of research participants (Creswell, 2003). Questions 1-9 of the survey collected demographic data. Relevant concepts, taken from college readiness surveys developed by Bernier (2008) and Conley (2007c) and a social capital index developed by Bullen and Onyx (1998), were used to create a 4-point Likert-rating scale questionnaire specifically designed for this study, also included on the survey(see Appendix F). This survey assessed and evaluated participants’ perceptions of college readiness skills and behaviors and perceptions regarding the production of social capital. Entry into a drawing for a chance to win one of four \$100 gift certificates to a local chain store was offered as an incentive to respond to the survey.

The survey was administered through multiple modes. Salant and Dillman (1994) espoused the use of mixed mode surveys that combine survey media. This approach first uses the best method for achieving a high response rate at the lowest possible cost; other media are then used to improve the response rate (Salant & Dillman, 1994). Initially, it was determined that paper-pencil, group administration would be the optimum method of data collection due to the socioeconomic status and literacy levels of GED completers. It was assumed that many would not have access to computers, would have limited computer literacy skills, or would be unable to complete mail-out surveys without assistance possibly hampering alternative data collection modes. A recognition that different members of a single household may have access to one method but not another, forces an explicit recognition of the mixed mode itself as a source of measurement error (Dillman, 1991) It was determined that group administrations, held at each program site (NCC and DCC) would be both comfortable and familiar to participants and would attract more potential participants. Administrative assistants from both GED programs were solicited to assist in this process.

A database from each campus was developed that comprised the names, phone numbers, and literacy levels of students. Names of participants were cross-referenced with a four-digit identifier that was used by the researcher to gather missing data and to ensure confidentiality. The database was sorted to include students currently enrolled in entry-level courses and students that I had not come in contact with, dating back to 2009. The purpose of this sort was to ensure anonymity, to eliminate researcher bias, and to avoid any consideration of “backyard research.” The database yielded (N=1050) potential participants from both Nunez and Delgado.

The first step in the selection process began with 100 phone calls, made throughout a two- week period, to invite participants to a face-to-face group administration session. A choice

of two dates per site was given. This effort produced 31 participants at DCC and 27 participants at NCC. I administered the surveys with the help of an administrative assistant. Each session was approximately 30 minutes in length; with 15 minutes for introductions and instructions, and 15 minutes for survey completion.

Interestingly enough, the first round of phone calls also led to individuals' requests for either mail-out or computer-based surveys. This disproved the assumptions of program directors, instructors, and the researcher that GED completers would be unwilling and unable to participate in either of the aforementioned modes. Consequently, an additional round of 200 phone calls were made that amounted to 50 mail-out and 150 online surveys requested. The online survey was created using *Survey Monkey*, which is a data collection/analysis program widely used for survey data collection. The emails contained a letter of consent (see Appendix G) and a link leading directly to the survey. Stated on the letter of consent were instructions for linking to the survey, which served as consent to participate once the link was followed. Each subject was given an identifier before submission of the survey. The identifier was cross-referenced with the name and respondent number to ensure anonymity of participants. Responses to the online survey were directly stored into a database on the survey site. This database is capable of being downloaded into *SPSS* format for data entry.

To facilitate the next round of mail-outs, addresses of participants were added to the database. Included in the mail-out surveys were the survey instrument, the letter of consent (see Appendix G), and a self-addressed, stamped envelope for the return mailing. An additional 205 surveys were mailed to GED completers currently enrolled in at least three credit hours. Between mid-November, 2011 and mid-January, 2012, an additional 150 calls were made, 125 mail-outs were sent, and 125 emails were delivered for a total of 905 attempted contacts made. A deadline



for receipt of all data was set for January 25, 2012. Within the time frame given, a total of 275 emails were sent with 36 emails (13.1%) returned undeliverable; 380 mail-out surveys were sent with 31 (8.2%) returned with incorrect addresses; and 450 phone calls were made with 72 (16%) declared out of service. Usable questionnaires and online responses were received from 321 subjects. The usable response rate was 42%.

#### *Preparation of Data/Missing Data*

The data cleaning and organizing process involved checking each survey for accuracy, missing data, or incompleteness. Three hundred and twenty-one participants responded to the survey. Not all respondents answered every question: 11 respondents (3.4%) missed a total of 61 questions (19%). Missing response items included: Q10, *the GED program prepared me for college* (1); Q23, *Setting personal goals is difficult for me* (3); Q25, *I am not a self-disciplined person* (6); Q33, *Upon completion of the GED, my quality of life did not improve* (8); Q39, *Time management is difficult for me* (5); Q41, *I work well in groups* (9); Q46, *The GED had value to me* (11); Q47, *Before entering, I understood the required college options and choices* (5); Q51, *I am connected to various support networks within my community* (1); Q59, *I can use my skills and knowledge to network with others in my community* (6); Q66, *Continuing my education has allowed me to contribute to my community* (6). The number of cases was considered extremely small; therefore, data imputation methods were not needed. Non-response or missing data values were established as, Missing at Random (MAR).

I conducted a preliminary factor analysis on all scale items. As a result, reverse items (23, 25, 33, and 39) were eliminated from the scale due to inter-item correlations below .30 (Hatcher, 1994; DeVellis, 2003; Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Reverse-coding of negatively worded items was employed to prevent ambiguity (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995; Nunnally, 1978).

The items had missing scores, unusually high means, and correlated poorly with other items in the factor. The reverse coding and instances of missing scores are suspected as the cause for the low correlations. List-wise deletion was the statistical technique used to handle the remaining MAR items during data analyses. The data were then logged and entered into an *Excel* spreadsheet. Finally, the data were coded and transformed and a data set was developed in *SPSS* that was ready for analysis. Missing values were entered into *SPSS* as 99. Scale totals were determined for each scale item during factor analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Several quantitative approaches were employed to analyze and report data collected for the study. First, descriptive statistics were used to address RQ1 and to present the characteristics of the sample. Also, the features of the survey data were presented through descriptive analysis. Descriptive statistics are recommended when the objective is to describe and discuss a data set more generally and conveniently than would be possible using raw data alone (Texas State Auditor's Office, 1995). The measures of central tendency analyzed from the descriptive statistics were the mean, mode, response category frequency and percentages in categories; the measure of variability was the standard deviation.

Next, an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis analysis (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation was conducted to answer sub-question (A) and to determine the survey items that define the latent variables of the study: college readiness and social capital. Oblique rotation is used when the factors are allowed to correlate. The choice of rotation depends on whether there is a good theoretical reason to suppose that the factors should be related or independent, and also how the variables cluster on the factors before rotation (Field, 2009). Factor analysis helps researchers to determine which indicators (test items) cluster together in a consistent or

reliable way, indicating that they are probably measuring the same thing; it is commonly used to assess the reliability of scales (Vogt, 2007). The pattern matrix was examined before interpreting the factor analysis. The measure of sampling adequacy (MSA) was examined for each of the individual items in the scale. An MSA value close to 1 indicates that patterns of correlations are relatively compact and so factor analysis should yield distinct and reliable (Field, 2009). MSA is used as a statistical measure of adequate sample size. The MSA finding for my study was .791. Factor analysis is appropriate if the MSAs are above .50 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998).

I examined the latent root criterion (eigenvalues) and the scree plot criterion to determine if there was more than one scale for each construct. Hair et al. (1998) recommends an eigenvalue greater than one as a cutoff for factor extraction. Due to the exploratory nature of my study, all items with cross loadings at or over .40 and any items that did not factor load at .40 were eliminated. Within the data analysis procedure, a scale score was calculated based on the factor analysis. Then, Chronbach's *alpha* was conducted from the scale scores and reported to assess the internal consistency of each scale. Chronbach's *alpha* for my study was acceptable at .894. The lower limit of Cronbach's *alpha* is .70, unless it is exploratory research, which may accept a .60 (Hair et al., 1998).

Third, multiple regression analysis was used to compare scores within groups and to determine if perceptions of college readiness and social capital could be predicted from literacy level. Prior to computing the multiple regressions, I checked the independent variables for correlation using Pearson's correlation coefficient in the bivariate procedure. Variables that are highly correlated, which is  $> .50$ , might lead to multicollinearity (Leech, Barrett, and Morgan, 2005). Multicollinear variables are highly correlated variables that contain the same information

and are measuring the same thing (Mertler & Vannatta, 2005). Multiple regressions were conducted on each literacy level group – 6-8.9 (Group 4), 9-10.9 (Group 5), and 11-12.9 (Group 6). The college readiness and social capital scores that emerged from the PAF were used as dependent variables. Group comparisons were based on calculated factor scores. Regression was appropriate for this study because it was exploratory and it helped to explain if literacy level, the independent variable, was important. Research question 2 was also answered with regression analysis.

Finally, a one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if significant differences exist between the means of the six samples of GED completers (six literacy levels of TABE) and their perceptions of college readiness and social capital. For the purpose of my study, the post-test score of the TABE is considered to be the overall literacy level of the participants. Research suggests that individuals who test within the medium (6-8.9) to advanced (9-10.9) literacy level are more likely to obtain the GED credential and consider post-secondary education as an option for self-improvement (Wenger, McHugh & Houck, 2006). Thematic analysis was used to categorize and code responses provided to two open-ended questions at the end of the survey. This qualitative data supported the findings of the quantitative findings.

Table 5  
*Research questions/analysis/result*

<u>Research question</u>	<u>Analysis</u>	<u>Expected result</u>
RQ1: What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?	Descriptive statistics (Mean, standard deviation)	Test internal consistency reliability of the survey Characterize participants in the sample Characterize survey item responses
A: What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?	Principal axis factoring  Cronbach's alpha Correlation analysis  Regression analysis	Determine items that cluster to identify relevant factors  Calculate factor scores to compare scores (means) within groups

<u>Research question</u>	<u>Analysis</u>	<u>Expected result</u>
B: Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their college readiness based on literacy level?	One-way ANOVA	Determine if significant differences exist among the means of the six literacy level groups
C: Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their production of social capital based on literacy level?	One-way ANOVA	Determine if significant differences exist among the means of the six literacy level groups

Table 5 was created to show how each research question was analyzed through specific quantitative statistical methods. Each analysis method was deemed appropriate by the researcher through the review of the related literature. The results may then serve to provide the answer to the research question. All analyses were conducted and interpreted using the *Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS) 15.0 for Windows (1998)* statistical analysis computer software program.

#### *Study Limitations*

The study was delimited to 312 former ALE/GED program participants, 18 years of age and older, currently enrolled in two Louisiana community colleges, who have received a GED certificate. A second delimitation was that participants enrolled in English as Second Language (ESL) components of ALE programs were omitted from this study in order to minimize the potential for missing or skewed data stemming from issues surrounding language barriers of both participants and the researcher. Thirdly, TABE post-test scores were delimited to 2009-2012. Finally, due to time constraints, the study's timeframe was delimited to one semester. Several limitations arose as a result of this study. First, a change in the demographic makeup of the GNO area, after a traumatic weather event in 2005 (Hurricane Katrina), has made earlier data obsolete. The second limitation was the location of the chosen sites. The two community colleges are

located in Orleans and St. Bernard parishes; therefore, travel time for the researcher and class and work schedules of the participants hampered participation. The limitations did not affect the significance of the study or the utility of the results for future research.

### *Reliability and Validity*

Reliability and validity of the instrument are very important in quantitative research. Errors in data are decreased when reliability and validity are ensured (Patten, 2004). Validity refers to the degree that an instrument accurately assesses the concepts being measured; this means whether one can draw meaningful and useful inferences from scores on the instruments (Creswell, 2003). Face validity of the survey instrument was obtained through several methods. First, field testing of ten individuals with GED credentials in a community college setting was conducted. Comments from the field test were used to make needed revisions to the instrument. Second, an analysis of the survey items and feedback from a panel of five experts in the fields of adult literacy education and higher education provided information on the rewording or removal of items from the survey. Content validity was then established by the items being deemed representative of all possible questions regarding college readiness and social capital needed for the analysis. Finally, Cronbach's alpha was used to test the reliability of the key constructs studied.

### *Summary*

The goal of this research study was to understand GED completers' perceptions of their college readiness and social capital. Several theories (Caffarella, 2002; Knowles, 1980, 1984; Kruidenier, 2002a; McCook & Barber, 2002) suggested reasons for and benefits of participation in adult literacy programs to improve quality of life. However, there have not been any empirical studies that link literacy improvement and GED completion with college readiness skills and

behaviors and the production of social capital. It is my hope that the results of this study helped to define and clarify the aforementioned linkage and offered insight into the urgency of the impacts of low adult literacy in the GNO area. The findings can assist adult education program planners, policy makers, and adult educators in providing optimal experiences that guarantee success for all adult learners in both educational settings and community environments.

## Chapter IV

### Results/Findings

My study was designed to explore GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and their perceptions of social capital. The current study also sought to determine if literacy level was predictive of these perceptions. The results and findings of this study are presented in this chapter. Techniques used to analyze the data and present the results, as they relate to each research question, will be discussed. Given the significance of studying GED completers' perceptions, it is essential that program planners and policy makers understand GED completers' perceptions and be cognizant of the factors that lead to those perceptions. My study sought to answer the following research question and sub-questions:

RQ1: What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?

- A. What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?
- B. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their college readiness based on literacy level?
- C. Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of their production of social capital based on literacy level?

#### *Descriptive Statistics of Sample*

##### *Participants' Demographic Characteristics*

Demographic identifiers of the participants for my study were used to characterize the sample of respondents. Table 6 provides a profile of the participants based on their demographic characteristics. The respondents consisted of 49% more females than males. A greater percentage of respondents (47.6%) were in the 18-25 year age range, compared to 19.7% at 26-33 years of



age and 30.0% at 34+ years of age; resulting in a slightly, negatively skewed distribution. The largest percentage (76.4%) of respondents reported their ethnicity as Black/African American (39.1%) and White/Caucasian (37.3%). Participants representing other ethnicities accounted for 20.9% of the reported self descriptions. The results of respondents' employment status were virtually identical with 48.5% reporting being employed and 48.8% reporting being unemployed. With respect to participants' household income, a majority of respondents (57.9%) reported an income of 10,000-30,000 dollars per year; with only 38.2% reporting 31,000-70,000 dollars per year income; as reflected in the nearly bimodal distribution. Overwhelmingly, respondents attended NCC's ALE/GED program (53.9%), as opposed to DCC's program (13.3%), with the additional 30% reporting that they had attended other adult education programs throughout the GNO area and beyond.

Table 6  
*Descriptive Statistics for Demographic Characteristics*

<b><u>Measure</u></b>	<b><u>Frequency</u></b>	<b><u>Percent</u></b>
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	241	73%
Male	80	24.2%
<b>Age</b>		
18-25	157	47.6
26-33	65	19.7
34+	99	30.0
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
Asian American	14	4.2
Black American	129	39.1
Mexican American	7	2.1
Other Hispanic	24	7.3
White/Caucasian	123	37.3
Other	24	7.3
<b>Employment Status</b>		
Employed	160	48.5
Unemployed	161	48.8
<b>Household Income</b>		
10,000-30,000	191	57.9
31,000-50,000	64	19.4
51,000-70,000	62	18.8
<b>ALE/GED Program</b>		
NCC	178	53.9
DCC	44	13.3
Other	99	30.0

N=321

Educational information of study participants was assessed in order to gain insight into the academic factors that may affect college readiness and social capital. As indicated in Table 7, descriptive statistics on the TABE posttest revealed a mean grade equivalency level of 9.8 (SD=2.07), with a range of 6.0-12.9. The mode for this variable was 8.9. I created another variable, *Number assigned to literacy level*, which assigned a number (1-6) to each literacy level of the TABE in order to get a more clear indication of the frequency and the distribution. This variable was also essential for employing both the ANOVA and Post hoc tests when groups contain only one case/value. Participant responses to item 8, *TABE scores/Literacy (grade) level*, ranged from 6.0 to 12.9. Some levels had only one response, and could not be used in the ANOVA. The number assigned to literacy level group had a mean of 4.99 (SD=1.11). This indicated that the average grade equivalency range of GED completers was 6-10.9. Supported by the work of Wenger et al. (2006) the claim that ALE/GED participants falling within the grade equivalency mid-range of 6-10.9 are more likely to complete the GED certificate and continue on to college, the data showed that over 63% of participants fell within this range. The remaining 33% scored above average, in the 11-12.9 grade equivalency range. The distribution of scores for the TABE posttest literacy level was slightly positively skewed, as half of the scores (50.3%) were reported at or above the mean grade equivalent level of 9.88.

Table 7  
*Descriptive Statistics for Participant Educational History*

<b><u>Measures</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>	<b><u>Range</u></b>
Participants Educational History	10.45	1.57	7-14
TABE Post Test	9.818	2.07	6.0-12.9
# of Credit Hours Enrolled	10.27	3.38	3-18
Number Assigned to Literacy Level Group	4.99	.829	1-6

N=321

Participants' educational history was used as the indicator of highest K-12 grade completed. However, 30 participants, or 9.1%, misread and misreported this as grade 13 and beyond; indicating one or two years of college completed. Grades 10 and 11 were most frequently reported (149), supporting that 45.1% of participants had completed. Forty-seven subjects (14.2%) reported completing grade 12. The number of participants, 93, who reported having completed grades eight and nine accounted for 28.2% of the sample. Only two participants (.6%) reported completing grade seven. The mean grade level completed was 10.45 (SD=1.57) (see Table 7). The participants' educational history data were approximately normally distributed, as most scores were reported in the ninth to eleventh grade range.

Finally, an assessment of the number of credit hours in which participants were currently enrolled yielded a fairly normal distribution. The scores were roughly bell-shaped with relatively thin lower and upper tails, suggesting that a dramatic increase at both six and twelve credit hours. This indicates that a majority of the subjects are enrolled in six or twelve college credit hours in the current semester. The mean number of credit hours enrolled in was 10.27 (SD= 3.38). As reported, 121 participants (36.7%) were enrolled in twelve hours and 60 participants (18.2%) were enrolled in six credit hours. Surprisingly, 61.9%, (204) participants reported being enrolled in 10 credit hours or more. According to Kist (2004), individuals holding the GED certificate are most frequently placed in developmental courses and are held to a maximum of 9 credit hours of coursework upon entry into post-secondary education. This invalidates the assumption that GED completers are more likely to be placed into developmental remedial courses for 9 credit hours or fewer upon entry into post-secondary education.

RQ1: *What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?*

*Survey Item Descriptive Characteristics*

Although my research question signifies a qualitative inquiry, my study quantified the perceptions of GED completers for statistical analysis purposes. In order to quantify the perceptions of college readiness and social capital in the current study, I identified key factors of the college readiness and social capital constructs. I created a scale (survey) based on the factors that emerged from previous literature (AERA, 2008; Bullen, 2007; Conley, 2007, 2010; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000) that operationalized academic behaviors, contextual skills and awareness, individual dispositions, and community connectedness. Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with statements categorized as two factors of college readiness and two factors of social capital. The four factors consisted of items designed to determine whether the respondents perceived themselves as “college ready” (Factors 1 and 2), and as knowledgeable of the “social capital” value of the GED to themselves and their community (Factors 3 and 4). Tables 8-11 present the means, mode, standard deviations, and the total number of GED completers currently enrolled in entry-level courses who responded to items clustered under each factor.

*Academic Behaviors*

Academic behaviors are the behaviors that reflect self-awareness and self-monitoring skills. Table 8 summarizes the results for the 25 items that comprise the academic behaviors factor of college readiness. Standard deviations show little deviation and variability of scores due to similarity of the mean scores. Thirteen of the items had modes of 4, which indicates that respondents strongly agreed with the statements; eleven items had modes of 3, which indicates agreement with the statements; and, only one item showed a high degree of dispersion, (Q35, *My*

*interest in college resulted from ALE/GED participation*), this item had a mode of 2, indicating disagreement with the statement. Question 35 had a mean of 2.69 (SD= .973). The frequency of response ratings and percentages of all (N=321) participants were as follows: strongly agree, 38 (11.5%); agree, 101 (30.6%); disagree, 103 (31.2%); and, strongly disagree, 38 (11.5%). Although the largest number of participants responded as disagree, still over half (53.6%) were in agreement with the statement, *My interest in college resulted from ALE/GED participation*.

Table 8  
*Descriptive statistics for Academic Behavior survey items*

<b>Academic Behaviors</b>	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>Mode</u></b>	<b><u>Mean Score</u></b>	<b><u>Standard Deviation</u></b>
Q10 Prepared	320	4	3.29	.718
Q11 Aware	321	4	3.53	.500
Q13 Manage	321	3	3.17	.716
Q14 Complete	321	3	3.19	.685
Q15 Interact	321	4	3.51	.676
Q16 Confident	321	4	3.53	.666
Q19 Adequate	321	3	3.24	.707
Q22 Self Discipline	321	3	3.32	.591
Q24 Belong	321	4	3.39	.677
Q26 Make Use	321	4	3.19	.784
Q29 Pursue	321	3	3.15	.757
Q32 Attitude	321	4	3.57	.582
Q34 Improved	321	3	3.04	.856
Q35 Interest In College	321	2	2.69	.973
Q37 Ability	321	4	3.50	.608
Q38 Tendency	321	3	2.81	.847
Q40 Communicate Effectively	321	4	3.28	.747
Q41 Groups	312	3	3.12	.831
Q44 Leader	321	3	3.36	.653
Q45 Self Aware	321	4	3.52	.602
Q46 Value	309	4	3.52	.567
Q48 Improve Quality of Life	321	4	3.34	.767
Q49 Happy	321	4	3.27	.757
Q59 Use Skills	315	3	3.21	.723
Q66 Allowed to Contribute	315	3	3.06	.835

*Based on a 4-point scale; 1 indicates strongly disagree, 4 indicates strongly agree*

### Contextual Skills and Awareness

Contextual skills and awareness is the “college knowledge” necessary to understand how the college system works. The descriptive results of the nine items making up the second college

readiness factor, contextual skills and awareness, are presented in Table 9. With a total (N=321) scores reported, there was little variability due to similarity of the scores, which indicates the homogeneous nature of the responses. But, three factors fell into the mean range of 3.19 to 3.63, with modes of 3. Two items fell below 3.19, Item 42 and Item 47, with mean scores of 2.63 (SD=.946) and 2.85 (SD=.926) respectively. This accounted for over 18% of the variance. For item 42: *Before entering, I understood how the college system worked*, 55.5% of respondents disagreed with the statement, while 41.8% of participants agreed with the statement. The remaining 29.7% represented responses of disagreement. For item 47: *Before entering college, I understood the required college options and choices*, 66.1% of respondents agreed with the statement; only 29% disagreed with the statement. These results indicated that more than half of all respondents did not possess essential contextual awareness or “college knowledge” prior to entry into post-secondary education.

Table 9  
*Descriptive statistics for Contextual Skills and Awareness items*

<b><u>Contextual Skills and Awareness</u></b>	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>Mode</u></b>	<b><u>Mean Score</u></b>	<b><u>Standard Deviation</u></b>
Q17 Entry	321	4	3.31	.756
Q26 Make Use	321	4	3.19	.784
Q29 Pursue	321	3	3.15	.757
Q30 College	321	4	3.61	.488
Q31 Expected	321	4	3.53	.559
Q32 Attitude	321	4	3.57	.582
Q42 System	321	3	2.63	.946
Q43 Respect	321	4	3.60	.568
Q47 Options	321	3	2.85	.926

*Based on a 4-point scale; 1 indicates strongly disagree, 4 indicates strongly agree*

### Individual Dispositions

Table 10 presents the response data for Factor 3, which consists of 21 items designed to identify the respondents’ attitudes of self-value upon completion of the GED. Variability of responses was heterogeneous, with two items, Q50 and Q58, having low mean scores, 2.05 (SD=

.965) and 2.45 (SD=.904) respectively. It is important to note that because Q58 is the reverse item of Q50 and had a low inter-item correlation, it was eliminated from the survey through factor analysis (Hair et al. 1995; DeVellis, 2003). Seven items had modes of 4, with means ranging from 3.28 to 3.60; and, twelve items had modes of 3, with means ranging from 2.56 to 3.88. The high variability shows the dissimilarity of agreement and disagreement of responses to the 21 items.

Table 10  
*Descriptive statistics for Individual Disposition items*

<b><u>Individual Dispositions</u></b>	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>Mode</u></b>	<b><u>Mean Score</u></b>	<b><u>Standard Deviation</u></b>
Q15 Interact	321	4	3.51	.676
Q37 Ability	321	4	3.50	.608
Q38 Tendency	321	3	2.81	.847
Q40 Communicate Effectively	321	4	3.28	.747
Q41 Groups	312	3	3.12	.831
Q43 Respect	321	4	3.60	.568
Q44 Leader	321	3	3.36	.653
Q46 Value	309	4	3.52	.567
Q48 Improve Quality of Life	321	4	3.34	.767
Q50 Enough	321	2	2.05	.965
Q53 Resources	321	3	2.88	.857
Q54 Volunteer	321	3	2.86	.854
Q55 Community Not Important	321	3	3.28	.653
Q56 Valued	321	3	3.15	.852
Q57 Respected	321	3	3.12	.756
Q58 Not Adequate	321	2	2.45	.904
Q59 Use Skills	315	3	3.21	.723
Q60 Not Volunteer	321	3	2.97	.840
Q65 Trusted	321	3	2.56	.843
Q68 Friends	321	3	2.87	.858
Q70 Set Goals	321	4	3.48	.680

*Based on a 4-point scale; 1 indicates strongly disagree, 4 indicates strongly agree*

Community Connectedness

Table 11 also provides the response data for the 13 survey items designed to identify the extent to which GED completers participate within their community. Responses to the items were homogeneous in nature, with 11 items reporting modes of 3, with means ranging from 2.56

to 3.48. Two items, Q51 and Q68, had modes of 2 and 4. With 320 participants responding to Question 51, *I am connected to various support networks within my community*, 53.9% of respondents disagreed with the statement and 43.1% agreed. For Q68, *I made new friends as a result of participation in community groups*, an overwhelming percentage (64.9%) responded in agreement to the statement. The percentage disagreeing with the statement was 32.5%.

Table 11  
*Descriptive statistics for Community Connectedness items*

<u>Community Connectedness</u>	<u>n</u>	<u>Mode</u>	<u>Mean Score</u>	<u>Standard Deviation</u>
Q51 CONNECTED	320	2	2.38	.787
Q53 RESOURCES	321	3	2.88	.857
Q54 VOLUNTEER	321	3	2.86	.854
Q57 RESPECTED	321	3	3.12	.756
Q59 USE SKILLS	315	3	3.21	.723
Q61 INTERACT	321	3	3.10	.728
Q64 TO OTHERS	321	3	2.75	.739
Q65 TRUSTED	321	3	2.56	.843
Q66 ALLOWED	315	3	3.06	.835
Q67 ISSUES	321	3	3.32	.821
Q68 FRIENDS	321	4	2.87	.858
Q69 SERVICES	321	3	2.94	.851
Q70 SET GOALS	321	3	3.48	.680

*Based on a 4-point scale; 1 indicates strongly disagree, 4 indicates strongly agree*

#### *Principal Axis Factor Analysis*

*Sub-question A: What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?*

In order to examine the factor structure of the items within survey questions ten through seventy-four, an exploratory factor analysis was conducted utilizing principal axis analysis with direct oblimin rotation. Oblique rotations were used due to my prediction of correlation among the variables. According to Field (2009), oblique rotation allows the factors to be correlated and is chosen depending on whether there is a good reason to support that the factors should be related. Survey questions were factored separately because each focused on a different domain



of college readiness and social capital. To determine if there should be one scale for each construct, the latent root criterion (eigenvalues) and the scree plot criterion were examined. Hair and colleagues (1998) recommend an eigenvalue greater than one for factors to extract. Factor analysis was used to find patterns in the correlations among the variables (Vogt, 2006). Variables that could be clustered into groups were combined to create the final items that make up the CRSCS.

Preliminary factor analysis of the original 80 survey items was conducted. Factor analysis on the original 43 items related to college readiness resulted in 19 items being retained because of correlations greater than .30. Twenty-four items were eliminated due to correlations less than .30. Preliminary factor analysis on the 37 items associated with social capital resulted in 24 items retained and 13 items eliminated. Twenty-one reverse items were not included and an additional eight items were eliminated due to correlations below .30. Elimination of reverse-coded items was attributed to problems with missing values, unusually high means, and poor correlation with other items in the same proposed factor (DeVellis, 2003; Hatcher, 1994).

Finally, a principal factor analysis was conducted on the 36 items remaining from the preliminary analysis. Thirteen items were related to college readiness, 13 items related to social capital, and 10 items were associated with both constructs. Table 12 illustrates the results of the PAF with direct oblimin rotation for college readiness and social capital. The determinant was good at 3.81E-009 (0.00000000381). The assumption of independent sampling was met (KMO=.791). The Bartlett test was highly significant at .000; indicating that the R-matrix is not an identity matrix, and there are some relationships among the variables. Factor analysis is appropriate.

The table displays the items and factor loadings for the rotated factors, with loadings less than .30 omitted to improve clarity. Two factors were requested, based on the fact that the items were designed to index two constructs. Factor 1 represents the construct of college readiness; attitudes, knowledge, awareness, and behaviors. Factor 2 represents the construct of social capital; dispositions and community connectedness. After rotation, the first factor accounted for 22.7% of the variance and the second factor accounted for 6.9% of the variance.

Table 12

*Factor Loadings/ Communalities for College Readiness and Social Capital factors*

<u>Scale/Item</u>	<b>Factor Loadings</b>		<u>Communality</u>
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	
Q26	.782		.830
Q43	.613		.602
Q44	.596		.627
Q45	.593		.569
Q40	.567		.539
Q22	.552		.501
Q13	.548		.415
Q14	.545		.427
Q32	.521		.618
Q16	.514		.503
Q46	.463		.548
Q70	.425		.469
Q48	.407		.606
Q66		.813	.827
Q57		.665	.746
Q64		.656	.662
Q68		.654	.750
Q61		.649	.679
Q54		.645	.764
Q67		.509	.696
Q51		.503	.643
Q65		.464	.605
Q59		.437	.487
Q56		.414	.626
Eigen values	8.19	2.50	
% of Variance	22.74	6.9	

*Note: Two factor solution cumulative percent of variance explained is 57.56%. The scale used for these items was 1= strongly disagree, 2= disagree, 3 = Agree, 4 = strongly disagree. N=321. Loadings < .30 were omitted.*

An examination of the pattern matrix revealed that there were 24 items in this college readiness and social capital perceptions scale. The first factor, which seems to index college

readiness, had strong loadings on the first ten items. Two of the items indexed low college readiness. The second factor, which seemed to index social capital, had high loadings on the next eight items as indicated in Table 12.

*Internal Consistency Reliability Coefficients (Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ))*

*Sub-question A: What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?*

Shown in Table 13, are the internal consistency reliability coefficients computed for each factor scale and for the combined College Readiness and Social Capital scale. To assess whether the items for each factor formed a reliable scale, Cronbach’s alpha was computed. The alphas for each of the four individual factor scales showed reasonable internal consistency reliability. The twenty-five items that were summed to create the academic behavior score formed a reliable scale with an acceptable  $\alpha = .817$ . Similarly, the alpha for the contextual skills and awareness scale ( $\alpha=.700$ ), the individual dispositions scales ( $\alpha=.789$ ), and the community connectedness scale ( $\alpha=.850$ ) were all acceptable and indicated good internal consistency. The College Readiness and Social Capital Scale (CRSCS) comprises 68 items, which are rated on a 4-point scale, from 1, “strongly disagree” to 4, “strongly agree.” Cronbach’s alpha calculated for the CRSCS was acceptable at  $\alpha= .894$  in the current study. Items that were included or removed from the analysis did not affect Cronbach’s alpha.

Table 13  
*Cronbach’s alpha ( $\alpha$ ) for College Readiness and Social Capital Scales*

<b># of Items/Scales</b>	<b>Cronbach’s (<math>\alpha</math>)</b>
(25) Academic Behaviors	.817
( 9) Contextual Skills & Awareness	.700
(21) Individual Disposition	.789
(13) Community Connectedness	.850
College Readiness & Social Capital Scale	.894

### *Correlation/Regression Analysis*

*Sub-question A: What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?*

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was computed to assess the relationship between literacy level (TABE post-test) and factor scores for college readiness and social capital. The Pearson correlation calculated for perceptions of college readiness,  $r(281) = .053$ ,  $p = .375$  indicated that the correlation was not significant and that there was no relationship between the variables. The Pearson correlation for perceptions of social capital yielded similar results,  $r(281) = -.071$ ,  $p = .233$ , indicating no significant correlation and no relationship between the variables. Increases in literacy level are not correlated with increases in perceptions college readiness and perceptions social capital.

Next, linear regression was conducted to investigate how well literacy level predicts perceptions of college readiness and social capital. The results were not statistically significant for perceptions of college readiness  $F(1,281) = .791$ ,  $p = .375$ . The adjusted  $R^2$  value was  $-.001$ , which indicated that less than 1% (.1%) of the variance in perceptions of college readiness was explained by literacy level. Regression results for perceptions of social capital yielded similar results,  $F(1,281) = 1.427$ ,  $p = .233$ . The adjusted  $R^2$  value was  $.002$ , which indicated that less than 1% (.2%) of the variance in perceptions of social capital was explained by literacy level. The results indicate that there is no systematic association between literacy level and perceptions of college readiness and social capital.

Finally, simultaneous multiple regression models were conducted to investigate the best predictors of perceptions of college readiness and social capital. A secondary regression was conducted after the variables for gender, age, and ethnicity were recoded. The means, standard deviations, and intercorrelations for both college readiness and social capital can be found in

Tables 14 and 15. Values for the secondary regression results are presented in **bold parentheses** in text and are indicated in Tables 14a, 15a, 16a, 17a. The combination of variances to predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital from literacy level, education history (highest K-12 grade completed), age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant,  $F(5, 277) = 12.734$  (**16.420**),  $p=.000$  (**p=.000**) for perceptions of college readiness; and  $F(5, 277) = 5.857$  (**6.866**),  $p=.000$  (**p=.000**) for perceptions of social capital.

Additionally, I recoded several of the variables to make them easier to use, to enhance uniformity of the results, and to create a referent group for each new variable. New variable names were assigned to the recoded cases. The *gender* variable which was coded as 1=female, 2=male was recoded to create a new variable labeled *sexRevis*, with values of 0=female, 1=male. The variable *age* was recoded to indicate a new age variable labeled *ageRecode*. The new values were 18-25=0, 26-33=1, 34+=2. The original *self-description* variable was recoded and renamed *raceRevis*. The *White/Caucasian* category was transformed into the referent group with a new value of 0. The *other* category was given the value of 3. Other minority categories were grouped and coded as follows: *Black/African American*, *Mexican American*, and *Other Hispanic*= 2; *Asian East Indian*, *Asian-American*, and *American Indian* = 1. After I completed the recoding process, the regression models were once again employed. Results of this secondary regression analysis had minimal differences in correlation coefficients and beta coefficients; therefore overall results did not change.

Table 14

*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for College Readiness with Predictor Variables*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
College Readiness	.000	.951					
Predictor Variable							
1. Literacy Level	9.83	2.03	.053	-.016	-.011	-.377	-.202
2. Education History	10.32	1.47		.273	.005	-.151	.117
3. Age	1.78	.860			.052	-.223	.163
4. Gender	1.27	.444				-.161	-.295
5. Ethnicity	5.52	1.66					.124

*Note:* p < .05, p < .01

Table 14a

*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for College Readiness with Predictor Variables (Recoded variable results)*

<u>Variable</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>
College Readiness	.000	.951					
Predictor Variable							
1. Literacy Level	9.83	2.03	.053	-.016	-.011	-.377	-.202
2. Education History	10.32	1.47		.273	.005	-.151	.117
3. Age/ageRecode	.781	.860			-.377	-.011	.095
4. Gender/sexRevis	-.270	.444				-.161	-.197
5. Ethnicity/raceRevis	1.22	1.60					.368

*Note:* p < .05, p < .01

Table 15

*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for Social Capital with Predictor Variables*

<b>Variable</b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
Social Capital	.000	.949					
Predictor Variable							
1. Literacy Level	9.83	2.03	.071	.125	.132	.232**	.112
2. Education History	10.32	1.47		.273**	.005	-.151	.117
3. Age	1.78	.860			.052	-.223**	.163
4. Gender	1.27	.444				-.161**	-.295
5. Ethnicity	5.52	1.66					.124

Note:  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

Table 15a

*Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for Social Capital with Predictor Variables*  
(Recoded variable results)

<b>Variable</b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>	<b><u>1</u></b>	<b><u>2</u></b>	<b><u>3</u></b>	<b><u>4</u></b>	<b><u>5</u></b>
Social Capital	.000	.949					
Predictor Variable							
1. Literacy Level	9.83	2.03	.071	.125	.132	.232**	.112
2. Education History	10.32	1.47		.273**	.005	-.151	.117
3. Age/ageRecode	.781	.860			.232	-.132**	-.010
4. Gender/sexRevis	.270	.444				-.161**	-.197
5. Ethnicity/raceRevis	1.22	1.60					.368

Note:  $p < .05$ , \*\*  $p < .01$

The regression results for college readiness and social capital are presented in Tables 16 & 17 (see Tables 16a and 17a for recoded variable results). It should be noted that gender and ethnicity can significantly predict perceptions of college readiness and social capital when all five variables (literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity) are included. The

adjusted R<sup>2</sup> values were .172 (.141) and .079 (.059), respectively. This indicates that 17% (14%) of the variance in perceptions of college readiness and 8% (6%) of the variance in perceptions of social capital were explained by the model.

Table 16  
*Regression Results for College Readiness*

<b><u>Variable</u></b>	<b><u>B</u></b>	<b><u>SEB</u></b>	<b><u>β</u></b>
Literacy Level	.018	.027	.038
Education History	-.049	.038	-.077
Age	-.136	.063	-.123
Gender	-.826	.122	-.386**
Ethnicity	-.104	.033	-.182*
Constant	2.20	.497	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01 R<sup>2</sup> = .172 F(5,277) = 12.734, p = .000

Table 16a  
*Regression Results for College Readiness (Recoded variable results)*

<b><u>Variable</u></b>	<b><u>B</u></b>	<b><u>SEB</u></b>	<b><u>β</u></b>
Literacy Level	.018	.027	.038
Education History	-.049	.038	-.077
Age/ageRecode	-.102	.066	-.092
Gender/sexRevis	-.817	.121	-.382**
Ethnicity/raceRevis	.048	.054	.054*
Constant	.239	.097	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01 R<sup>2</sup> = .150 F(5,279) = 16.420, p = .000



Table 17  
*Regression Results for Social Capital*

<b><u>Variable</u></b>	<b><u>B</u></b>	<b><u>SEB</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>
Literacy Level	.003	.028	-.006
Education History	.024	.040	-.038
Age	.162	.067	-.147
Gender	.472	.129	.221*
Ethnicity	.100	.035	-.176*
Constant	.522	.523	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01  $R^2 = .079$   $F(5,277) = 5.857$ , p = .000

Table 17a  
*Regression Results for Social Capital (Recoded variable results)*

<b><u>Variable</u></b>	<b><u>B</u></b>	<b><u>SEB</u></b>	<b><u><math>\beta</math></u></b>
Literacy Level	.003	.028	-.006
Education History	.024	.040	-.038
Age/ageRecode	-.139	.069	-.126
Gender/sexRevis	.487	.127	.228*
Ethnicity/raceRevis	.074	.057	.082*
Constant	-.113	.102	

Note: \* p < .05, \*\* p < .01  $R^2 = .069$   $F(5,279) = 6.866$ , p = .000

## *Analysis of Variance*

*Sub-question B: Is there a difference in GED completers' perceptions of their college readiness based on literacy level?*

*Sub-question C: Is there a difference in GED completers' perceptions of their production of social capital based on literacy level?*

Two analyses of variance (ANOVAs) were performed to compare the one factor score for college readiness and the one factor score for social capital with the three literacy levels that emerged from respondents' reporting TABE post-test, grade equivalent score. Factor scores were calculated during the individual factor analysis of the college readiness and social capital scales. For the ANOVAs, I created another variable labeled, *Number assigned to literacy level*, in order to eliminate groups within each literacy level containing only one case/value. Group 6-8.9 was given the value of 1, group 9-10.9= 2, and group 11-12.9= 3. Participant responses ranged from 6.0 to 12. 9; with some levels having only one reported case. ANOVAs and Post hoc tests cannot be computed for groups with only one case. A statistically significant difference was found among the three literacy levels on perceptions of college readiness,  $F(2, 280) = 5.332, p = .005$ ; and on social capital,  $F(2, 280) = 7.961, p = .000$ . The Levene statistic indicates that both factor scores are significant at  $p < .05$  and  $p < .01$ ; therefore, the assumption of equal variance is violated. Levene's test is a simple and elegant test which tests the null hypothesis that the variances in different groups are equal (i.e. the difference between the variances is zero) (Field, 2009). Additionally, the between group differences for perceptions of college readiness and social capital are significant ( $p < .05$ ).

Table 18 shows that mean college readiness scores for participants with a literacy level of 6 – 8.9 was .064 (SD= .922); -.243 (SD= 1.105) for participants at the 9-10.9 literacy level; and,

.188 (SD= .733) for participants at the 11-12.9 literacy level. The mean social capital scores for each literacy level were: -.035 (SD= .774), .279 (SD= 1.13), and -.257 (SD= .824) respectively.

Table 18  
*Means and Standard Deviations Comparing Three Levels of Literacy*

<b><u>Literacy Level</u></b>	<b><u>College Readiness</u></b>			<b><u>Social Capital</u></b>		
	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>	<b><u>n</u></b>	<b><u>M</u></b>	<b><u>SD</u></b>
6 – 8.9	96	.064	.922	96	-.035	.774
9 – 10.9	96	-.243	1.11	96	.279	1.13
11 – 12.9	91	.188	.733	91	-.257	.824
Total	283	.000	.950	283	.000	.948

Tables 19 and 20 summarize the one-way ANOVA between groups and within groups comparisons for perceptions of college readiness and perceptions of social capital. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests indicated that the medium literacy level group (9-10.9) and the high literacy level group (11-12.9) differed significantly in their perceptions of social capital (p= .005). Likewise, there were also significant mean differences on college readiness between the medium literacy level group (9-10.9) and high literacy level group (11-12.9) (p=.000) using the same Post hoc Tukey HSD test (see Tables 21- 26).

Table 19

*One-way ANOVA Summary Table/College Readiness*

<b><u>Source</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>MS</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b>Perceptions of College Readiness</b>					
Between groups	2	9.342	4.67	5.33	.005
Within groups	280	245.29	.876		
Total	282	254.63			

*Note:* Table comparing literacy level groups on perceptions of college readiness.

Table 20

*One-way ANOVA Summary Table/Social Capital*

<b><u>Source</u></b>	<b><u>df</u></b>	<b><u>SS</u></b>	<b><u>MS</u></b>	<b><u>F</u></b>	<b><u>p</u></b>
<b>Perceptions of Social Capital</b>					
Between groups	2	13.66	6.83	7.96	.000
Within groups	280	240.21	.858		
Total	282	253.87			

*Note:* Table comparing literacy level groups on perceptions of social capital

Table 21

*Tukey HSD descriptives for college readiness*

<b><u>Literacy level</u></b>	<b><u>Mean</u></b>	<b><u>Standard error</u></b>	<b><u>95% confidence interval</u></b>	
			<b><u>Lower bound</u></b>	<b><u>Upper bound</u></b>
6-8.9	.064	.100	.122	.251
9-10.9	.243	.112	.470	.020
11-12.9	.200	.080	.040	.341

Table 22

*Tukey HSD descriptives for social capital*

<u>Literacy level</u>	<u>Mean</u>	<u>Standard error</u>	<u>95% confidence interval</u>	
			<u>Lower bound</u>	<u>Upper bound</u>
6-8.9	.040	.080	.200	.121
9-10.9	.280	.120	.050	.510
11-12.9	.260	.100	.430	.100

Table 23

*Tukey HSD results with college readiness as the dependent variable*

<u>Literacy level</u>	<u>Mean Differences</u>	<u>Sig</u>
6-8.9	.310	.060
9-10.9	.124	.636
11-12.9	.432	.005*

*Note.* \*p<.05

Table 24

*Tukey HSD results with social capital as the dependent variable*

<u>Literacy level</u>	<u>Mean Differences</u>	<u>Sig</u>
6-8.9	.314	.050
9-10.9	.222	.229
11-12.9	.540	.000*

*Note.* \*p<.05

Table 25  
*Perceptions ratings of college readiness by literacy level*

Literacy level		
6-8.9	9-10.9	11-12.9
.064 [.122, .251]	.243 [.500, .020]	.200 [.040, .341]*

*Note.* Ratings were made on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). \*  $p < .05$  in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison. Numbers in brackets are 95% confidence intervals of the means.

Table 26  
*Perceptions ratings of social capital by literacy level*

Literacy level		
6-8.9	9-10.9	11-12.9
.040 [.200, .121]	.280 [.050, .510]	.260 [.430, .100]*

*Note.* Ratings were made on a 4-point scale (1 = strongly disagree, 4 = strongly agree). \*  $p < .05$  in the Tukey honestly significant difference comparison. Numbers in brackets are 95% confidence intervals of the means.

### *Thematic Summary of Open Ended Responses*

Two open-ended questions, designed to substantiate the findings of the quantitative analysis, were implemented at the end of the survey. Only 175 of the 321 participants chose to answer the questions. Item 75 prompted participants to “*explain what your successful entry into college means to you*”. Four themes emerged from the responses:

1. Can better my life, 97 responses (55%);
2. Improve my work/career, 62 responses (35%);
3. Means a better future for self/family, 120 responses (69%); and,
4. Have many other opportunities, 88 responses (50%).

Quotations provided by some of the respondents emphasized the value of college-going in improving quality of life. Respondent 9 stated, *“I can improve myself and my career. I will also be able to set an example for my kids.”* While respondent 112 stated, *“I have a better future ahead of me and it means a better successful life.”*

Item 76 asked; *describe how you participate in your community.* Five themes emerged from the responses:

1. Give myself to help others, 115 responses (66%);
2. Volunteer at centers and shelters, 78 responses (45%);
3. Volunteer with kids, 162 responses (92%);
4. Feed the homeless, 59 responses (34%); and,
5. I don't participate, 43 responses (25%).

To provide a sample of some of the issues raised with regard to this question, respondent 217 stated, *“I volunteer with kids, help rebuild homes in my parish, and feed the homeless.”* Another respondent, 59, stated, *I help out when and where I can, mostly in centers and shelters with elderly people.”* Some participants mentioned there is a lack of participation for various reasons. For example, respondents 34 and 152 stated, *“I can't/don't participate in my community because of my kids, my work and I go to school at night. It's hard for me to do anything else.”* Comments such as these are common throughout the responses; they speak for themselves and warrant no further summary or explanation.

### *Summary*

Regardless of the fact that GED completers had, on average, good attitudes toward college readiness and social capital; data collected indicated that literacy level had a very small, if any, relationship with their perceptions of college readiness and social capital. Clearly, the

original items on the College Readiness and Social Capital Scale designed for this study were not as reliable as I first thought. However, after the pilot test results and preliminary factor analysis eliminated several items, the remaining 36 items had greater face validity and reliability. Cronbach's alpha for the individual college readiness and social capital scale, as well as for the complete scale revealed a high internal consistency. This instrument might best be utilized as part of a more comprehensive design that looks at other demographic factors, as well as additional domains of college readiness and social capital.

An analysis of responses collected also indicated that GED completers' age and gender were statistically significant with regard to perceptions of college readiness and social capital. In contrast, the correlations for and regressions of literacy level in association with college readiness and social capital, had no significant relationships. Moreover, the ANOVA did reveal a slight significance in the factor scores of college readiness and social capital in between group differences.

In the main, the goal of this study was not necessarily to generalize the data collected to all GED completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education. Rather, the interest was in identifying whether literacy level predicted perceptions of college readiness and social capital. As such, generalizing the data to all GED completers should be done with caution, given that some findings may reflect bias, since data analyzed was based on GED completers' perceptions. Additional research focusing on GED completers' successful entry into and completion of post-secondary education should be carried out to support the results of this study and to provide a basis for generalizations.

The next chapter will present a review of the research purpose, a review of the findings (as they relate to existing knowledge), and discussion conclusions. This final chapter will also



provide a discussion of the implications of the study findings for research, theory, and practice. And lastly, limitations to this study and recommendations for possible future research directions will be presented.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion and Conclusions**

In this study, I examined how GED completers, currently enrolled in post-secondary education perceived college readiness attitudes and knowledge and the production of social capital. The purpose of my study was to learn more about GED completers' college readiness and social capital perceptions that affect their post-secondary entry, success, and ultimately, their quality of life. I introduced and detailed the issues surrounding low adult literacy rates in the GNO area, how adult education programs can assist in addressing the issues, and the benefits of educational resources to enhance and improve social capital outcomes.

In this chapter, I present an analysis and discussion of the results of my study and relate those findings to the existing body of knowledge. Next, I evaluate the results of the study and draw conclusions with respect to the research question and sub-questions and the statistical analyses employed. Then, I present implications for theory, practice and policy. Finally, I present the limitations to my study and offer recommendations for future research.

My dissertation aimed to uncover empirical evidence to support social capital theory of individual fulfillment and community involvement based on literacy improvement, college readiness, and entry into post-secondary education. In this chapter, I discuss the significance of my findings and how they relate to existing knowledge. I also briefly suggest how they might be applied in practice. I draw conclusions with respect to each research question and present limitations to this study. Finally, I present possible implications for research and theory and make recommendations for further research.

The research question and three sub-questions guiding this study are:

- What are GED completers' perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?
- What is the relationship between literacy levels of GED completers and their perceptions of college readiness and the production of social capital?
- Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of college readiness based on literacy level?
- Is there a difference in GED completer perceptions of social capital based on literacy level?

The conceptual framework developed for my study (see Chapter II), emphasized the relationship between five central issues: adult literacy (ALE/GED participation), GED completion (knowledge resources), college readiness, post-secondary education (human capital; identity resources), and social capital (individual fulfillment, community involvement). The structure provided a means by which to examine the attitudes of GED completers in a post-secondary education setting. Falk and Kilpatrick (2000) provided the foundation for the development of my conceptual framework. Falk and Kilpatrick developed a model that showed the relationship of knowledge and identity resources to the activation of social capital through educational attainment by improving adult literacy skills and knowledge. When conceptualizing this framework, all components are observed as interrelated (see Figure 1). Such interrelation comes from the research of Bourdieu (1986), and emphasizes the fact that these entities are part of the same social structure (educational attainment, knowledge resources, and social capital productivity).

### *Research Questions/Analysis of Results*

The principal research question asks, “What are GED completers’ perceptions towards college readiness and social capital?” Through descriptive statistics, I presented the features of the data collected for the study. Frequency charts showed a normal distribution of responses to items designed to assess participants’ college readiness behaviors and knowledge and social capital attributes. The item with the lowest mean ( $M=2.05$ ) was *my employment and income are enough*, and the item with the highest mean ( $M=3.61$ ) was *college is an important step to accomplishing goals and dreams*. Therefore, of the 65 items in the original survey questionnaire the most frequent response in regards to college readiness was *college is an important step to accomplishing goals and dreams*, and the least frequent response was *my employment and income are enough*. On average, GED completers responded to college readiness and social capital factors on a range of slightly disagree to strongly agree. Given the fact that most respondents think that college is an important step, the results of the study do not support this view. College-going is a form of knowledge acquisition and it is theorized that adult learners gain human, as well as, social capital from participation in post-secondary education (Baycich, 2003; Boesel, 1998; Murnane et al., 2000)

Sub-question A was answered through an exploratory factor analysis using principal axis factoring (PAF) with direct oblimin rotation. The PAF was employed to determine the pattern of relationships among the items (factors) on the survey. Eigenvalues and scree plot criterion were examined. Preliminary factor analysis of the original 80 survey items resulted in 19 items related to college readiness and 24 items related to social capital being retained. Reverse items and items with correlations less than .30 were eliminated (Hair et al. 1995; Hatcher, 1994). The remaining

36 items were factor analyzed and yielded two factors associated with college readiness and social capital. Factor one represented college readiness and factor two represented social capital.

After rotation, factor one accounted for 22.7% of the variance and factor two accounted for 6.9% of the variance. The determinant was good at 3.18E-009, the assumption of independent sampling was met (KMO=.791), the Bartlett's test was highly significant at .000, and factor analysis was deemed appropriate. Factor one had strong loadings on the first ten items and factor two had high loadings on the next eight items (see Table 12). Cronbach's alpha was used to assess whether survey items formed a reliable scale. Cronbach's alpha calculated for the CRSCS was acceptable at .894. Results of the factor analysis indicate that the survey instrument was valid and reliable enough to render more substantial results. The items were highly correlated and had strong loadings on the college readiness and social capital factors. Therefore, it is not understandable that literacy would not be a significant factor of college readiness and social capital.

Correlation and regression analyses were also conducted to answer sub-question A. Pearson correlation indicated that TABE post-test literacy level had no relationship to college readiness and social capital. Also, the variables did not have a significant correlation. All p-values were greater than .001 and .005. Linear regression analyses were conducted to determine if literacy level predicts college readiness and social capital perceptions. The regression results for both college readiness and social capital were not statistically significant, indicating that less than .1% of the variance in college readiness and .2% of the variance in social capital can be explained by a participants' literacy level. According to Cohen (1988), there was no evidence that perceptions of college readiness and perceptions of social capital are affected by literacy level. Also, there was no systematic association between literacy level and perceptions of college

readiness and social capital. Once again, these results do not support my assumption, as well as the research of Baptiste and Nyanungo (2007), Bernardo (2000), Fingeret (1983), and Wagner (1992), that adult literacy levels are crucial measures to enhance an individual's social capital and improve their community connectedness.

Multiple regression analyses were employed in order to determine the best predictors of college readiness and social capital. A combination of literacy level, education history, age, gender, and ethnicity was statistically significant;  $F(5,277) = 12.734, p < .001$  for college readiness and  $F(5,277) = 5.857, p < .001$  for social capital. The adjusted R-squared values were .172 and .079, respectively; indicating that 17% of the variance in college readiness and 8% of the variance in social capital can be explained by the model. However, only gender and ethnicity were found to significantly predict college readiness and social capital when all five variables are included. After recoding of the age, gender and ethnicity variables, regression results were not affected and reflected low percentages of the variance in college readiness and social capital. The results of the regression analyses could possibly be explained by the fact that other forms of social capital (see Figure 3) may have greater impact on an individual's feelings and attitudes regarding education and community engagement. Perhaps an individual's economic, cultural or symbolic capital may have a negative effect on how they value education and how they see themselves participating in society.

To answer sub-questions B and C, ANOVAs were performed to compare the factor score of college readiness and the factor score of social capital with the three literacy levels. Three of the six literacy levels (6-8.9, 9-10.9, 11-12.9) were used in the analysis of the data because there were no reported cases in the lower three levels (0-1.9, 2-3.9, 4-5.9). There were statistically significant differences among the three literacy levels on college readiness,  $F(2, 280) = 5.332,$

$p = .005$ ; and on social capital,  $F(2,280) = 7.961$ ,  $p = .000$ . The assumption of equal variance was violated because of a significant Levene statistic,  $p < .05$  and  $p < .01$ . The between group differences were significant also. Post hoc Tukey HSD tests were conducted to determine if the means of the three literacy level groups were significant. The test revealed that the low literacy group (6-8.9) and high literacy level group (11-12.9) differed significantly, as well as the medium literacy level group (9-10.9) and high literacy level.

Responses to two open-ended questions, one related to college readiness and one related to social capital, revealed themes that substantiated hypotheses of the researcher. Sixty-nine percent of respondents reported that entry into college meant a better life for themselves and their families. Overwhelmingly, 92% of respondents reported volunteering with kids. Only 25%, 43 participants reported not participating in their communities.

### *Conclusions*

Although the results cannot be generalized beyond my study, the following conclusions can be cautiously drawn from my research: that adult literacy is still a major concern especially for the GNO area and the rebuilding effort. The results of my study indicate that there is no systematic association of literacy level to college readiness and social capital; however, there was a determination that gender and ethnicity could significantly predict college readiness and social capital. It may be that for GED completers, particularly those who may not be experiencing success in college, becoming college ready and attempting to produce social capital requires more than just those self-concepts and feelings of being valued in society. As Caffarella (2002) and Knowles (1980, 1984) pointed out, there may be a variety of reasons or purposes that adult learners choose to participate in improving literacy skills. Therefore, additional factors should be assessed and analyzed for their predictive value.

Due to the results of the regression analyses on college readiness and social capital, all factors of college readiness and social capital should play a key role in examining GED completers' perceptions. There is a definite need for attention to adult literacy education programs and high school curricula, in our area and nationwide, in preparing participants for post-secondary education. As Cline et al (2007) suggested sustained and intensive efforts to help high schools make the conceptual shift from preparing students to be college eligible to educating them to be college ready.

*Support/Non-support of Hypothesis/Connections to Previous Literature*

Overall, the results of my study indicated that there is not a significant relationship between literacy level, college readiness and social capital. This was an unexpected outcome. Results of the correlation and regression analyses showed no significant effects or correlations to the variables; thus, not supportive of my initial hypotheses that there exists a significant relationship between knowledge acquisition and the production of social capital. Surprisingly, these findings are not in agreement with existing literature (Bernardo, 2000; Fingeret, 1983; Hamilton, 2006; Hunter & Harman, 1979; Scribner, 1984; Torres, 1994; Wagner, 1992) that concluded that literacy activities and practices are community resources and important aspects of social capital. The researchers placed the educational problem of adult literacy into the larger context of a changing society. Additionally, social capital theory, used to frame my study and to show how the acquisition of knowledge (human capital) can lead to the development of social networks, was not supported by the findings. I, like Bourdieu (1986) and Coleman (1988), believed that human capital, as a form of social capital, enhances community and societal engagement and leads to increased production of social capital.



The results also do not support my assumptions that there is a significant relationship between adult literacy development (GED completion), entry into post-secondary education (college readiness), and the production of social capital; and, that adult learners, after acquisition of the GED, perceive that they are college ready for entry into post-secondary education and are able to produce social capital as a result of increased knowledge. The results were in contrast to the findings of Tyler et al. (2000), which reported that acquisition of a GED could lead to higher average levels of human capital through increased access to post-secondary education. Tyler and colleagues (2000) found that acquisition of the GED leads to higher earnings and greater probability of employment. Therefore, concluding that literacy is not a significant factor of social capital is quite surprising. Again, my hypothesis that knowledge resources (human capital) are a catalyst to achieving greater individual fulfillment and community involvement was not supported.

Tett and Maclachlan (2007) conducted a mixed-methods study that found that literacy, self-confidence, learner identity, and social capital were interrelated. My study extended the research of Tett and Maclachlan by adding the college readiness component in order to show how post-secondary education, as a form of literacy learning, adds to the self-confidence and social contacts necessary to produce social capital. However, my quantitative design did not reveal any connections among the concepts. An explanation of this occurrence could be that measuring perceptions quantitatively may be flawed in attempting to capture all feelings and attitudes regarding these concepts.

The ANOVA conducted in my study, however, did result in statistically significant differences among the three literacy levels. This finding could indicate that GED scores can be used as predictors of college readiness, but perhaps not of social capital. Although my results

cannot be interpreted as solely due to the influence of literacy on college readiness and social capital, it is supported by the work of Joost (2009). The researcher explored how GED scores in the domains of reading and math might be predictive of college readiness skills (Joost, 2009). Joost's results confirmed that GED scores are positively linked to COMPASS placement test scores at a significant level; meaning that GED scores can predict COMPASS scores. Joost (2009) recommended that future research devise a method of predicting college readiness of GED completers based on their test scores. This method, Joost suggests, could help align the curricula of GED preparation courses with community college developmental and college level courses.

My findings indicate that the concepts of literacy, college readiness and social capital are more complex than initially perceived for this study. When examining literacy, the factors that affect literacy development must be taken into account. For example, generational illiteracy, functional literacy, and illiteracy should be comprehensively investigated on individual cases to determine how literacy affects an individual's perceptions. If college readiness is used as a variable for investigation, each of the four key dimensions (key cognitive strategies, key content knowledge, academic behaviors, and contextual skills and awareness) should be explored for their predictive power. Although social capital is widely used for research, exploring all forms of social capital (see Figure 3) would provide an in-depth understanding of its structure and theoretical utility.

#### *Implications for Theory and Policy*

The findings of my study contribute to the body of literature relating to college readiness and social capital. In addition, it contributes to the body of literature relating to literacy and adult literacy education. Given that the findings indicated no significant connection among literacy,

college readiness and social capital, it does open the doors to further examination into social capital theory. Additional forms of social capital (i.e. human capital, cultural capital, economic capital) have also emerged as bodies of literature affected by the findings. My study also indicates that factors of college readiness and social capital are more complex, and should be studied both individually and collectively in order to draw more significant conclusions.

Policy implications include creating specialized policies for ALE/GED programs which may meet the needs of participants in preparing for and understanding college choice. Policies focusing on program planning and curriculum design should also be established for ALE/GED programs to ensure seamless matriculation into post-secondary education. Policies should also include training and professional development for adult educators at both ALE/GED programs and colleges and universities to better educate and support GED completers.

#### *Implications for Practice*

The findings of my study are important for ALE/GED program educators and for the public two-year post-secondary institutions in the GNO area. My suggestions for practical implications are based on the results of my study, as well as the findings of several other researchers. As such, high school and ALE program curriculum planners should take note of the research of (Byrd, 2005; Cline et al., 2007; Conley, 2007c; Kuh, 2007; Greene & Forster, 2003) and their suggestions and strategies to help increase the numbers of college-ready students and align their programs for college success. It is important that adequate collaboration and planning be implemented in order to improve alignment efforts. It is also important for educators to refine support systems so that high school students, as well as GED completers, can transition successfully to a community college environment. ALE/GED educators could use more support, resources and training on strategies for increasing “college knowledge” and awareness.

Furthermore, ALE/GED program directors should look for ways to give students information that would strengthen their academic behaviors and contextual knowledge in preparing them for a range of post-secondary opportunities. For GED completers enrolled in college courses, my study may be able to inform adult educators about the value of supporting GED completers in college, and provide ALE/GED program planners insight regarding GED completers' perceptions of college readiness and social capital. K-12 educators could benefit from the findings by providing information to students regarding the disadvantages of dropping out and encouraging persistence and completion of high school. K-12 educators should collaborate with ALE/GED educators and college instructors to increase attention to and knowledge of the benefits of college-going.

### *Limitations*

There are several limitations to my study. First, the findings cannot be generalized beyond GED completers currently enrolled at two community colleges located in the GNO area. The study was also limited to one semester. A third limitation is the small effect sizes of the correlations between the variables. Fourth, it is possible that participant self-reported responses were due to factors other than those present in the community college setting. For example, generational illiteracy and apathy towards education could have affected participant responses negatively. Also, because I am an administrator at one of the community colleges used in the study, and an adjunct instructor at the other, some students may have known my role and that could have influenced how they responded. However, I was not in a supervisory role when administering the survey, and I used several sources of data collection to try to protect against researcher bias.

Additional limitations relate to instrumentation, data collection methods, and the length and depth of the study. First, the instrument used for data collection was self-made by the researcher and therefore increased potential threats to validity. Although I examined several related surveys and questionnaires to determine appropriate wording and design, participants may not have interpreted the survey items consistently. Secondly, because I used multiple methods for the data collection process, there was the danger of incorrect data entry. My intent was to gather as many participants for the study as possible, given the preferences of how they received the survey. Lastly, the study was limited to one semester, which created a very short and quick turnaround time between distribution of the survey and returns. My study would have been strengthened if, perhaps, an entire academic school year could have been feasible.

#### *Generalizability*

Generalizations based on the findings of my study should be applied with caution. The potential threats to internal validity in my study relate to limitations in its generalizability. The study sample was small and only employed two community colleges in a system of eleven schools. Replicating my study, using other schools in different Louisiana parishes, would be one way to address this limitation. There are also limitations with the dimensions of college readiness and social capital being examined.

Given the fact that I chose to examine only two of the dimensions of college readiness (academic behaviors and contextual skills and awareness), according to Conley et al. (2009), the components of each of the four dimensions represent the characteristics of college-ready students. My study's small sample size and overall design framework did not take into account the multiple forms of social capital. Realistically, and throughout the literature (Balatti & Berger, 2000; Dika & Singh, 2002; Falk & Kilpatrick, 2000; Putnam, 2001; Rubenson, 2005), multiple

forms of social capital operate and interact in various ways to influence an individual's perceptions of learning and value to the community. Therefore, utilizing several forms of social capital for research purposes could yield more significant results.

### *Future Research*

Given the findings and the fact that my study used the TABE post-test scores as the literacy level of GED completers, further research should include other demographic variables such as age, gender and ethnicity. I, like Joost (2009), suggest that future research include a method or measure of college readiness using GED scores that could assist in high school, as well as college curriculum alignment. Another suggestion is to extend or duplicate this study to include additional domains of college readiness and social capital and to include the community college environment as a factor.

I also recommend that future studies about GED completers entering college include the population of GED completers transitioning to four-year universities, as well as those transitioning to community colleges. A comparison of the two settings could offer a deeper understanding of the institutional differences that affect student entry and success. More research on the topic of ALE/GED program participants beginning college while still in the program is needed. There is a need for such research, especially given the fact that many students who are earning a high school equivalency diploma are failing to be college ready.

Qualitative research, designed to broaden our understanding from the perspectives of GED completers and post-secondary completers, could be useful in further explorations of perceptions of college readiness and social capital. This study might be replicated using a qualitative design meant to explore the experiences of GED completers both in college and in

their community. Qualitative research in the areas of college readiness and social capital could provide the additional themes (factors) to be used for quantitative investigations.

All in all, adult education programs, specifically GED completion, should not be considered as terminal programs. It is my hope that this study offers a better understanding of the importance of literacy improvement and college-going as a means to improve one's quality of life. Despite the limitations of this study, my intent was to highlight the critical need of increased adult literacy rates in our area so that more citizens are able to productively participate in our efforts to rebuild and renew Greater New Orleans and its surrounding areas.

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*Appendix A*

University of New Orleans

LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

October, 2011

Dear Mr. L. Unbehagen, Mr. S. Boyd and Mr. S. Martin:

I am a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Marietta DelFavero in the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to understand the relationships between adult literacy education participation (GED completion) and perceived college readiness and social capital of GED completers in post-secondary education. I believe that the effectiveness of ALE/GED programs, and the factors that influence college readiness skills and gains in social capital, can best be described and/or explained by former ALE/GED participants who are currently enrolled in entry-level college courses in a community college setting.

Due to the limited amount of ALE/GED programs in the Greater New Orleans area, I am requesting your assistance in this study, which will involve gathering information from participant files of former ALE/GED participants. This method of data collection will occur over a two month period based on your established hours of operation, participant schedules and my availability. Therefore, I am also requesting names and contact information of former participants from your program who are currently enrolled at a community college in order to select a sample for my study. I clearly understand confidentiality rules and will ensure the confidentiality and ethical nature of this study. Your assistance and that of former program participants in this study is voluntary. The results of my research study may be published, but names will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (504) 606-2721. Dr. M. DelFavero can be reached at (504) 280-6446. I am available at your convenience to arrange a meeting time to further discuss my research study and your participation.

Sincerely,

Donalyn L. Lott

## Appendix B

2/16/11

IRB Approval 01Nov11

### **IRB Approval 01Nov11**

UNO Institutional Review Board [unoirb@uno.edu]

**Sent:** Thursday, November 17, 2011 1:13 PM

**To:** Marietta Del Favero [mdelfave@uno.edu]

**Cc:** Donalyn Leufroy Lott

### **University Committee for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research**

## **University of New Orleans**

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### *Campus Correspondence*

Principal Investigator: Marietta DelFavero

Co-Investigator: Donalyn L Lott

Date: November 17, 2011

Protocol Title: "Perceptions of college readiness and social capital of GED completers in entry-level college courses"

IRB#: 01Nov11

The IRB has deemed that the research and procedures are compliant with the University of New Orleans and federal guidelines. The above referenced human subjects protocol has been reviewed and approved using expedited procedures (under 45 CFR 46.116(a) category (7)).

Approval is only valid for one year from the approval date. Any changes to the procedures or protocols must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to implementation. Use the IRB number listed on this letter in all future correspondence regarding this proposal.

If an adverse, unforeseen event occurs (e.g., physical, social, or emotional harm), you are required to inform the IRB as soon as possible after the event.

Best wishes on your project!

Sincerely,

## Appendix C

University of New Orleans

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

November, 2011

Dear Mr. L. Unbehagen, Mr. S. Boyd and Mr. S. Martin:

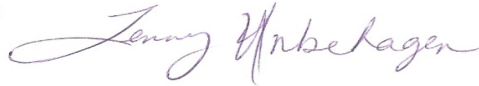
I am a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Marietta DeFavero in the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to understand the relationships between adult literacy education participation (GED completion) and perceived college readiness and social capital of GED completers in post-secondary education. I believe that the effectiveness of ALE/GED programs, and the factors that influence college readiness skills and gains in social capital, can best be described and/or explained by former ALE/GED participants who are currently enrolled in entry-level college courses in a community college setting.

Due to the limited amount of ALE/GED programs in the Greater New Orleans area, I am requesting your assistance in this study, which will involve gathering information from participant files of former ALE/GED participants. This method of data collection will occur over a two month period based on your established hours of operation, participant schedules and my availability. Therefore, I am also requesting names and contact information of former participants from your program who are currently enrolled at a community college in order to select a sample for my study. I clearly understand confidentiality rules and will ensure the confidentiality and ethical nature of this study. Your assistance and that of former program participants in this study is voluntary. The results of my research study may be published, but names will not be used.

If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (504) 606-2721. Dr. M. DeFavero can be reached at (504) 280-6446. I am available at your convenience to arrange a meeting time to further discuss my research study and your participation.

Sincerely,

Donalyn L. Lott



## Appendix D

University of New Orleans

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

November, 2011

Dear Mr. L. Unbehagen, Mr. S. Boyd and Mr. S. Martin:

I am a doctoral candidate under the supervision of Dr. Marietta DelFavero in the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to understand the relationships between adult literacy education participation (GED completion) and perceived college readiness and social capital of GED completers in post-secondary education. I believe that the effectiveness of ALE/GED programs, and the factors that influence college readiness skills and gains in social capital, can best be described and/or explained by former ALE/GED participants who are currently enrolled in entry-level college courses in a community college setting.

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Sincerely,

Donalyn L. Lott



## Appendix E

University of New Orleans

### LETTER OF INTRODUCTION

November, 2011

Dear Mr. L. Unbehagen, Mr. S. Boyd and Mr. S. Martin:

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If you have any questions concerning the research study, please call me at (504) 606-2721. Dr. M. DeFavero can be reached at (504) 280-6446. I am available at your convenience to arrange a meeting time to further discuss my research study and your participation.

Sincerely,

Donalyn L. Lott



Appendix F

College Readiness/Social Capital Survey

The purpose of this investigation is to study your perceptions of college readiness and social capital.

Directions: Please answer each question to the best of your ability. Please print responses.

Demographics

Q1. Gender: Female\_\_\_ Male\_\_\_ Q2. Age: 18-25\_\_\_ 26-33\_\_\_ 34+\_\_\_

Q3. Self Description: American Indian\_\_\_ Mexican-American\_\_\_
Asian-American\_\_\_ Other Hispanic\_\_\_
Asian East Indian\_\_\_ White/Caucasian\_\_\_
Black/African American\_\_\_ Other\_\_\_

Q4. Employment Status: Employed\_\_\_ Unemployed\_\_\_

Q5. Household Income: \$10,000- \$30,000\_\_\_
\$31,000-\$50,000\_\_\_
\$51,000-70,000\_\_\_

Q6. Educational History: Highest level of school completed: \_\_\_\_\_

Q7. ALE/GED program attended: \_\_\_\_\_

Q8. TABE scores/Literacy (grade) level: Post-test\_\_\_\_\_

Q9. Number of credit hours currently enrolled: \_\_\_\_\_

Directions: Rate each item on the scale shown to demonstrate your level of agreement.

Q10. The ALE/GED program prepared me for college.
\_\_Strongly agree \_\_Agree \_\_Disagree \_\_Strongly disagree

Q11. I am aware of my academic strengths and weaknesses.
\_\_Strongly agree \_\_Agree \_\_Disagree \_\_Strongly disagree

Q12. When I encounter a challenging problem, it is difficult for me to solve it myself.
\_\_Strongly agree \_\_Agree \_\_Disagree \_\_Strongly disagree

Q13. I am able to manage my time effectively.
\_\_Strongly agree \_\_Agree \_\_Disagree \_\_Strongly disagree

Q14. I am able to complete tasks set before me in a timely manner.
\_\_Strongly agree \_\_Agree \_\_Disagree \_\_Strongly disagree

- Q15. I have the ability to interact and socialize with others.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q16. I am self-confident.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q17. I understand the challenge of entry-level college courses.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q18. I do not possess leadership skills.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q19. My problem-solving skills are adequate.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q20. The ALE/GED program did not prepare me for college.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q21. I do not interact and socialize with others.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q22. I am a self-disciplined person.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q23. Setting personal goals is difficult for me.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q24. I feel like I belong in college  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q25. I am not a self-disciplined person.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q26. I make use of available school resources (e.g., instructors, advisors, counselors, tutors).  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q27. I am unable to complete tasks set before me in a timely manner.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q28. My interest in college was not a result of my participation in the ALE/GED program.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q29. Upon completion of the GED, I had the capabilities, skills, knowledge and behaviors necessary to pursue college.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q30. College is an important step on my way to accomplishing my goals and dreams.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q31. I am aware of what is expected of me to be successful in college.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q32. I have the attitude to be successful in college  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree



- Q33. Upon completion of the GED, my quality of life did not improve.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q34. The ALE/GED program improved my reading, writing and thinking skills significantly.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q35. My interest in college resulted from ALE/GED participation.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q36. I have feelings of not belonging in college.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q37. I have the ability to set personal goals for myself.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q38. I have the tendency to seek advice from others.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q39. Time management is difficult for me.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q40. I communicate effectively with my instructors and advisors.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q41. I work well in study groups.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q42. Before entering college, I understood how the college system worked.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q43. I respect the diverse backgrounds and cultures of others.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q44. I feel that I have leadership skills.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q45. I am self-aware.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q46. The GED had value to me.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q47. Before entering, I understood the required college options and choices (e.g. the admissions process, the COMPASS placement testing, financial aid procedures and requirements, and academic advising for scheduling purposes).  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q48. The GED improved my quality of life.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q49. I am happy with the level of education that I have received in the ALE/GED program.  
 Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree
- Q50. I feel that my employment and income are enough.

- Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q51. I am connected to various support networks within my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q52. I do not attend or participate in local community/organization events.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q53. I am aware of resources in my community where I can get support.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q54. I am motivated to volunteer in my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q55. My community is not important to me.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q56. I felt valued by my family, community and society upon completion of the  
 GED.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q57. I feel respected and trusted in my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q58. I do not have adequate employment and income.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q59. I can use my skills and knowledge to network with others in my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q60. Volunteering in my community is not of interest to me.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q61. I interact with others in my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q62. I never make use of local, public services.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q63. I have not set career goals.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q64. I have important responsibilities to others in my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q65. I feel that most people in my community can be trusted.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q66. Continuing my education has allowed me to contribute to my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q67. I am concerned about major issues (schools, crime, poverty, recreation,  
 cultural arts) that affect my community.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q68. I have made new friends as a result of participation in community groups.  
 Strongly agree    Agree    Disagree    Strongly disagree  
 Q69. I regularly make use of local, public services (e.g., libraries, transportation,

museums, parks).

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q70. I have set career goals.

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q71. I have difficulty trusting others in my community.

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q72. Major issues that affect my community are not my concern.

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q73. I do not feel respected and trusted in my community.

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

Q74. I do not feel that I can make a contribution to my community, as a result of my learning experiences.

Strongly agree  Agree  Disagree  Strongly disagree

**Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability.**

Q75. Explain what your successful entry into college means to you.

Q76. Describe how you participate in your community.

*Appendix G*

University of New Orleans  
LETTER OF CONSENT FOR ADULTS

December, 2011

Dear former ALE/GED participant:

I am a doctoral student under the supervision of Dr. Marietta DelFavero in the Department of Educational Leadership, Higher Education Administration at the University of New Orleans. I am conducting a research study to understand the relationship between adult literacy education (GED completion) and perceived college readiness and social capital of GED completers currently enrolled in post-secondary education.

I am requesting your participation, which will involve one face to face meeting, online survey, or mail-out survey of former ALE/GED participants at two New Orleans area community colleges. This method of data collection will occur over a one month period, based on your schedule and your availability. Your participation in this study is voluntary, and choosing not to participate or withdrawing from the study at any time, will not result in any type of penalty. The results of the research study may be published; however, your name and other personal information will not be used. Confidentiality will be assured through the use of pseudonyms and non-identifying wording.

Although there will be no direct benefit to you, your participation in this study could result in improvements to ALE/GED programs throughout the Greater New Orleans area. I will, however, place your name into a drawing to win one of four, \$25 Wal-Mart gift cards.

If you have any questions concerning this study, please call me at (504) 606-2721 or Dr. M. DelFavero at (504) 280-6446. I am available at your convenience to arrange a meeting time to further discuss my research study and your participation.

Sincerely,  
Donalyn L. Lott, M.A.

Your signature below implies consent to participate in the above mentioned study and gives permission for access to your GED program files in order to collect TABE post-test data; if you are unable to self-report.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature    Printed Name    Date

Any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a subject/participant or possible risks of this study should be directed to Dr. Ann O'Hanlon at the University of New Orleans (504) 280-6500.

*Appendix H*

University of New Orleans

Perceptions of college readiness and social capital of GED completers in entry-level college courses

**Confidentiality Statement**

As the researcher of the above mentioned research study, I fully understand that I must ensure and maintain the confidentiality of all information concerning the research participants. This information includes, but is not limited to, all personal identifying information taken from the study survey and from educational files. Also, all information from the research data of participants that results from all direct or indirect contact with participants is included in this agreement. In order to maintain confidentiality, I agree to refrain from discussing or disclosing any information regarding research participants, including information described without identifying information, to any individual who is not part of the above research study and in need of the information for the expressed purposes on the research program. All data will be kept secured in a locked file case.

_____	_____	_____
Research Assistant Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Research Assistant Signature	Printed Name	Date
_____	_____	_____
Research Assistant Signature	Printed Name	Date

**Vita**  
**Donalyn Leufroy Lott**

Donalyn Leufroy Lott was born and raised in the great city of New Orleans. She earned both Bachelor of Science and Master of Arts degrees, Louisiana Alternative Teacher certification, and Reading Specialist certification from Xavier University of Louisiana. Donalyn is currently a doctoral candidate at the University of New Orleans in Higher Education Administration. Her research interests include adult literacy and learning, adult education, developmental education, college readiness, nontraditional/underprepared community college students, and social capital theory.

Donalyn taught grades K-8 in the parochial and public school systems of New Orleans for 16 years as a K-12 educator. She is currently an Associate Professor of Developmental Reading and Teacher Education at Nunez Community College (NCC) located in Chalmette, Louisiana. She serves as Department Chair of Developmental Education at NCC and on several school administrative committees. Additionally, she is an adjunct instructor at Delgado Community College (DCC); currently teaching in the Adult Education program at DCC.

Donalyn has presented at several local and national association conferences including, the Greater New Orleans Association for the Education of the Young Child (GNOAEYC), the Louisiana Community and Technical College System (LCTCS), and the National Association of Community College Teacher Education Programs (NACCTEP). She is a frequent presenter at NCC faculty institutes, covering a wide range of topics focused on best practices in community college education.

Donalyn has received many honors and awards, including the Excellence in Teaching award (2010), the Joey Georgusis Endowed Professorship (2009), and the Ronnie Lamarque

Endowed Professorship (2010). She was also honored as a Distinguished Educator by the Phi Delta Kappa Educational society in 2010.

She is a member of the NACCTEP, the International Reading Association (IRA), the Louisiana Association of Women in Higher Education (LAWHE), the Louisiana Institute for Higher Education (LIHE), and Kappa Delta Pi (KDP) professional associations.