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# A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation From High School Dropout to Second Chance Alumni

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A CONSENSUAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY  
OF THE TRANSFORMATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT TO  
SECOND CHANCE ALUMNI

by

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A Dissertation Proposal Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
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## ABSTRACT

### A CONSENSUAL QUALITATIVE RESEARCH STUDY OF THE TRANSFORMATION FROM HIGH SCHOOL DROPOUT TO SECOND CHANCE ALUMNI

Jayne Erin Smith  
Old Dominion University, 2013  
Chair: Dr. Danica G. Hays

This study focused on understanding the perceived process of change, outcomes and influencing factors experienced by high school graduates of Urban Corps of San Diego County (UCO) from a bioecological theory of human development standpoint. UCO is a second chance high school diploma-job training program that offers students free mental health counseling and employment assistance. Limited research charted former high school dropouts' process of re-engagement with school and experiences after graduation. Using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) and Critical Theory, a research team identified nine categories and 33 subcategories based on 15 semi-structured interviews with a homogenous sample of UCO alumni. The findings informed a tentative model of relationships between the perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors that describe UCO alumni's development over time. Theoretical implications supported the utility of the bioecological theory of human development in understanding UCO alumni development-in-context. Findings may be applied in social justice counseling, advocacy, research, and program evaluation.

*Keywords:* student development-in-context, process of change, high school dropout, social justice counseling, qualitative research

This dissertation is dedicated to Grandma Iris  
and the corpsmembers.



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## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

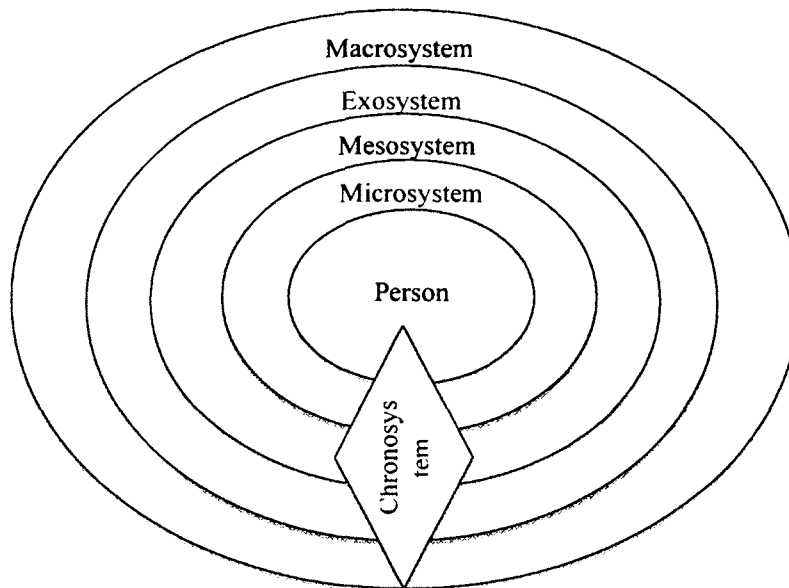
Although research has documented the risk and protective factors related to high school student success and disengagement with school (e.g., academic self-efficacy, school-family connection), research provides few models illustrating a developmental process of change for those students who choose to re-engage in high school after dropping out (see Finnan & Chasin, 2007; Freado & Long, 2005). Fewer empirical studies report on perspectives of re-engaged high school alumni to identify their perceived long-term outcomes from earning a diploma and factors that impact their change and outcomes. Empirical evidence is needed from the perspective of those students whose educational path is considered atypical so that educators and counselors may work with these students using interventions derived from expressed needs and individuals' experiences. Additionally, there is a need for research based on participants' developmental process of change rather than research that focuses on specific variables related to their school experience (Cairns & Cairns, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 1995; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). To this end, this study seeks to promote social justice by inviting former high school dropouts who successfully re-engaged with school and graduated to share their lived experiences over time.

#### **Human Development-in-Context**

Participants in this study were former high school dropouts who re-engaged and graduated from a second chance high school. Their *development-in-context* based on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development. The bioecological theory of human development evolved over time from Bronfenbrenner's (1979) earlier

ecological model of human development. Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined human development within a bioecological context as “the phenomenon of continuity and change in the biopsychological characteristics of human beings, both as individuals and as groups. The phenomenon extends over the life course across successive generations and through historical time, both past and present” (p. 3). Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) model incorporated four key dimensions that provide a theoretical framework for studying human development-in-context: process, person, context, and time. The developmental *process* captures the dynamic interaction between the *person* and the *context*, which results in development outcomes over *time*. The *person* consists of biological, social, emotional, behavioral, and cognitive characteristics. The *context* includes systems depicted as nested layers described in Bronfenbrenner’s (1979) original model: micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems. *Time* is incorporated in a fifth system—the chronosystem and includes general developmental periods of time (i.e., from birth to adolescence), historical time (i.e., the Great Depression), and specific events that occur at specific times in individuals’ lives (i.e., death of a parent in elementary school versus mid life). The Process-Person-Context-Time (PPCT) Model allows researchers to understand individual experiences, environmental impacts, and processes occurring over time (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Figure 1 displays the bioecological theory of human development.

**Figure 1.** Bioecological Theory of Human Development



*Figure 1.* The person, microsystem, mesosystem, exosystem, and macrosystem are nested layers depicting Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development. The chronosystem impacts human development at all layers. Human development in context is a process of change that occurs when each layer interacts with other layers leading to developmental outcomes over time (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The bioecological theory of human development may be understood using the PPCT model (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) and provided a theoretical framework for this study in five ways. First, the person, centrally located in Figure 1, was the focus of this study. The study was rooted in the experiences of the individual participants who experienced dropping out of and re-engaging in high school. Second, context depicted as the nested layers surrounding the person in Figure 1 provided the organization for the presentation of relevant statistics about education in the United States (macrosystem) and the organizational context (microsystem) within which the participants earned their high school diploma. Additionally, existing research on risk and protective factors relevant to participants' interaction with high school were organized based on the person and context



(nested layers surround the person). Third, time, shown as the chronosystem in Figure 1, established parameters for this study. Participants reflected on a specific period of time in their lives: before, during, and after their enrollment in a second chance high school diploma program. Fourth, the process was based on participants' (person) perceived change throughout their experiences in the second chance high school (context). Participants' perceived developmental outcomes, or "patterns of mental organization and content" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 87) illustrated participants' process of change based on their experiences before and after high school graduation. Fifth, the research questions, structure of the interview protocol, and findings were based on the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Bronfenbrenner and other developmental psychologists and researchers have provided countless quantitative research designs based on the bioecological theory of human development both in theory and practice (see Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005; Bronfenbrenner & Mahoney, 1975; Moen, Elder, & Luscher, 1995). None incorporated purely qualitative research designs to capture development in context. However, Cairns and Cairns (1995) suggested expanding existing research design methods to include identification of patterns and behavioral characteristics within individuals given their development-in-context. Bronfenbrenner (2005) also further contended that future research designs should allow for the inclusion of subjective experiences of individuals' ecological context. Cairns and Cairns (1995) and Bronfenbrenner (2005) underscored the relevancy and utility of the bioecological theory of human development in theoretically framing qualitative research. Qualitative research

provides thick descriptions of the phenomenon under study oftentimes based on subjective experiences of those close to the phenomenon (Hays & Singh, 2012).

This chapter continues by providing contextual information relevant to the macrosystem, which focuses on the impact of larger social systems (e.g., education) on individuals' development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Education in the United States is situated within a global, national, and state level, and statistics are reported about long-term effects of dropping out of high school. An in-depth description of Urban Corps of San Diego County (microsystem), a high school diploma-job training program for students choosing to re-engage in school, provides the organizational context for this study. Bronfenbrenner (1995) noted the majority of developmental studies focus on the family microsystem, yet microsystems include all environmental settings with direct impact on individuals (e.g., school). Finally, limitations in current literature are presented to provide a rationale for the research design used in this study.

### **Macrosystem Context: Education in the United States**

Social justice and education are related macrosystems that impact participants' development. Social justice includes four principles: equity, access, participation, and harmony (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008). Accordingly, building equity in social capital includes education. Access to high quality education is an issue of justice (Fabricant & Fine, 2012). In terms of participation, socially just societies, communities and schools should include all stakeholders (e.g., teachers, counselors, administrators, principals, families, and students) in decision-making. In relation to this study, social justice meant that students, including those who dropped out, must be involved in decision-making related to policies that impact their access to and experience in education. Finally, social

justice occurs when decisions about resources are made harmoniously. Harmony occurs when individual and collective community needs are interdependent, which means both must sacrifice for the greater good (Crethar & Nolan, 2009). In terms of education, social justice could mean decisions that affect the quality of education, access to education, and support services that promote success in school should be based on needs of the greatest number of students, while meeting the needs of individual students. Data presented here highlight a macrosystem that does not promote social justice through education for all students, especially for students similar to those who participated in this study.

### **Education in the United States: International Comparison**

UNICEF (2010) focused on issues faced by those children who were at risk of being left behind by the wealthy nations in which they live in terms of health, education, and material well-being. In so doing, UNICEF introduced a common measure of “bottom-end inequality” to assess a nation’s treatment of their children by measuring the inequality gap between the median and bottom 10<sup>th</sup> percentile of those under 18 years old. Overall, the United States, Greece, and Italy were found to have the greatest inequality in their treatment of children. The countries that treated children with the greatest equality included Denmark, Finland, Netherlands, and Switzerland. Specifically, of the 24 developed countries included in this study, the U.S. ranked 23<sup>rd</sup> in material well-being, 19<sup>th</sup> in education well-being, and 22<sup>nd</sup> in health well-being. Material well-being measured poverty based on a child’s household income, access to basic educational resources, such as computers and desks in the home, and housing living space. Educational well-being, or educational achievement, was measured based on standardized math, reading, and science scores of a representative sample of 15 year olds

in each country. Health well-being was measured by children's self-report of health ailments, healthy eating, and levels of physical activity (see UNICEF, 2010).

### **National and Regional Education Statistics**

National and state statistics provided further evidence of the unjust treatment of many high school students in the United States. The U.S. Departments of Education (USDOE) and Labor (USDOL), and the U.S. Census Bureau (USCB) provided evidence of the high school dropout crisis in terms of dropout, poverty, employment, and income rates. Unfortunately, the statistics reported by the USDOE, USDOL, and USCB conflict in some areas. The departments use different calculation methods, and reporting strategies vary by state, which may account for the conflicting findings (see Belfield & Levin, 2007). To further complicate matters, non-government researchers report different numbers, which also may be a result of research design issues.

**U.S. government dropout rates.** The dropout rates reported here describe national means for high school dropout rates combining 9<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> graders in 2009-2010. The enrollment rates reported here illustrate the percentage of high school students enrolled in school in 2009-2010. The dropout rates range from 4.1% (Stillwell, Sable, & Plots, 2011) to 8.1% (U.S. Department of Education [USDOE], 2011). Seventeen percent of Latino and 9.3% of African-American students were not enrolled in school as compared to 5% of White students in 2009-2010 (USDOE, 2011). Furthermore, 5.8% of Latino and 4.8% of African-American students dropped out of public school during the same academic year. The combined not enrolled and dropout rates could indicate that 36.9% of Latino and African-American students would not enroll in school for the 2010-2011 academic year, which is roughly 1 out of 3 Latino and African-American students.

Belfield and Levin (2007) analyzed graduation rates in terms of race and gender from the Current Population Survey (CPS) of the USCB and the Common Core Data (CCD) of the USDOE. They found that across the United States only 42% of African-American males and 48% of Latinos graduated from public high schools compared to 72% of white males in 2003 and 2004. Female graduation rates were better than males overall, but the disparity between African-American and Latino female students, and white female students remained (56%, 59%, and 77%, respectively). The majority of students of color, especially male students, were more likely not graduating from high school.

In California, the state in which this study took place, 50% of the student population was Latino, 27% was White, and 12% was African-American in 2009-2010 (USDOE, 2011). In terms of gender, there were slightly more males than females (51% and 48%, respectively). The high school dropout rate presented a bleak outlook for the majority of students of color in the United States, and even more so, in California where 62% of the student population represented students identified as being at-risk for dropping out at higher rates than White students based on ethnicity. This bleak outlook could be further illustrated given that male students of color seem to drop out at higher rates than female students of color (Belfield & Levin, 2007) and the majority of students in California are male students of color.

**Long-term effects.** There are long-term effects for high school dropouts in terms of employment, income, poverty, substance abuse, incarceration, depression, and teenage childbirth. In 2010, 46.3% of the United States population that was 25 and older with less than a high school diploma was in the labor force, which means they have the

potential for employment (DeNavas-Walt, Proctor, & Smith, 2011). However, the unemployment rate for that group was 14.9%, as compared to 10.3% with a high school diploma and 4.7% with at least a bachelor's degree in the same age group (DeNavas-Walt et al., 2011).

A comparison of studies across different racial/ethnic populations allows one to make statements regarding the income of high school graduates versus non-graduates in 2009. Chapmen, Laird, Ifill, and KewalRamani (2011) reported that 18-67 year olds in the U.S. population without a high school diploma earned a median income of \$25,000 in 2009, as compared to \$43,000 for those with at least a high school diploma or GED. Ou (2008) used data from the Chicago Longitudinal Study (CLS) to identify differences in income between those with a GED or diploma and those who dropped out of high school using a sample of 1,372 low-income minority students from high poverty inner city neighborhoods. Ou found that over twice as many high school graduates (57.8%) than dropouts (22.5%) earned more than \$12,000 annually. GED certificate holders fared only slightly better than dropouts (33.1%) in terms of earning more than \$12,000 annually. This data indicate that 77.5% of minority dropouts and almost 70% of minority GED holders likely earned less than \$12,000 annually, which is significantly less than the national median income of the overall population without a high school diploma (\$25,000 for dropouts and \$43,000 for GEDS, respectively) (Chapmen et al., 2011).

The poverty threshold for one-person households under 65 in 2009 was \$11,161 and for two-people households was \$14,439 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Based on Ou's (2008) report of annual income, up to 77.5% of minority high school dropouts and almost 70% of GED certificate holders live near or below the poverty threshold. In the western

region of the U.S., 15.3% live below the poverty threshold, which was the third highest of four regions in the United States. In terms of race/ethnicity across the nation, 27.4% of African Americans and 26.6% of Latinos lived in poverty (U.S. Census Bureau, 2009). Given that the dropout rate is highest for African-American and Latino students, and they fair worse in terms of employment and income, it is no surprise that the poverty threshold rate for these populations are high. The poverty threshold statistics related to these specific minority groups reflect participants in this study.

Minority high school dropouts also seem to experience increased rates of teenage childbirth. Ou (2008) found that 80.7% of female GED holders and 81.5% of female dropouts reported having at least one child before the age of 20 compared to 60.1% of graduates. It is likely that these children also experience higher rates of poverty given that their parents were more likely to live below the poverty threshold. In 2010, 22% of those living below the poverty threshold were under the age of 18 (U.S. Census, 2010). This means that an estimated 1 out of 5 children live in poverty. Furthermore, the poverty rate of children living with single mothers was 31.6%, as compared to 15.1% of single father households. This could indicate that re-engaging students who are parents also may decrease the chances of their children living in poverty.

Institutionalization, either through incarceration or placement in mental institutions, has also been correlated with high school dropouts. Aud et al. (2011) found that 40% of the institutionalized population did not earn a high school diploma. Ou (2008) reported that of 15% ( $n=206$ ) of the total sample ( $n=1,372$ ) who were incarcerated, only 2.2% ( $n=5$ ) held high school diplomas as opposed to 27.5% ( $n=57$ ) who held GEDs and 31.2% ( $n=64$ ) who dropped out. These numbers could indicate that high school

dropouts and GED holders are institutionalized at greater rates than those with a high school diploma, which supports the need for counselors and educators to develop strategic interventions to re-engage students in high school.

Finally, substance abuse and depression are also correlated with high school dropouts. Ou (2008) found that of the 29% ( $n=398$ ) of participants who reported substance use since the age of 16, 48% ( $n=190$ ) dropped out, 34.6% ( $n=137$ ) held GEDs, and 18.8% ( $n=74$ ) held diplomas. In terms of depression, 19.9% ( $n=273$ ) of the total sample had depression (Ou, 2008). In a similar pattern, dropouts made up the largest percentage of those with depression (31.2%;  $n=85$ ), followed by GED and diploma holders (20.5%;  $n=56$  and 15.4%;  $n=42$ , respectively).

The national, regional, and state statistics reported in this section provide supportive data for the United States' position in the UNICEF (2010) report and provide contextual information relevant to macrosystems that may impact participants' development. In all areas, dropouts fared the worst, and GED holders were not much better off as compared to those who graduated from high school, especially for minority populations.

### **Risk and Protective Factors Impacting Student Development in Context**

Countless studies across education, counseling, psychology, social work, economics, and public policy describe risk and protective factors in an attempt to predict high school dropout. Others describe programs and interventions developed to prevent students from dropping out. Individual student factors, such as academic performance, academic self-efficacy, career aspirations, motivation, attendance rates, mental and physical health issues, gender, generational level, and perceptions, to name a few, have



been identified as influencing students' academic success (Christle, Jolivette, & Nelson, 2005; Eichas et al., 2010; Fairbrother, 2008; Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Rivera, Blumberg, Chen, Ponterotto, & Flores, 2007; Solberg, Carlstrom, Howard, & Jones, 2007; Suh, Suh, & Houston, 2007).

School, family, and environmental factors have also been identified in the literature, oftentimes calling attention to negative factors that influence the high school dropout crisis. These factors are relevant to Bronfenbrenner's (1979) micro-, meso-, and ecosystems. For instance, schools with punitive discipline policies that employ limited instructional strategies with large class sizes tend to influence students' path to leaving school (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Jones, 2011; Worthman, 2008). Unfortunately, many of these schools are situated in low SES communities, which also tend to have higher percentages of Latino and African-American students. Family factors include level of parental involvement in education, parent education level, family trauma, and single parents (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001; Davis, 2006; Fairbrother, 2008; Hartwell, McMackin, Tansi, & Bartlett, 2010; Kubik, Lytle, & Fulkerson, 2004). Considering that many participants in this study were both products of many of these characteristics, and have children of their own, there may be an increased risk for the perpetuation of cycles of poverty across generations.

Many alternative high school diploma programs are offered through charter schools. The National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (2011) reported that there were 1,005 charter high schools nationwide for 2010-2011, which comprises 19% of the total number of U.S. charter schools. Some of these charter schools provide high school diploma programs for students who choose to re-engage in school.

Youth Corps, an alternative charter high school program that also provided job skills training for students at over 110 sites nationwide (Jastrzab, Blomquist, Maser, & Orr, 1997). Jastrzab et al. (1997) compared Youth Corps students to a representative sample not enrolled in the program. Their participants were 17-26 years old and predominantly persons of color. They found that 56% of enrolled participants dropped out of traditional high school. They also found that the year prior to enrollment in Youth Corps 80% had not worked and 70% reported an annual household earning of less than \$15,000. Additionally, program completion rates ranged from 30-59%. Program completion varied by site and ranged between 6-12 months. Those students who completed the Youth Corps program showed better results on employment and earnings outcomes, and were a third less likely to be arrested up to 15 months after the program than students in the comparison group (12% arrest rate for program completers and 17% for students in the comparison group) (Jastrzab et al., 1997).

Findings from a more recent study of Conservation Corps, of which Youth Corps are included, supported Jastrzab et al.'s (1997) findings. Duerden, Edwards, and Lizzo (2011) compared corpsmembers from 10 different Conservation Corps with a group of similar youth who did not complete a Conservation Corps program in terms of leadership, civic engagement, intent to pursue environmental education and careers, and involvement in outdoor recreation. Corpsmembers scored higher on all outcome measures indicating that participation in a conservation corps program is associated with leadership, civic engagement, continued environmental education, employment in environmental jobs, and involvement in outdoor recreation.

Jastrzab et al. (1997) and Duerden (2011) indicated positive impacts on participants of Youth Corps/Conservation Corps programs, but Price, Williams, Simpson, Jastrzab, and Markovitz (2011) did not find significant results in similar outcomes with Youth Corps program alumni. Price et al. (2011) conducted a national evaluation of the impact of Youth Corps using an experimental design to assess outcomes in terms of education, employment, civic engagement and life skills, and risky behaviors. They compared alumni of Youth Corps programs and a similar comparison group up to 30 months post program. They did not find significant results in terms of education, employment, and civic engagement and life skills for either the treatment or control groups. Similarly, there were no significant findings related to risky behaviors, including incarceration recidivism rates. However, they did find that Youth Corps participants' educational expectations were significantly different compared to a similar group who did not attend Youth Corps. This finding means that participants in Youth Corps were more likely to expect completion of educational diplomas and degrees than control group participants. They also found that compared to a control group, Youth Corps participants changed jobs with less frequency, had higher earnings, and had higher perceived ability to make ends meet at the end of each month. These findings suggested that Youth Corps program participants fared slightly better in educational expectations and some employment related outcomes, but did not actually attain educational degrees or secure stable employment at higher rates than non-program participants.

High school dropouts may also take the standardized General Education Development (GED) test in place of earning a high school diploma. However, the GED alone has very little positive impact on at-risk youth (Ou, 2008). Davis (2006) stated

“Those GED programs that successfully lift students out of poverty are those that provide on-the-job training and access to postsecondary education or job placement assistance as well as a GED” (p. 293). Youthbuild is an example of a national alternative charter high school program that offers students a chance to develop construction job skills and earn a GED (“About Youthbuild,” 2012). Using qualitative research, Davis (2006) analyzed the transcripts of eight African American males who recently completed Youthbuild to understand how their constructed meanings of masculinity impact their relationship with school. Davis (2006) found that African American males’ journey in and out of school towards stability and employment was not linear. Instead, their paths were filled with many obstacles and called for educators to offer many opportunities for success. Davis’s participants reported “making poor choices” (p. 300) where street life, such as dealing drugs, and not Youthbuild was their priority.

Jastrzab et al. (1997), Davis (2006), Duerden et al. (2011), and Price et al. (2011) provided evidence of the need for comprehensive interventions that provide job skills training, education, and job placement support for students who drop out of high school. Conservation Corps, Youth Corps, and Youthbuild offer program models to meet the needs of this disadvantaged population. Unfortunately, there are not any other published studies that focus on the perceived experience of alumni from programs such as these before, during and post program to date.

Similarly there are not any published studies of participants’ experience with alternative high school programs, such as Youthbuild and Youth Corps that offer mental health counseling services. Counselors’ training in relationship building, empathic understanding, multicultural competency, assessment and evaluation, and, increasingly,

advocacy provide a foundation to engage in social justice work with students who are at risk of dropping out and those who re-engage in high school, including those who re-engage in alternative high school programs.

### **A Second Chance Program: Organizational Context**

Urban Corps of San Diego County (UCO), the partner organization in this study, is the microsystem around which this study is centered. UCO offers a similar job training-education program to the Conservation Corps, Youth Corps and Youthbuild for high school dropouts who want to re-engage in school. All of these programs include job skills training, but UCO's job skills training are related to environment, water, and energy conservation industries (more details below) and UCO students have an opportunity to earn a high school diploma, which is beyond a GED offered in the other comparable programs.

UCO is currently 1 of 13 Certified Conservation Corps in California and operates independently with a local board of directors (California Association of Local Conservation Corps [CALCC], 2008). The Conservation Corps started over 25 years ago and has served over 40,000 young adults since that time (About CALCC, n.d., para. 1). Across the state, 64% were males, 36% were females, 72% had some high school or less, 55% were Latino, 31% were African American, 27% were single parents, and over 50% were court involved (About CALCC: Statistics, n.d.). Currently, UCO is the only Certified Conservation Corps in the state offering free mental health counseling services onsite for students.

UCO's student racial and ethnic demographic data is similar to the overall state demographic data. In terms of race and nationality, 43% were Iraqi, 32% were Latino,

18% were African American, 7% were Asian, 1% was American Indian/Alaska Native, and less than 1% were White (UCO Charter School, 2010). More than 85% of the student population dropped out of mainstream high school and 65% are single parents (UCO, 2009). UCO (2009) reported that 71% of its students experienced improved economic status, 75% of the alumni were still employed, and students living in stable conditions improved from 50% to 79%. Currently, over 1,400 students have earned a high school diploma and UCO has served over 6,000 youth (UCO, 2009). UCO is funded through local, state, and federal contracts and grants (49%), program service fees (41%), and other sources, such as the charter school's average daily attendance (10%). It is a fee-for-service organization, so it is mainly a self-sustaining non-profit with an estimated \$7.8 million dollars in revenue in 2009 (UCO, 2009). Student enrollment ranges from 150-250 depending on fee-for-service contracts (Education Director, personal communication, March 3, 2012).

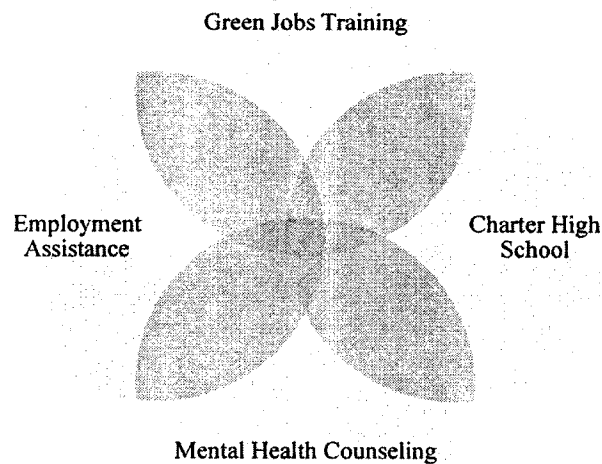
UCO's campus is located within walking distance of two major public transportation hubs, and consists of three buildings, and a state-of-the-art vehicle wash using recycled water. Two of the buildings are Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certified and include a recycling center for the community, solar panels, and a rooftop garden. Additionally, the education and support services programs have SMART classroom technology, and over 50 computers available for student use before, during, and after work and school.

### **Program Components**

Some of the program activities have changed since participants in this study were enrolled in the program. For instance, the work-school schedule changed so that now

50% of students attend school each week, with a rotating schedule (“Big Changes,” 2011). Overall, the program components have stayed the same. Activities and services reported here reflect the way the program was when participants in this study attended. Figure 2 illustrates UCO program components.

**Figure 2.** UCO Program Components and Services



*Figure 2.* UCO = Urban Corps of San Diego County includes 4 program components. Green Jobs Training includes paid work in energy, water, and environmental conservation. The Charter High School offers a high school diploma program including preparation courses for the math and English California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Free mental health counseling services are provided for enrolled students and alumni, and include individual and group counseling and psychoeducational training related to personal, career, and academic needs. Employment assistance services are provided for enrolled students and alumni, and include resume writing, interview preparation, and employment networking.

Students applied to the program and attended a 3-day orientation prior to being assigned to work in 1 of 7 environmental service departments. In addition, students were assigned to attend the high school diploma program, which was provided by a charter high school onsite. Students worked four days per week and attended school one day per

week. Students also had access to support services through an onsite employment assistance center and mental health counseling clinic during and after work and school. The work and school day started at 7:30 AM and ended between 4:00-5:00 PM Monday thru Friday, with the exception of a few departments that worked nights and weekends depending on the fee-for-service contract.

**Environmental job skills training.** UCO provided students with specific job training related to “green” industries to assist in “managing scarce resources and conserving energy” (CALCC, 2008, p. 1). Community Improvement Services involved the maintenance of a number of business improvement districts in the county. For instance, students were trained in tree trimming, power washing, landscaping, and sidewalk and gutter sweeping to increase cleanliness and safety in these districts.

The award winning Recycling Program worked in collaboration with local cities and entertainment venues to streamline the separation of waste and recyclables. Students were trained to identify different levels of recyclable items and use specialized collection vehicles to ensure these items do not end up in landfills. On average, this department diverted over 5,000 tons of recyclables from the waste stream each year (UCO, 2009). Students in this department also participated in outreach to local schools and agencies to provide recycling education to the community.

Students assigned to work in Environmental Services learned to build trails and crib steps, stop erosion using best management practices, and restore natural habitats in canyons, parks, and wetlands. For instance, they were responsible for the re-habitation of many regional and state lands devastated by the 2007 San Diego Fires. Students gained



skills in using specialized hand tools, power tools, and light equipment, such as bob cats, chippers, and dump trucks.

The Graffiti Removal Department was responsible for removing over 4 million square feet of graffiti each year (UCO, 2009). Students assigned to this department learned to use power washers, boom lifts, reclamation and recycling units, and paint sprayers to fulfill community requests for removal through a 24-hour hotline. To maintain the Environmental Protection Agency's standards for preventing illegal water run-off, these students also learned best practices for water quality control.

The Urban Forestry and Tree Smart Department worked in partnership with the Community Development Block Grant funding program to plant trees in low-income urban areas. Students received specialized training in tree planting, care, pruning, and watering. They also learned, and taught community members, about the aesthetics, benefits, and importance of trees to the environment. Specifically the Tree Smart program partnered with local elementary schools to teach youth about the importance of trees in the environment, and the dangers of trees near power lines.

The Weatherization, Energy Efficiency, and Residential Rehab (WEER) program was done in partnership with the local city redevelopment agency and city council. Students provided basic weatherization, home repairs, and security improvement to low income, disabled, and senior residents of the county. These services increased the safety and health of residents, and resulted in more energy and water efficient homes.

Supervisors worked with student crews in each of the departments every day. Before and after work, and during lunch, supervisors mentored students, helped with school projects, and provided structure to keep students engaged in the work. Each day

students submitted a written response to an organization wide journal topic related to career, environment, and personal growth that was reviewed with supervisors. Students earned a paycheck while learning a variety of job skills that increased their employability post program, and helped the community.

**Charter high school.** Students split time between work and school. The charter school was founded on the following seven growth areas that guide student learning: (a) reading and writing effectively; (b) understanding and effectively functioning in the world; (c) appreciating history, geography, and current events; (d) comprehending the political process; (e) applying mathematical principles and operations to solve problems; (f) applying scientific concepts and skills to explain the work, and finding solutions to its problems; and (g) realizing his/her own special interest, talents, and abilities (Academics, 2012, para. 1). Students entered the program with varying high school credits from previous high schools, so their programs of study were individualized.

The charter school offered three additional educational components. The students took preparation classes for the state standardized English and math high school exit exams. There was an English Language Learner track for students whose primary language was not English. Finally, driver's education courses were offered for students to acquire their class B and C licenses.

The charter high school staff consisted of one education director, two registrars, five teachers, one clinical mental health counseling clinic director/supervisor, three to five clinical mental health counseling graduate students, and three "grandparent" volunteers from a local church charity. The charter school does not calculate graduation and drop out rates as students may be terminated from the program due to poor

performance in their job placement (Education Director, personal communication, March 3, 2012). However, 100 students graduated between October 2009 and October 2010, the period within which alumni were selected for this study (UCO Charter School, 2012).

**Employment assistance.** UCO students were required to engage in the employment assistance program provided by Corps to Career, which included the 3-day orientation that all students must attend. Corps to Career also coordinated activities to develop career goals, track job skills certifications, outreach to potential employers, and assist in the development of resumes, cover letters, and other job-seeking tools. Each student had a case manager with whom they meet at least once per quarter to monitor their progress (UCO, n.d.). Corps to Career was grant funded and staffed by a director, case manager, and employment outreach coordinator.

**Mental health counseling.** The Assessment and Counseling Clinic (ACC) was an award winning partnership with a local university graduate counseling program that provided free onsite mental health counseling (CALCC, 2008). The researcher in this study was the first director of the ACC. An average of four counseling practicum and internship students staff the clinic each semester. The staff provided an initial intake for all new students, and many continued with weekly individual counseling sessions. The main presenting concerns included homelessness, childcare issues, anger management, substance use, parenting, relationship issues, court involvement, academic and career concerns, and conflict resolution (UCO, 2010).

From 2009 to 2011, the ACC also provided a variety of psychoeducational groups. One such group, Vocalize Our Individual and Collective Experience (VOICE), was required for all graduating students and was part of their education program. Smith

(2012) conducted a Participatory Action Research (PAR) project with the counselors and teachers who facilitated VOICE to describe the program purpose and facilitator experience based on interviews of teachers and counselors who co-facilitated the program. Four themes were identified that describe VOICE. Of these four themes, the *personal development process* captured the transformational experience that students and facilitators go through to become change agents by the end of VOICE. According to the VOICE co-facilitators, this process was fostered by activities that promote self-exploration, empowerment, self-expression, and positive engagement in the community. The second theme involved skill-building activities, such as public speaking, basic Microsoft Office training, and conducting action research. The third theme, *VOICE culture* reflected Freire's (1970,1993) liberation education model. The fourth theme pertained to student evaluation. Students were evaluated on their final projects, which included the senior research project and an autobiography, as well as their engagement in the process of learning.

During the same period, the ACC staff also developed and implemented intensive 1-day psychoeducational groups offered during intersessions between quarters with topics determined in collaboration with the students. Group topics included parenting skills, bystander intervention, substance abuse prevention, Microsoft Office training and computer anxiety prevention, and cross-cultural communication. Finally, students identified as at-risk for dropping out based on excessive absences were required to attend a support group and individual counseling until their attendance rates stabilized.

### **Limitations of Existing Literature**

Extensive quantitative research has identified risk and protective factors associated with a student's engagement and disengagement in school. The student voice is missing from these quantitative studies as quantitative studies tend to present results in the form of numbers (Patton, 2002). The next chapter will provide greater detail of these studies. Additionally, the quantitative studies reporting risk and protective factors did not provide deeper understanding of the developmental process and outcomes experienced by former high school dropouts from an ecological lens (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

Qualitative research is based on listening to the participants' experiences of a phenomenon and presenting data that reflects the participants' voice (Hays & Singh, 2012). There are currently 14 qualitative studies related to alternative high schools and students who were at-risk or already dropped out of high school. Three are case studies, of which two did not report details related to research design and methodology (Finnan & Chasin, 2007; Freado & Long, 2005) and one was an evaluation of an alternative high school (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Despite the limitations in the first two case studies, these were the only articles with participants who reflect the sample in this study and charted their transformation from dropping out of high school to re-entering an alternative program and finding educational and job success after graduation.

Kim and Taylor (2008) used a critical theory paradigm and constant comparison to analyze data from observations and open-ended, structured interviews with students and school officials, and primary documents reflecting curriculum to assess the effectiveness of an alternative high school. This study provided school risk and

protective factors, in part from the student perspective, but it was not focused on the student transformational experience. Additionally, the program did not indicate that job skills training was offered to students like those offered by UCO.

Five of the 14 qualitative studies provided risk and protective factors related to alternative high school programs (Fairbrother, 2008; Jones, 2013a; Jones, 2013b; McKenzie, Skrla, Scheurich, Rice, & Hawes, 2011; Worthman, 2008). Like Kim and Taylor (2008), these studies included students who were currently enrolled in alternative high schools, but were not focused on the students' personal growth experiences from the point of leaving mainstream high schools to their current experience in the alternative school. None of the school programs were reported to offer job skills training, mental health counseling, or individualized job placement services. Finally, none of the studies provided details of specific research traditions used to guide the studies.

The remaining six qualitative studies focused on students' personal experiences related to secondary education using grounded theory (Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005), ethnomethodology (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009), action research (Rios, 2010), interpretive ethnography and narrative inquiry (Jones, 2011), appreciative inquiry focus groups (De La Ossa, 2005), and qualitative analysis (Davis, 2006). With the exception of Davis (2006), none of these studies were set within an organizational context like UCO as most were set within alternative high schools focused solely on education. The participants in many of the studies attended different alternative high school programs. None of these studies included a focus on students' re-engagement with school or extended to two years beyond graduation. Teachers and/or classroom observation were included in most of the samples and data sources, as well as the students. Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) and

Brown and Rodriguez (2009) noted the small number of qualitative studies about the high school dropout experience from the students' perspective. Their studies were the only two to include student only samples to capture the students' process of disengagement from school.

This study expanded on the current literature related to students who drop out of high school in a number of ways. Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR), critical theory, and multiple strategies for trustworthiness were utilized to improve upon the research design limitations in past qualitative studies. CQR and critical theory emphasize the importance of the participant as expert in constructing their own reality, minimizing power differentials, and optimizing trustworthiness through use of research teams, auditors, and multiple rounds of analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hill, 2012). Hill (2012) also recommended a homogeneous sample of 12-15 participants, which is larger than many of the previous studies using semi-structured individual interviews. Participants in this study have successfully re-engaged in secondary education, earned a high school diploma, and have two to three years of life experience post graduation, which extends beyond previous studies and reflects CQR's emphasis on understanding long-term outcomes (Hill, 2012). Furthermore, there are not any studies set within the context of UCO offering "green" job skills, a high school diploma, and free mental health services and employment assistance. In so doing, this study provided insight into UCO alumni's process of change, long term outcomes, and mitigating factors that influence their perceived process of change and outcomes.

### **Purpose of the Study**

Given the tremendous obstacles faced by many high school students described in the current literature, this study aimed to understand the experiences of former high school dropouts who re-engaged with school and earned a high school diploma using a theoretical framework based on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecology theory of human development. In addition to understanding UCO alumni's perceived developmental process of change, this study identified perceived long-term outcomes for UCO graduates and perceived factors that influence their process of change and outcomes.

Understanding the perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors may provide a better understanding of the impact of UCO on their lives, families and communities within which they live. Current literature focuses primarily on negative outcomes for high school dropouts and the process of disengagement from high school. Instead, this study offers insight into successful transformations from dropout to graduate and beyond.

Participants in this study were the UCO students in their senior semester who completed VOICE (Smith, 2012). This study had potential to strengthen the understanding of the PDP by expanding it from the psychoeducational context to the UCO program context, and extending the timeframe from one semester to multiple years. In doing so, this study deepened an understanding of their perceived transformation that occurred from the point of dropping out of mainstream public high school to two to three years after graduation from UCO, clarified perceived long-term outcomes, and identified perceived factors that influenced successes and challenges.



Eligible participants must have graduated from UCO between October 2009-October 2010 and have attended some public high school in the United States. This timeframe was selected because the researcher was the director of the counseling clinic during this time, and worked with each of the possible participants in individual counseling, or as the VOICE facilitator during their senior semester. The researcher “established trust with [potential] participants and gained detailed, sufficient information about them, their culture, the setting, and the phenomenon of interest” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 206). This prolonged engagement increases confirmability, authenticity, and substantive validation, which are strategies for increasing trustworthiness in qualitative research (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Research Questions**

There were three research questions for this study:

1. How did participants experience a process of change, if any, in Urban Corps of San Diego County?
2. What changes, if any, do participants report post program?
3. What program factors, if any, impact the participants’ process of change and experience post program?
  - a. What additional factors, if any, impact the participants’ process of change and experience post program?

### **Contributions of the Study**

This study was unique in that data were only based on interviews of UCO alumni to provide rich descriptions of their experience of change, outcomes, and influencing factors using an bioecological theoretical framework (Bronfenbrenner, 1979;

Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Findings have implications for counselors, educators, and UCO staff. UCO alumni insight into their challenges and successes inform dropout prevention and intervention programs rooted in social justice. The focus on the participant voice provided depth to the extensive quantitative data illustrating protective and risk factors for high school students (dis)engagement in school, and foster an increase in the experience of the participation principle of social justice (Crethar et al., 2008). The extended timeframe of two to three years post graduation informed long-term student outcomes for UCO, with the possibility to transfer the findings to other alternative high school programs. The extended timeframe also reflected Bronfenbrenner's (2005) recommendation to include data from more than one time period when conducting research on human development-in-context. Retrospective data was collected about participants' lives from main stream high school to post graduation from UCO and was not collected at more than one time.

This study contributed specifically to social justice counseling, UCO's credibility, and offered recommendations for continued program development. In addition, this study contributed to research in two ways. First, it offered a model for using qualitative research to increase leadership and advocacy in social justice counseling (see Hays, Wood, & Smith, 2011). Second, it offered an example of extending Bronfenbrenner's (1979; 2005) recommendations for developmental research rooted in experimental design to include qualitative research design based in the CQR tradition and critical theory paradigm.

### **Definition of Terms**

This section defines terms used throughout the study.

*Alternative High School Program:* Alternative high school programs were not considered to be conventional or mainstream public high school. This included alternative tracks within a conventional or mainstream public high school, alternative programs connected to, but separate from conventional or mainstream high school, or adult-learning programs provided by public school districts. For example, Murray High School was an alternative high school within a school district and not connected to a mainstream high school in a mid-Atlantic city where 8<sup>th</sup> grade students were identified as at-risk by school counselors and placed at Murray instead of the conventional or mainstream public high school in their district (Jones, 2011).

*Charter High School:* A charter high school was a public high school in that it received funding from the local, state, and federal government, was open to all students, and cannot charge tuition. However, charter high schools were not bound by the same rules and regulations of conventional or mainstream public high schools with the understanding that accountability measures were outlined in the charter (National Education Association, 2012)

*Conventional or Mainstream High School:* A conventional or mainstream high school was a public high school in the United States. They were part of local school districts, funded through the local, state, and federal government, and had standardized requirements for all students. Attendance in high school was mandatory for all students, but the age range and policies related to mandatory attendance varied by state. In California (UCO's state), students were required to attend school until the age of 18 (Legislative Analyst Office, 2004).

*Development-in-Context or bioecology theory of human development:* Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) described human development in terms of the impact of multiple contextual levels, or systems, within which an individual has specific roles, engages in activities, and interacts with other people, settings, and systems. The contextual levels included the micro-, meso-, exo-, macro-, and chronosystems. Individuals' development, or growth is influenced by elements within each of these systems.

*Developmental Outcomes:* Bronfenbrenner (2005) defined developmental outcomes in terms of individuals' psychological development including established patterns of mental organization based on subjective experiences and objective observations that evolve over time. According to Bronfenbrenner (2005) "the demonstration of a developmental outcome requires evidence of patterns of subjective experience and objective behavior that exhibit some degree of continuity across space and time but have their origins in conditions, events, and process taking place at an earlier period in the life of the person" (p. 87).

*General Education Diploma (GED):* The GED certificate was earned after test takers pass seven core content area tests that were equivalent to the academic knowledge required to earn a high school diploma. While many government institutions and universities considered the GED to be equivalent to the diploma in regards to program eligibility, the military has higher standards (Joining the Army, 2012, para. 3). Cameron and Heckman (1993) also found that GED holders experienced less economic benefits, such as annual income, than those who held a high school diploma. Ou (2008) reported similar findings in terms of teenage childbirth, incarceration rates, substance abuse, depression, and income.

*Green job skills:* Participants in this study developed environmental job skills while enrolled in UCO, such as weatherization, recycling, water quality control, restoring habitats, and planting trees. “Green” job skills were related to energy and water conservation, and environmental resource management.

*High School Dropout:* A high school dropout referred to a person who left a conventional or mainstream public high school for any reason without earning a diploma prior to the age of 18.

*Influencing Factors:* Elements or characteristics of systems within the ecological context that impacted participants’ process of change and outcomes before, during, and after their enrollment in UCO.

*Outcomes:* Characteristics, attributes, behaviors, and skills that participants’ perceived to have gained through completion of UCO. The hoped for benefits or changes in participants who complete a program such as UCO (Patton, 2002).

*Social Justice Counseling:* Crethar et al. (2008) defined social justice counseling as “a unique and multifaceted approach to mental health care in which counselors strive to promote human development and the common good by addressing issues related to both individual and distributive justice. [This includes] empowerment of the individual as well as active confrontation of injustice and inequality in society” (p. 270).

*Transformation Process or Process of Change:* The transformation process refers to the change that UCO alumni go through from being a high school dropout to being a high school graduate. This process may include elements in the personal development process (Smith, 2012). CALCC (2008) described students who enroll in the Certified Conservation Corps: “They want to face the obstacles that previously held them back,

confront them, tackle them, and move past them to live healthy and productive lives” (p. 2). The transformation process included the challenges and successes that occurred on their path to leading healthy and productive lives. This process may have also included outcomes experienced by participants post program. Finally, this process may have reflected Bronfenbrenner’s (2005) bioecology theory of human development in that it highlights participant growth over a developmental time period including the impact of various influencing factors relevant to micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems.

### **Delimitations**

The study did not include a substantial number of students and alumni from UCO and other Certified Conservation Corps to maintain a homogeneous sample (Hill, 2012). Many UCO students were international refugees and did not meet the sampling criterion related to previous attendance at a public high school in the United States. Therefore, this study did not provide an understanding of the experiences of international refugees who were entering the U.S. education system through their participation in UCO. Current students were not able to yield a reflection on life after the program, which was a large focus of this study, and were not included. Finally, students who graduated between 2006-2009 had access to the counseling clinic, but the clinic did not have a fulltime director. Prior to 2006, counseling services were not provided for students in this program. Therefore, UCO alumni who graduated before October 2009 were not included in this study. Students and alumni from the 12 other Certified Conservation Corps in the state were not eligible for this study because the organizational context varies across the other certified programs.

This study did not include the UCO staff for two primary reasons. First, Hill (2012) recommended a homogenous sample for CQR studies, which means staff were not eligible based on criterion sampling used in this study. Second, alternative high school staff and teachers are represented more frequently in the literature, and Smith's (2012) participants in the PAR study included program staff. Several strategies for trustworthiness were employed in this study to mediate the lack of data triangulation in the form of UCO staff interviews.

Alumni's families of origin, friends, children, neighbors, parole and probation officers, social workers, church officials, gang leaders and members, and other people who interact with UCO students and alumni were not included in this study because the purpose of the study was to hear the alumni's perspective. Likewise, representatives from local businesses, government agencies, and universities in partnership with UCO were not invited to participate in this study.

This study did not seek to empirically validate the quantitative data reported in UCO's documents, as this study was a qualitative study, although the results of this study provided support to the quantitative data in UCO's documents. Additionally, this study was not a program evaluation of UCO. UCO provided the organizational context for the study, which gave parameters to the homogenous sample's experience. This study was focused on understanding the high school graduates' change experience related to their disengagement and re-engagement with school, and their lives after earning their high school diplomas. UCO may benefit from the results of this study as it sought to understand long term outcomes and influencing factors, including program factors, through understanding alumni experiences of change.

## CHAPTER II

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Over the last 50 years, researchers, policymakers, and educators have documented the risk and, to a lesser degree, protective factors related to high school dropouts and graduates. The literature extends across disciplines (e.g., education, counseling, social work, criminal justice) providing contextual information to help situate youth who dropped out of high school. This chapter begins with a brief review of educational statistics comparing California and the nation to provide additional contextual information beyond the information shared in Chapter 1. The main body of this chapter consists of five sections organized using the bioecology theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) to present the risk and protective factors related to high school students' degree of engagement with school.

#### **California and National Education Statistics: Macrosystem Context**

The United States Department of Education's (USDOE) National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) provides the most current statistical data related to education nationally and by state. In 2009-2010, the most current year with available data comparing states, the national average public school student enrollment was 968,104 (USDOE, 2010). In California, the number of students enrolled in public school was 6,263,449. In order to adequately compare the state student demographic data to the national averages, the total numbers reported by the USDOE were converted to percentage shares (see Table 1).



Table 1

*California and United States National Average Public School Student Demographic Data  
Percentage Shares, 2009-2010*

Student Demographic Data	California	U.S. National Average
Total Student Enrollment <sup>a</sup>	6,263,449	968,104
Grade 9 Student Enrollment	8%	8%
Grade 10 Student Enrollment	8%	8%
Grade 11 Student Enrollment	8%	7%
Grade 12 Student Enrollment	8%	7%
Total Students- American Indian/AK Native	1%	1%
Total Student- Asian/Pacific Islander	12%	5%
Total Student- Black	7%	17%
Total Student- Latino	50%	22%
Total Student- White	27%	53%
Total Student- 2+ races	3%	1%
Total Student- Male	51%	51%
Total Student- Female	48%	48%
Total Student- Free or Reduced Lunch Eligible	54%	45%
Teacher Ratio <sup>a</sup>	19.96	15.38

*Note.* Percentage shares calculated from actual numbers provided by U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Common Core of Data (CCD), “Public Elementary/Secondary School Universe Survey”, 2009-10, Version 1a; and “Local Education Agency Universe Survey”, 2009-10, Version 1a; and “State Nonfiscal Survey of Public Elementary/Secondary Education”, 2009-10, Version 1a.

<sup>a</sup>Total student enrollment and teacher ratio are the actual numbers from the USDOE sources listed in the note.

In Table 1, the state and national average percentage shares of 9<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> grade students and gender were the same or similar. California had a greater number of Asian/Pacific Islander (12%), Latino (50%), and multiracial students (3%) than the national average

(5%, 22%, and 1%, respectively). Nationally, 53% of students were White, and 17% were Black, which was greater than the percentage share of White (27%) and Black (7%) students in California. The percentage share of students in California eligible for the Free or Reduced Lunch Program was 54% as compared to only 45% nationwide. Finally, there were almost four more students per teacher in California than in the nation.

These percentage shares indicate that California enrolls a substantially larger percentage of Latino, Asian/Pacific Islander and low-income students (based on the Free or Reduced Lunch Program). However, a larger percentage of Latino and low-income students consistently are not enrolled in school each year, which is known as the Status Dropout Rate (Chapman et al., 2011). In 2009, 17% of Latino students were not enrolled in school as compared to 9% of African American/Black students, and 5% of White students nationwide (Chapman et al., 2011). The percentage of students from low-income families not enrolled in school was five times greater than students from high-income families (7.4% and 1.4%, respectively). This may indicate that California is faced with a larger percentage of high school dropouts than the national average.

Another important comparison relates to those who successfully complete high school. The Averaged Freshman Graduation (AFG) rate is based on the percentage of 9<sup>th</sup> graders in 2004-2005 who graduated with a high school diploma in 2007-2008 (Stillwell et al., 2011). The percentage of students who graduated with a high school diploma in this 4-year time period in California was 71.2%, which is below the national average (74.9%) (Stillwell et al., 2011). These statistics meant that 28.8% of students in California were not graduating within the traditional 4-year period. While there may be various reasons that 28.8% of students in California took longer than 4 years to earn a

diploma, in that same year 8% of 16-24 year olds were not enrolled in school. It is a jump to say that the 8% of students not enrolled in school were included in the 28.8% of students in California who dropped out of school because the population and rates in these measures were different. However, together these statistics provided evidence of the percentage of those who were not graduating in 4 years, and the percentage of those who were not enrolled in any school up to the age of 24.

There are long-term consequences for students and their ecological systems within the 28.8% who never earn a high school diploma. Dropouts who are unemployed or underemployed tend to live in poverty, which means they are more likely to be on welfare (Alexander et al., 1997). Driscoll and Bernstein (2012) found that unemployed adults tend to not have health coverage, and reported poorer mental and physical health than their employed counterparts. Rouse (2007) found that the difference in lifetime income between those who graduated from high school and those who dropped out is \$260,000, and the lifetime difference in income tax between those who graduated and those who dropped out is \$60,000. “Aggregated over one cohort of 18-year-olds who never complete high school, the combined losses of income and tax revenues are likely more than \$156 billion, or 1.3% of GDP” (Rouse, 2007, p. 101). For the number of students within the 28.8% who actually dropped out, it was likely that society incurred these losses. Similarly, Lochner and Moretti (2004) found that increasing the graduation rate by 1% might result in an annual savings of \$1.4 billion in crime reduction alone. Their finding indicated that if 1% of the 28.8% graduate, individuals and systems within their ecological context may change.

Student enrollment in California reflects many of the race/ethnicity and income demographics that are more at risk of dropping out. Students who drop out of high school are more likely to suffer long-term consequences, such as lower employability, lower incomes, higher crime rates, increased mental and physical health issues, and higher reliance on public assistance (Alexander et al., 1997; Chapman et al., 2011; Driscoll & Bernstein, 2012; Ou, 2008; Rouse, 2007). Understanding the perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors that assist in transforming students who drop out of high school to re-engage and graduate may help counselors, educators, and UCO staff to successfully re-engage at least 1% of dropouts in school each year.

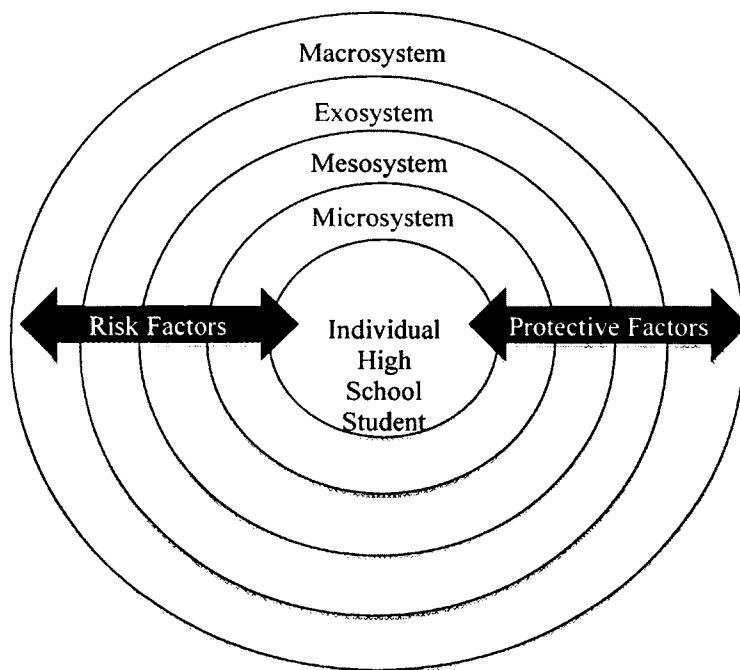
### **High School Student Development-in-Context: Risk and Protective Factors**

Extensive quantitative research identified individual, academic, school, family, and community barriers to completing high school, and slightly fewer studies have identified protective factors that keep students in school. In contrast, a minimal number of qualitative studies have been conducted to provide more depth to the risk and protective factors associated with high school dropouts. An even smaller number of qualitative studies included at-risk students and alumni in the sample. This section summarizes current literature related to risk and protective factors that may have influenced many students' experience in high school, especially Latino and African American students.

The bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005) provides organization for reporting the extensive empirical literature related to risk and protective factors impacting students' level of engagement with high school. Bronfenbrenner (1979) emphasized the need to conduct research focused on participants' development-in-context. Examining development-in-context

means looking at the *ecological environment* as layers of nested systems that impact the developing person in direct and indirect ways. Figure 3 displays an adapted bioecological theory of human development based on risk and protective factor that impact high school students' development-in-context. The chronosystem was omitted from this adapted model because time was used as a parameter for this study and there were not risk and protective factors related to this layer in the literature. The researcher added bidirectional arrows to indicate that risk and protective factors occur within, and in some cases, across each layer in the model.

**Figure 3:** Model of the Bioecology of Student Development with Risk and Protective Factors



*Figure 3.* Model of student development-in-context indicating risk and protective factors that impact student engagement in school. Based on the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The individual layer includes biopsychosocial characteristics that impact development, such as genetics, cognitive ability, personality, attitude, and behavior (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The microsystem includes the systems that have direct impact on students, such as family, school, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The mesosystem reflects the interactions between the systems within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). For instance, this layer captures the interactions between family and school. The exosystem illustrates the impact of the interaction between the larger social system and parts of students' microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005), such as a parent's experience of discrimination in the workplace. The macrosystem includes laws, policies, social norms, and cultural values and customs that do not directly interact with students, yet impact students' development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

The bidirectional arrows, added by the researcher, illustrate the protective and risk factors that occur across levels. For instance, a low-income student, may also have a low-income family, attend a low-income school, and live in a low-income neighborhood. As a macrosystem risk factor, poverty is a systemic issue that is both reinforced and decreased by different policies. The bidirectional arrows show the complex nature of the relationship between risk and protective factors, and the developing student-in-context.

### **Individual Risk and Protective Factors**

Individual risk and protective factors include attitudes, beliefs, perceptions, behaviors, values, and genetic and physiological traits of an individual. Many of these individual factors have potential for growth or change when presented with new settings and changing environments (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Many of the individual risk and

protective factors reflect varying levels of the same characteristic. For instance, students with high intrinsic motivation and academic self-efficacy tended to have a higher likelihood of high school completion than did students with low intrinsic motivation and self-efficacy (Fairbrother, 2008; Solberg et al., 2007). Similarly, students with poor school attendance were more likely to drop out than those who had high attendance rates (Christle et al., 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Freado & Long, 2005). Specific individual risk and protective factors are presented in the following sections.

**Academic performance.** Low academic performance has been identified as a predictor of students' dropping out of high school (Lan & Lanthier, 2003). Lan and Lanthier conducted a study using data from the National Educational Longitudinal Study (NELS): 1988-1994 that included 1,327 high school dropouts at 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup>, and 12<sup>th</sup> grades. They compared students' academic performance, perception of school in terms of safety, spirit, discipline, and instruction, and self-esteem across time and for gender at each grade. Academic performance was the only variable that the high school dropouts were below the national average in 8<sup>th</sup> grade, which resulted in a significant increase over the next two grade levels as compared to the other predictors. This result means that low academic performance in 8<sup>th</sup> grade continued to increase in high school, and is a predictor of students who drop out of high school. They did not find a difference between genders.

Suh et al. (2007) found similar results in a study comparing high school dropouts to graduates using a national database. Students with a low GPA when coupled with high absenteeism and pessimistic outlooks were significantly more likely to dropout. This finding suggested that academic performance is crucial to students' success.

**Career development.** Many researchers have focused on the impact of career-related constructs on high school dropouts. In a study using structural equation modeling, Eichas et al. (2010) found that consolidated life goals, or realistic professional goals, served as a mediator in positive youth development interventions. In other words, when students had realistic and relevant career goals, they were more likely to stay in school. Conversely, those with unconsolidated life goals, or unrealistic career goals, tended to disengage from school over time. Eichas et al.'s example of an unconsolidated life goal was becoming a professional athlete, a profession that they noted as being achieved by only a small percentage of the population.

In a related study about the gap between career expectations and aspirations, Diemer and Hsieh (2008) found that students who experience sociopolitical engagement tended to have greater alignment of their career expectations and aspirations. They used purposive sampling of NELS data to identify 1,748 12<sup>th</sup> grade students of color who never dropped out. They defined sociopolitical engagement as having awareness of social and economic inequality, a motivation to change inequality and help others, recognition of the connection between social issues and one's own life, and engagement in community and social action groups. They found that students with higher sociopolitical engagement were also more likely to have a smaller career expectation-aspiration gap. They also found that established career expectations and aspirations support student engagement in school. Hartwell et al. (2012) also found career aspirations to positively correlate with lower recidivism rates in juvenile offenders.

Rivera et al. (2007) used path analysis to understand the effects of perceived barriers, role models, and acculturation on career self-efficacy and career consideration of



Latina students in an urban community college. They found that participants with high career self-efficacy tended toward both male- and female-dominated careers. Participants with low role model exposure and high perceived career barriers tended to consider female-dominated careers and have low career self-efficacy. Additionally, Latina students with high Anglo acculturation tended to have high consideration for female-dominated careers.

Career development has also been linked to students' generation status. Ojeda and Flores (2008) found that Mexican-American students who were first generation had lower academic and career aspirations than those who were second and higher generation levels. They suggested that counselors and educators could also assess for generational level, and may consider using interventions that increase academic and career aspirations with first generation students.

**Physical and mental factors.** Physical and mental risk factors have been noted in numerous studies as contributing to school disengagement and juvenile delinquency. Kubik et al. (2004) studied mental and physical health risk factors of students in an alternative high school. They found that these students showed an increased number of violence-related injuries, unsafe sexual behaviors, higher rates of obesity, substance abuse issues, suicidal behavior, unhealthy diets, and physical inactivity. Experiencing and witnessing trauma has also been highlighted as barriers to school completion. Okundaye (2004) found a connection between exposure to urban violence, such as through involvement in drug trafficking, and PTSD prevalence rates among urban African American youth. Hartwell et al. (2010) noted that male offenders experienced high rates of substance abuse, early childhood trauma, and high rates of psychotropic

medication use. Furthermore, they found that the first criminal offense was 12.33 years old for those who were rearrested as compared to over one year older for those who were not rearrested.

**Gender.** Male students tended to drop out of high school at higher rates than female students (Belfield & Levin, 2007). Davis (2006) analyzed the transcripts of eight African American male students who dropped out of mainstream high school and enrolled in an alternative program to understand the interaction between masculinity and perceptions of school. Most of the participants also dropped out of the alternative program at least once before re-enrolling and finishing the program. Davis found that these male students experienced peer pressure on the “street” to be tough, in control, and powerful. The school environment was not conducive to the participants’ masculine identity, which resulted in disproportionate discipline and eventual disengagement from mainstream high school. Instead, Davis urged educators to empower male students to “own their social geography [school] and reclaim it as a space of growth and personal opportunity” (p. 303).

**Discrimination.** When students experienced oppression or witnessed their parents experiencing structural racism, they were more likely to disconnect from school (Diemer, & Hsieh, 2008). Brown and Rodriguez (2009) captured one Latino student’s experience of racism in school and subsequent disengagement from school. “These perceptions of him, which reflect cultural stereotypes and representations of Latino males as ‘violent and alien,’ seem intractable. Over time, he began to internalize images of himself as both a social and intellectual ‘outsider’” (p. 238). Perceptions, regardless of

reflecting actual reality, are powerful. In this case, the perception and actual lived experiences of racism in schools seemed to have a profound impact on students of color.

**Student perceptions of support from others.** Additional risk factors include students' perceptions of teachers to be uncaring (Lan & Lanthier, 2003; Solberg et al., 2008) and parents to be unsupportive of school (De La Ossa, 2005). Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) conducted a grounded theory study with four males in an alternative high school and found that school disengagement occurred when participants perceived their values as clashing with school values, and teacher feedback to be inflated and inauthentic. Their perceptions seemed to have an especially negative impact on their engagement in school when coupled with not being motivated by grades and being uninterested in the curriculum.

**Student choice.** Giving students choices encourages their participation in their education (Jones, 2011), which is a core principle of social justice (Crethar et al., 2008). Jones (2013a) conducted a qualitative study of an alternative high school's implementation of choice theory. Jones (2013a) described four strategies based on choice theory to increase opportunities for student choice that permeated the various departments within the school. The first strategy was to train all employees and students in choice theory. The second strategy, called "take 5" empowered students to redirect themselves when they felt frustrated by giving them the option to leave the classroom for up to five minutes. The third strategy, called "Choices," was a self-referral system that empowered students to ask for help in specific areas and receive immediate assistance from trained counselors. The fourth strategy, "mediation," occurred whenever a conflict came up that was not resolved by the earlier strategies. Mediation occurred when

conflicts arose between students and teachers, teachers and administrators, and students and students. Student choice empowered them to take charge of their interactions and way of being in school, which increased their engagement in the classroom.

Brown and Rodriguez (2009) used observations and interviews for one and half years with two Latino high school students who chose to drop out of school. They found that after repeated academic neglect, unchallenging curriculum, and racial targeting and insults from teachers and in-school police, these students chose to drop out of school to protect themselves from an unhealthy and unsafe school environment. Interestingly, student choice emerged as a key protective factor in this study, although administrators, teachers, police, and other adults may likely see students exercising choice in this way as a risk factor. Schools will be discussed in greater detail in the next section.

Bjerk (2012) analyzed data from the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth (NLSY) 1997 to identify differences in economic and criminal long-term outcomes depending on students' reasons for choosing to drop out of high school. Bjerk identified two groups of students: those who were "pushed" out of school and those who were "pulled" out of school. Students who were pushed experienced punitive disciplinary practices, like suspension and expulsion, substance abuse, low grades, legal issues, health problems or moved away. Students who were pulled had to leave school to earn money for their families. Bjerk (2012) confirmed that all students who dropped out of high school experienced worse economic and criminal outcomes than graduates, but he also found that those who were pulled out were much better off than those who were pushed out. These findings could indicate that students who choose to leave to help their

families rather than those who were forced to leave due to discipline, mental and physical health issues, and moving, may be more likely to re-engage in school.

Table 2 provides an overview of the individual risk and protective factors that effect students' school completion. Understanding the characteristics of the individual is important, but is only one part of a more complex issue.

Table 2

*Individual Risk and Protective Factors*

Individual Risk Factors	Individual Protective Factors
Low SES	Higher SES
Ethnic/Racial minority	Resilience
First generation in U.S.	Low absenteeism
Male	Choice
High absenteeism	Engagement in sociopolitical action
Experience and witness trauma	High career self-efficacy
Violence-related injury	Connect to purpose of education
Gang involvement	High intrinsic motivation
Drug trafficking	Perception of
Early criminal behavior	Caring teachers
Homelessness	Supportive parents
Substance Abuse	Career-related factors
Unsafe sexual behavior	Consolidated life goals
Poor diets	High Career aspirations
Obesity	High career expectations
Uninterested in school topics	Exposure to varied career fields
Personal-school values in conflict	Exposure to role models
Receive inflated/inauthentic feedback from teachers	Participate in problem-solving
Experience oppression	Empowerment
Perceptions	
Witness parents experience of racism at work	
Uncaring teachers	
Barriers to educational attainment	
Unsupportive parents	
Career-related risk factors	
Unconsolidated goals	
Low career aspirations	
Low career expectations	

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### Low career self-efficacy

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*Note.* Individual risk and protective factors outlined from the research studies described in this section. Please see specific references in the body of the section.

### **Microsystem Risk and Protective Factors**

The microsystem includes groups that immediately interact with individuals, such as family, school, and peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). School risk and protective factors have received the most attention from researchers studying student engagement in high school, followed by family, peer, and neighborhood factors.

**School risk factors.** The most notable school risk factors were the use of limited instructional strategies, and an impersonal school environment with large class sizes and limited student-teacher interactions where only grades were valued (De La Ossa, 2005; Fairbrother, 2008; Worthman, 2008). In these schools, mainly summative feedback was given, the emphasis was on rote learning, and students were inappropriately labeled as *at risk* or *special ed*, which impacted the way others perceived them (Christle et al., 2005; Daniels & Arapostathis, 2005). Grade retention and suspension tended to occur at higher rates in these schools (Finnan & Chasin, 2007). Ojeda and Flores (2008) identified teachers' and administrators' cultural incompetency as a risk factor noting that many teachers and administrators in their study believed that all Mexican American families do not value education. Students, particularly students with low SES and minority students in these school environments were more likely to drop out of high school.

Brown and Rodriguez's (2009) case study warrants greater discussion because they charted the process of disengagement of Angel and Ramon, two Latino high school students, over the course of one and half years. Angel and Ramon were selected because they had high scores on state high school standardized exams and low GPAs indicating

higher cognitive ability despite their lower academic performance. Findings showed that they experienced “educational neglect” and “social and intellectual isolation,” although each student experienced these differently. Angel experienced educational neglect when he tried to advocate changing his schedule, which he believed did not follow his IEP. His school counselor was dismissive and never followed up. Ramon experienced educational neglect when he attempted to integrate more challenging assignments into his curriculum and was met with resistance from his teachers. Angel was left socially and intellectually isolated when he experienced racism and criminalization. Ramon experienced this theme when teachers ignored him and he believed he was invisible. Not one teacher, counselor, or administrator attempted to intervene when Ramon and Angel choose to leave school. Brown and Rodriguez reported that Angel’s guidance counselor did not remember his name 6 weeks after he dropped out.

**Family risk factors.** Family trauma was highlighted by researchers as increasing the likelihood of dropping out of high school (Davis, 2006; Fairbrother, 2008; Hartwell et al., 2010; Kubik et al., 2004). According to these researchers, family trauma could include addiction, separation through divorce, incarceration, “getting kicked out,” abuse, moving, homelessness, job loss, and death. Lower parent education level was highly correlated with students who drop out of high school (Alexander, Entwisle, & Kabbani, 2001). Additionally, families with immigrant parents tended to have higher rates of drop out than non-immigrant parents (Ojeda & Flores, 2008). Rivera et al. (2007) found that family gender norms influenced Latina students’ career considerations in that Latina students from more traditional gender normed families were more likely to consider female-dominated careers. Finnan and Chasin’s (2007) case study of Anthony described

a mother who actively discouraged school attendance and engagement. This extreme case demonstrated the strong influence of a parent's lack of support and discouragement of school as Anthony struggled to stay in school and eventually dropped out. Once Anthony separated from his mother, he re-enrolled, earned a diploma, and went to college.

**Neighborhoods and peer groups risk factors.** Neighborhoods and peer groups with high gang presence had a negative impact on students' chance of success (Christle et al., 2005; Freado & Long, 2005; Okundaye, 2004; Rios, 2010; Solberg et al., 2007). Gangs tended to be involved with drug trafficking, violence, and other criminal behavior (Venkatesh, 2008). Additionally, gangs relied on peer pressure through threats and fear to recruit new members (Venkatesh, 2008). Davis (2006) described the effect gangs have on "masculine" identity development. According to Davis (2006), masculinity means being tough and engaging in school does not fit this mold, but street life does.

**Police risk factors.** Police presence in schools and in neighborhoods was identified as a microsystem risk factor because of the reported reinforcement of power inequity and racism experienced by at-risk youth at the hands of police (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Rios, 2010). Angel, one of Brown and Rodriguez's (2009) case study participants dropped out of high school, in part, because of his experiences with the police in his school. Angel reported a sense of powerlessness and vulnerability, and believed his chance of incarceration was higher at school than outside of school due to his school's police presence.

Rios (2010) conducted an action research project with gang-involved youth in a southern California town. Over the multi-year project, Rios and his research team learned through interviews and observations of police brutality, racial targeting, and



corruption that increased the likelihood of the criminalization of at-risk youth. In many instances, police were seen as a risk factor because they misused power by instigating and escalating situations.

**School protective factors.** There were one model and two programs highlighted in the literature that illustrated school protective factors. The Adult Persistence In Learning Model (APILM; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994) provides a conceptual framework for counselors working with adult learners. The model stresses the importance of working with the adult learner to identify personal, learning process, and environmental issues so that adult learners may develop effective coping skills to overcome these issues. MacKinnon-Slaney recommended that counselors assist adult learners in establishing life and career goals, increasing self-awareness, developing a sense of interpersonal and educational competence, and having mastery over life transitions.

The first program illustrating school protective factors was the Changing Lives Program (CLP; Eichas et al., 2010). CLP promoted positive identity development for all students, no matter their SES level, race, gender, or any other risk factors that may impact their chance of success (Eichas et al., 2010). CLP was an 8 to 12 week counseling program that meets for 45 to 60 minutes each week in an alternative high school in Miami, Florida. Students engaged in mastery activities, identified and attempted to solve real-world current issues, and self-directed transformative activities. The positive outcome was measured using the Personally Expressive Activities Questionnaire (PEAQ; Waterman, 2004). The problem outcome was measured with the Behavior Problem Index (BPI; Peterson & Zill, 1986). The Mediators of Outcome were measured with the

Identity Style Inventory (ISI; Berzonsky, 1989) and the Erikson Psycho-Social Stage Inventory (EPSO; Rosenthal, Gurney, & Moore, 1981).

Eichas et al. (2010) showed that CLP had a significant effect on the change in students' personal expressiveness, which is defined as the "degree to which respondents feel that the pursuit of life goals is personally satisfying and expressive of their unique potentials" (p. 222). In addition, CLP had a significant direct path to decreasing the internalization of problem behaviors in female students, and increasing the identity resolution in all participants. These findings indicated that educational settings that adopt programs like CLP, and integrate reflection, mastery activities, goal setting, and positive identity development in the classroom, may likely see a decrease in the high school dropout rate.

The second program illustrating school protective factors was Murray Alternative High School. Jones (2011) conducted a qualitative study including ethnographic observation and interviews with teachers and students at Murray, an alternative school based on Glasser's Choice Theory. He sought to understand how student engagement was perceived and experienced in this alternative school. He found that a sense of value for the school and belonging in the school was inspired when teachers and administrators emphasis building strong relationships with students. Classroom participation was also an expectation for all students in this program and teachers sought to engage students using various instructional methods. Through focusing on individual student interests and needs, and caring about each student, teachers and counselors motivated students to be engaged in the school and their learning.

**Family protective factors.** Family involvement and support of education, cohesion, and adaptability were protective factors needed for student success (Christle et al., 2005; Lagana, 2004; Solberg et al., 2007). In a case study, Freado and Long (2005) described the role Sako's mother played in overcoming his criminal past to eventually graduate from high school. He reported that her steady encouragement, tears, and belief in him helped him not give up on his dream to earn a high school diploma. Alexander et al. (2001) supported the need for supportive and encouraging parents in their longitudinal study of a representative sample of students in Baltimore. They also found that students born to teen mothers were at greater risk of dropping out, but those with single working mothers were more likely to stay in school.

**Peer and adult protective factors.** Positive peer influence and support from non-family adults were protective factors (Lagana, 2004). Lagana (2004) compared responses of three student groups from the Family Adaptability and Cohesion Evaluation Scale (FACES; Rodick, Henggler, & Hanson, 1986) and Perceived Social Support Scale (PSSS; Procidino & Heller, 1983). The groups consisted of low-risk students in a mainstream high school, moderately at-risk students in an alternative program within the school, and high-risk students who already dropped out, but were attending continuing education courses in the evening. The results showed that members of the high-risk group reported significantly less positive peer influence and support from non-family adults than those in the low-risk group. This finding suggested that interventions to enhance positive peer relationships, and provide connection to adult mentors and role models may increase the likelihood of high school completion. In the action research project, Rios (2010) found that connecting one gang leader, a *shot caller* to a college prep

workshop led to three other members' enrollment in the program. Despite the shot caller dropping out of the program, the other three completed it and went to community college.

Microsystems have an incredible amount of power to influence youth development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Teachers, police officers, family members, peers, counselors, and university researchers can make a difference in the lives of at-risk youth. They can allow their own apathy, misuse of power, limited scope of practice, and racism to encourage at-risk youth to disengage and eventually drop out of school (Brown & Rios, 2009; Rios, 2010). Or they can promote cultures of caring, provide appropriate support and challenge, integrate the use of multiple instructional and intervention strategies, and engage with students in co-creating curriculum that reflects current issues (Jones, 2011). In the next section, the impact of interactions between these microsystems is discussed.

Table 3

*Microsystem Risk and Protective Factors*

Microsystem Risk Factors	Microsystem Protective Factors
Family trauma	Family
Separation/divorce	Involved & supportive of school
Death	Stable
Abuse	Working mothers
Addiction	Discuss sociopolitical issues
Immigrant Family	School conditions
Parental education level	Adult Persistence in learning
Parents unsupportive and uninvolved in school	Model
School conditions	Holistic & integrative
Poor building conditions	Counseling interventions
Limited instructional strategies	Student-focused and learning-focused
Strict rules	High teacher/administrator expectations & development
Curriculum-focused	Safe & clean environment
Limited access to healthy diets	Multiple & varied instructional strategies
Large class sizes	
Gangs	

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Labeling students	Support sociopolitical development
Teachers time is limited	Discussion-based learning
Grade retention	Student-generated lessons
Suspension	Promote positive identity development
Cultural stereotypes	Formative feedback
Value grades ONLY	Teacher-student interaction
Summative feedback	Smaller class size
Counselors use limited assessments and interventions	Incentives to engage in school
“Easy credits”	Lessons connect to real life
Remedial classes	Accelerated Learning
Peers & neighborhood	High standards for all students
Peer pressure	Career exploration
Substance abuse	Mentor program
“Masculinity”	Teacher, counselor cultural competence
Gangs	Leadership development
Drug trafficking	Equity orientation
High rates of violence	Positive peer & non-family adult influences
	Action Research

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*Note.* Microsystem risk and protective factors outlined from the research studies described in this section. Please see specific references in the body of the section.

### **Mesosystem Risk and Protective Factors**

The mesosystem is comprised of the interactions between the systems within the microsystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). While this layer is not directly based on interactions with the individual, this layer considers the significance of family-school, police-school, and university-neighborhood interactions, to name a few, on students’ development. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) highlighted the risk factor associated with the police-school interaction as Angel, one of their case study participants dropped out of school due, in part, to the police presence there. Using action research, Rios (2010) captured the negative impact of the police-neighborhood interaction on gang-involved youth, and purposefully did not attempt to collaborate with the police to make change

after witnessing police brutality and profiling. The police-school and the police-neighborhood interactions created such an inequitable power dynamic reported in these studies that the participants were left powerless and vulnerable.

The parent-school relationship has also been identified as a significant risk and protective factor. Parents who were involved in schools and schools that outreach to parents, such as by providing family connection centers, have lower dropout rates (Goldschmidt & Wang, 1999). These researchers also found that students with a father who dropped out of high school are 1.4 times more likely to dropout than their peers whose fathers have a high school diploma. This finding suggested that current high school students who were also parents may likely impact their children's future school experience.

The university is in a unique position to develop collaborative relationships with schools, communities, and other organizations. Rios (2010) demonstrated this in the action research project as he and a team of graduate assistants provided workshops and resources to gang-involved youth over the multiyear study. Another example of the university-school relationship is Smith's (2012) PAR project with teachers and counselors from UCO. Smith, a researcher at a public university used data from six in-depth interviews and two observations with teachers and counselors related to their experiences facilitating VOICE. She worked with teachers and counselors to develop the training based on their needs, which resulted in a one a half-day training. Although additional research is needed to increase the empirical evidence for the effectiveness of VOICE, it exemplified how the university can partner with schools to impact protective

factors supporting student engagement in school. Table 4 outlines the mesosystem risk and protective factors.

Table 4

*Mesosystem Risk and Protective Factors*

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Misuse of power	Strategic partnerships to provide
Reinforce structural racism	Staff development
Racial targeting	Access to resources for student
Reinforce cultures of apathy and school neglect	success
Lack of parent-school outreach	Opportunities for social change

*Note.* Mesosystem risk and protective factors outlined from the research studies described in this section. Please see specific references in the body of the section.

**Exosystem Risk and Protective Factors**

The exosystem is the layer in which interactions between settings that the student is not directly involved in interacts with the microsystems within which the developing student is directly involved (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). For example, parents' workplaces do not directly involve their student(s), but parents' experiences at work may directly impact their student(s). There is limited research related directly to the effect of exosystem risk factors on students' success in school. Diemer and Hsieh (2008) conducted a study about the sociopolitical development and vocational expectations of low SES students of color. Sociopolitical development is related to students' understanding and experience of oppression, such as racism and classism, and the motivation level to change inequities. Their sample consisted of 1,784 12<sup>th</sup> grade students of color who never dropped out and were identified as low SES. They found that parents who experienced racism in the workplace were less likely to engage in activities to promote sociopolitical development, which resulted in lower vocational

expectations for these students. Their findings implied that students who witnessed their parents (microsystem) experiencing racism (macrosystem) in the workplace (exosystem) may be less likely to have high career expectations.

Another exosystem risk factor is related to teachers and administrators (microsystem) holding lower expectations and providing less rigorous academic opportunities to students of color and/or living in poverty (macrosystem) (Christle et al., 2005). The standardized test movement (macrosystem) has also negatively interacted with schools' ability to use creative and innovative instructional strategies (microsystem) (Eichas et al., 2009).

Protective factors are more difficult to infer from the literature. Diemer and Hsieh's (2008) findings about the relationship between parents' experience of racism at work, their level of engagement in activities that promote sociopolitical development and their students' vocational expectations could be connected to exosystem protective factors. Their findings speak to the power of engaging students in sociopolitical dialogues and providing opportunities for students to engage in community activities aimed at decreasing inequities. Accordingly, schools, families, and organizations (microsystems) that increase their awareness of current sociopolitical issues (macrosystem), and experience improving these conditions (e.g., by reducing or eliminating racism at work) may positively impact students' career expectations and aspirations. This in turn may have a positive impact on the student's engagement in school.

Exosystem risk and protective factors are under researched, perhaps due to design and analysis limitations (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Perhaps with more complex statistical



procedures, such as structural equation modeling (Bronfenbrenner, 2005), and/or by following Bronfenbrenner's (1979) recommendations for developmental research design, researchers may be able to more directly connect exosystem risk and protective factors with student success in schools. Table 5 shows the risk and protective factors in the Exosystem.

Table 5

*Exosystem Risk and Protective Factors*

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Parent experiencing of workplace racism	Parents, school staff, organization staff developing sociopolitical engagement
Low sociopolitical development in school staff, parents, etc.	
Teachers holding lower student expectations based on SES and race/ethnicity	

*Note.* Exosystem risk and protective factors outlined from the research studies described in this section. Please see specific references in the body of the section.

**Macrosystem Risk and Protective Factors**

The macrosystem is not directly linked to the individual, but is described as having a “cascading influence” throughout the other layers (Berk, 2012; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). In addition to the education and social justice contexts described in chapter 1 and earlier in this chapter, the macrosystem also includes culture, values, traditions, customs, laws, and policies (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Cultural gender norms (Rivera et al., 2007) and generation levels with immigrant families (Freado & Long, 2005; Ojeda & Flores, 2008) reflect cultural values, traditions, and challenges faced by immigrant families, all of which impact students.

There are two specific laws and policies that compliment each other and warrant greater discussion here. Truancy laws and school discipline policies based on punitive

consequences were cited repeatedly throughout the literature as having a negative impact on at-risk students' chance of school success (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Christle et al., 2005; Davis, 2006; Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Fairbrother, 2008; Jones, 2011; Jones, 2013a; Jones, 2013b). One participant in Davis's (2006) qualitative study with students and teachers involved in Youthbuild recalled that he chose not to attend school for two weeks consecutively because he read the school policy that stated students were expelled after two consecutive weeks of being absent.

Policies based on grade retention and standardized testing as the only measure of success for a school also act as risk factors preventing at-risk students' success (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; Fairbrother, 2008; Finnan & Chasin, 2007; Gleason & Dynarski, 2002; Jones, 2011; Rios, 2010). Unfortunately, many federal and state funding policies are based on school's standardized test scores and academic achievement, which impacts schools' ability to provide creative, progressive environments with challenging curriculum that is relevant to students' everyday lives (Lee, 2010). In a study of dropouts in four large urban areas, Gleason and Dynarski (2002) found that students who were older than their grade level peer group by 2 years had a dropout rate of 16% compared to those who were held back for 1 year or not at all. This finding indicated that grade retention policies may likely increase at-risk student's disengagement from school.

Stereotypes based on societal norms appeared to have a negative impact on students' engagement in school (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009). Additionally, whether or not schools acknowledged these labels had an impact on students' engagement in school (Kim & Taylor, 2008). Labels described in the literature included *at-risk*, *remedial*,

*alternative school, poor*, or identified specific racial or ethnic identities (Brown & Rodriguez, 2009; De La Ossa, 2005; Kim & Taylor, 2008).

Conversely, discipline policies that support developmental discipline strategies, such as the alternative high school based on Choice Theory (Jones, 2011; 2013), may be seen as protective factors supporting student success. Kubik et al. (2004) found that alternative schools are flexible and can implement progressive policies that support student success. Policies that support school staff development to enhance instructional strategies and increase sociopolitical development, for instance, are examples of policies that could positively impact student success (Kubik et al., 2004).

Kim and Taylor (2008) conducted a qualitative study to examine one alternative high school's impact on breaking the cycle of educational inequality. Their findings were somewhat consistent with Jones' (2011; 2013a; 2013b) findings that policies that reinforce positive student-teacher interactions and empowered student choice illustrated policies as protective factors. However, Kim and Taylor also found that students in their study were not involved in curriculum decisions, and the low level of academic rigor frustrated students. Students referred to the alternative school as a "credit recovery factory" and did not believe they were prepared for academic success in higher education. Kim and Taylor recommended that administrators and policy makers include students in decision-making processes that affect their learning.

Macrosystem risk factors are more prevalent in the literature, although empirical support directly linking these factors to students' development and success is limited. Protective factors are even more limited. Table 6 outlines the Macrosystem risk and protective factors.

Table 6

*Macrosystem Risk and Protective Factors*

Risk Factors	Protective Factors
Standardize testing policies	Policies that support school staff development
Negative stereotypes and labeling	Discipline policies that support student choice/ emphasis development
Poverty	
Cultural gender norms	
Immigrant status	
School to Prison Pipeline	
Punitive discipline policies	
Grade retention policies	
Truancy laws	
Little to no student input in decision-making	

*Note.* Macrosystem risk and protective factors outlined from the research studies described in this section. Please see specific references in the body of the section.

### **UCO Student Development-in-Context**

There is extensive literature about specific individual, school, neighborhood, and family factors that contribute to students' process of engagement or disengagement in school (see preceding sections in this chapter). Larger social factors, such as the truancy laws, schools' discipline policies, and discrimination are included in the literature, but not as the focus of specific research studies. To address these issues, interventions must be multifaceted, offering services beyond the academic requirements for secondary education (Davis, 2006; Jones, 2011; Jones, 2013a; Jones, 2013b; Kim & Taylor, 2008; MacKinnon-Slaney, 1994).

UCO addresses many of the risk and protective factors presented in the literature through the program components offered to students and alumni. In addition to attending classes that fulfill the high school diploma requirements, UCO students also received extensive career development and job placement support through the Corps to Career, Assessment and Counseling Clinic (ACC), and “green” job skills training. Although the UCO charter school is a high school diploma program, these services reflect Davis’s (2006) statement that successful GED programs offer additional career and employment services. Students in UCO and Youthbuild (Davis, 2006) experienced similar obstacles in that they faced many risk factors that resulted in dropping out of mainstream high school.

Many of the career-related activities offered to UCO students through VOICE, the 15-week psychoeducational group facilitated by the counseling clinic reflects researchers’ emphasis on self-exploration, career aspirations, and setting realistic goals (Diemer & Hsieh, 2008; Eichas et al., 2010; Hartwell et al., 2012). VOICE activities emphasized identifying career interests, clarifying values, and learning to use the internet in researching potential careers to decrease perceived barriers to careers. These activities reflect the recommendation to address self-imposed perceived career barriers for Mexican American students (Rivera et al., 2007).

UCO also offered students the opportunity to engage in community service and environment conservation advocacy through Tree Smart and Recycling workshops in elementary schools. Other examples of UCO community service have been highlighted in the city’s flagship newspaper. Students were featured in photographs and one was quoted “It feels good to clean out [the canyon near] the school I went to, because when I

used to go here nothing ever got cleaned up. It was growing all wildly. Now, the students can feel safer and not have to worry” (Max, 2001, p. 3). Students’ environmental work is also reinforced in their classes as many of the lessons connect to their jobs and greater social issues (UCO History Teacher, personal communication, March 7, 2012). UCO students’ community engagement and class discussions related to conservation and social issues reflect the importance of sociopolitical engagement as a protective factor (Diemer and Hsieh’s, 2008).

UCO’s campus is safe, clean, and most of the staff seemed to be supportive, patient, caring, and encourage students to succeed, all protective factors highlighted in the literature (Eichas et al., 2010; Jones, 2011). UCO students also earned a paycheck for 32 hours a week for the work they do in the community and there were opportunities to increase their pay rate as they learn new job skills. Most UCO students came from low-SES families and neighborhoods, and some were homeless when they begin the program (UCO, 2009). They also had access to computers, the Internet, and other advanced technology, such as Smart Boards, which many did not have while growing up in their homes. Access to these resources addressed some issues outlined by UNICEF (2010) that placed the United States in the lowest ranking group in terms of its children’s material, education, and health well-being.

Some of UCO’s policies may be perceived by students as barriers to their success. For instance, 11 out of 19 pages in the student handbook are devoted to policies that, if broken, result in incident reports (UCO, n.d.). Three incident reports result in termination. Two related policies were the absence and late policies. If a student is late or absent due to childcare or public transportation issues three times over the course of the 1-year

program, the student was terminated. Issues with childcare and public transportation were oftentimes out of students' control and the low number of permitted absences and tardies may have made it difficult for some students to stay in the program. There are future plans to offer onsite childcare once funding is secured (UCO Former Executive Director, personal communication, March 7, 2012).

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to expand the current literature on school dropout and re-engagement in a number of ways. First, the study continued where Brown and Rodriguez's (2009) study stopped. They chronicled 2 Latino students' process of dropping out of mainstream high school. This study focused on UCO students' experience beginning with their decision to leave mainstream high school and ending up to three years after graduating from UCO.

This study also addressed the research design limitations in Freado and Long's (2005) and Finnan and Chasin's (2007) case studies describing the experiences of Sako, a Cambodian immigrant, and Anthony, an African American. These articles chronicled Sako's and Anthony's struggles with school, involvement with gangs, incarceration, and the many protective factors that helped them eventually earn a diploma, and continue education and employment in helping fields. While these articles provided anecdotal evidence of the process Sako and Anthony went through as they navigated the complex interactions of risk and protective factors, the authors of these studies did not provide any research design and methodology details.

This study also attempted to integrate the risk and protective factors and program outcomes in a model for successful transformation from dropout to graduate based on

developmental outcomes (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Current research does not address the complex interactions of the factors within each level of development with the students' process of transformation. The research team in Smith's (2012) PAR study of the facilitators' experience facilitating VOICE identified the personal development process as a main theme. This theme captured the perceived process that students seem to experience throughout their participation in VOICE. This study continued to revise and expand the personal development process to capture UCO students' perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors beyond the 15-week VOICE psychoeducational group.

Finally, this study sought to increase UCO graduates' participation in research from their perspective. Brown and Rodriguez (2009) and Daniels and Arapostathis (2005) emphasized the need to increase students' voice in research related to their experiences in school. This study met this need, and in so doing, also promoted social justice (Crethar et al., 2005).



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODOLOGY**

This chapter provides a statement of purpose, description of the research design and methodology for this study, and outlines strategies used to increase trustworthiness. CQR was coupled with a critical theory paradigm. This chapter includes an in depth review of the roles of the research team as well as describes the four rounds of data analysis. A pilot study conducted to refine the interview protocol is also described.

#### **Purpose Statement and Research Questions**

The purpose of this study was to understand the perceived process of change that UCO alumni experienced from the point of dropping out of mainstream public high school to up to three years after graduation from UCO; identified perceived long term outcomes of students who successfully graduated from UCO; and indentified perceived factors that influence UCO alumni's process of change and outcomes. The thick description of their transformation from their point of view centered on their experience in UCO provided insight that cannot be captured through quantitative methods.

The research questions and subquestions for this study were:

1. How did participants experience a process of change, if any, in Urban Corps of San Diego County?
2. What changes, if any, do participants report post program?

3. What program factors, if any, impact the participants' process of change and experience post program?
  - a. What additional factors, if any, impact the participants' process of change and experience post program?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research seeks to provide in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of participants in a study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hill, 2012). The emphasis on collecting data from a smaller number of participants who are intimately connected to the focus of the study is a major difference from quantitative research designs. Within qualitative research, there are numerous traditions and paradigms to provide a rigorous design. This research project utilized the CQR tradition with a critical theory paradigm. CQR and critical theory best fit the study because the emphasis is on the participant voice, which means researchers use strategies to minimize the impact of their subjectivity (Hill, 2012) and seek to minimize the participant-researcher power differential (Hays & Singh, 2012). CQR and critical theory also provided a foundation by which the study contributed to social justice, especially reflecting the principle of participation (Crethar, Rivera, & Nash, 2008), and offered a method to explore participants' development-in-context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

According to Hill, Thompson, and Williams (1997), CQR combines phenomenology, grounded theory, and comprehensive process analysis to understand "long-term or individualized effects of therapist or client behaviors" (p. 517). This study utilized CQR because it sought to understand the process of transformation from a high school dropout to graduate, which included learning about academic, career, and personal

outcomes and influencing factors after successfully graduating from UCO through an ecological lens. Participants in this study graduated 2 to 3 years prior to participation in this study, which allowed for reflection on the long-term impact of the program on their development. Participants' lived experiences were captured through semi-structured interviews. A research team identified patterns and pathways to provide a tentative model of transformation that may be used in the continued development of comprehensive interventions, such as UCO, to re-engage students in school.

CQR, as opposed to heuristic inquiry and autoethnography, does not require the researcher(s) to have lived the experience under study (Hill, 2012). The researcher and research team members are not former high school dropouts, so they did not have direct experience related to the phenomena being studied. CQR does require that researchers remain objective and emphasizes the importance of the participant as "expert." There are four main strategies included in CQR that assist in maintaining researcher objectivity and focus on the participant voice throughout analysis: (a) use of a research team, (b) reaching consensus, (c) use of an external auditor, and (d) analyzing individual transcripts into domains and core ideas and conducting cross-analysis to categorize data as a whole (Hill et al., 1997; Hill et al., 2005). These are discussed in greater detail in the remaining sections of this chapter.

Critical theory provided an additional foundation for the role of the participant as "expert" and the minimization of power in the researcher-participant relationship. Like CQR, honoring the participant voice is paramount in critical theory (Kincheloe, McLaren, & Steinberg, 2005). Central to critical theory is understanding the participant in context, such as through the identification of bordering groups that intersect with the participants

(Kincheloe et al., 2005). The bordering groups in this study included many of those individuals not included, such as UCO students and alumni who were international refugees and UCO staff. Other bordering groups were described in Chapter 2, such as families, police, and policies.

In addition to bordering groups, critical theory emphasizes the role of systemic oppression in seeing participants in context and calls for researchers to be aware of their own subjectivity (Kincheloe et al., 2005). CQR stresses the importance of the researcher, research team, and auditor being aware of bias, assumptions, and expectations (Sim, Huang, & Hill, 2012). Both CQR and critical theory call for researchers to acknowledge power and minimize the power differential within the researcher-participant relationship (Kincheloe et al., 2005; Sim et al., 2012; Vivino et al., 2012). Ultimately, the research is used for social change in critical theory and CQR (Hill, 2012; Kincheloe et al., 2005). Later in this chapter, the researcher further discusses her bias, expectations, and assumptions to attempt to minimize power and increase trustworthiness.

### **Role of the Researcher and Research Team**

Research teams provide the foundation for CQR because multiple perspectives increase the likelihood of bracketing researcher bias, avoiding groupthink, objectively analyzing data, and reaching consensus (Vivino, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). Attention to group dynamics and effective management of member conflict are crucial to the success of CQR. Additionally, all research team members must have a basic understanding of CQR and an interest in the topic of study. Vivino et al. (2012) recommended using a primary research team of 3 to 5 members and 1 to 2 external auditors. Hill et al. (1997) advised that research teams could include undergraduate, graduate, post-graduate, and

faculty members as long as the above criteria were met and power dynamics were minimized. Vivino et al. (2012) also recommended that research team members reflect the diversity of the research participants, despite having not directly experienced the phenomena under study. The research team for this study included the primary researcher, primary research team members, and one auditor. Research team members were informed of expectations and incentives prior to agreeing to participate (see Appendix A).

**Primary researcher.** The primary researcher emailed potential research team members including the purpose of the project, their role, a brief overview of CQR, and a schedule outlining the research team orientation and meetings. The primary researcher developed and facilitated the research team orientation. She has specialized training and experience in facilitating student and professional development in the areas of team building, advocacy, conflict resolution, and cross-cultural communication, and in conducting qualitative research using research teams. She also worked with an outdoor education specialist to lead the research team in activities related to communication, conflict management, problem solving, and goal setting. She incorporated an outside facilitator in order to minimize power differentials between her, the other research team members, and the auditor.

The primary researcher was also responsible for managing the research team, which included sending email reminders about upcoming meetings, preparing all administrative needs for the project, such as copies of data for members to analyze, and resolving any conflicts that arose. The primary researcher managed the data analysis process, which included acting as the liaison between the auditor and primary research

team. She coordinated the data collection process, which included contacting potential participants, scheduling, conducting, and transcribing interviews, and completing member checking. Finally the primary researcher wrote the final dissertation.

The primary researcher also conducted a pilot study to develop the interview protocol. She interviewed two participants who reflected the sampling criteria (discussed below), and solicited verbal and written feedback about the interview questions and demographic survey from them. The research team used the information gathered in the pilot study to come to consensus on the interview protocol and Domain List 1 used in this study. (see Appendix B).

**Primary research team.** The primary research team members were selected based on the following criteria: (a) completed a doctoral-level course in qualitative research; (b) to the extent possible, reflect the diversity of the research participants in terms of gender, race, ethnicity, and family status; (c) demonstrated Vivino et al.'s (2012) effective research team member qualities including the ability to debate, be open-minded, immerse themselves in the data, take initiative, and work independently; and, (d) availability to engage in data analysis over several months. The primary research team consisted of one male and two females, one was African American, one was White, and one was Caucasian/White European. None of the research team members had children or dropped out of school. One research team member reported living in an unsafe neighborhood until he/she was in high school. The primary research team members' ages ranged from 25 to 34 years old.

The research team members attended an orientation prior to beginning the project. The 2-day orientation consisted of CQR training, individual reflection, and team building

facilitated mainly by the primary researcher, and in part by the outdoor education specialist. By the end of the orientation, the research team members identified and discussed their individual bias, expectations, and assumptions, practiced identifying domains, abstracting codes, and cross-analysis through consensus, and strengthened relationships and communication skills. In addition, the research team members reached consensus on the final interview protocol based on feedback from two pilot study participants and two expert reviewers.

**Auditor.** One auditor was selected to participate on the primary research team. Auditor selection criteria includes experience with qualitative research, expertise in relevant content areas, ability to pay attention to detail while seeing the big picture, and characteristics, such as flexibility, openness, organization, punctuality, and willingness to work independently (Hays & Singh, 2012; Schlosser, Dewey, & Hill, 2012). Additionally, they recommended that the auditor be disconnected from the research team so as to provide a more objective analysis, avoid conflicts of interest, and offer negative case analysis. This helps to minimize groupthink and remain true to the data throughout analysis (Schlosser et al., 2012). The auditor only attended the first orientation day, which involved team building and CQR training. The auditor did not attend the second day of training where the research team came to consensus on the interview protocol and Domain List 1 (more details below). This partial attendance of orientation allowed for the entire research team to increase trust, understand communication patterns, and learn about CQR; and left space for the auditor to be removed from the research team consensus on the interview protocol and initial domain list so as to remain more objective when auditing.

Schlosser et al. (2012) recommended that the auditor review the research team's work 5 times: interview protocol, consensus domains, data chunks and core ideas, cross-analysis, and patterns and pathways. The auditor checked for order, number, clarity, and relevance of the questions in the interview protocol (Schlosser et al., 2012). She also checked for consistency, redundancy, clarity, accuracy, and missing information between the domains, chunks of data and core ideas by thoroughly reviewing the raw data and comparing to the domains, data chunks and core ideas from the research team. The auditor reviewed individual domains to ensure representativeness in the cross-analysis categories, and consistency and clarity in the patterns and pathways. Additionally, she reviewed the memos and written reflections describing the research team members' biases, expectations, and assumptions discussed at each of the 25 research team consensus meetings to ensure those were bracketed during analysis. She provided written feedback to the research team at each review.

### **Researcher Bias, Expectations, and Assumptions**

Research team members reflected on and discussed their expectations and possible bias prior to data collection (Sim, Huang, & Hill, 2012; Vivino et al., 2012). Hill et al. (2005) determined that research teams only needed to reflect on biases based on research team members being more actively engaged in reviewing the literature, collecting data, and writing data summary reports throughout the analysis process. However, the research team for this study was not as involved in each step of the research design because this project was a dissertation study (Hill et al., 1997). As a result, the research team in this study reflected on both the expectations and potential biases related to the topic, population under study, and past experiences with teams.



At the orientation, each research team member completed a written reflection related to their biases, and participated in ongoing discussions and memoing about them at each phase of data analysis (see Audit Trail). For instance, one research team member reflected that he/she struggled relating to participants' external locus of control in that many of them seemed to blame external events and people for their hardships. Another research team member shared that he/she became aware of his/her privilege as a researcher. This research team member felt a strong sense of responsibility in ensuring the participant voice remained at the center of analysis. Through dialogue and memoing, the research team and auditor continuously checked in on researcher bias and expectations. Additionally, each research team member answered the interview protocol questions based on how they expected participants to respond (Hill et al., 1997). The auditor reviewed these documents to ensure bias and expectations were bracketed during analysis.

CQR also places emphasis on the participants as expert and demands a high level of objectivity in data analysis. Hill et al. (1997) stated that research team members must "forget" the literature during analysis to ensure that participants' voice, and not the literature, drives data analysis. They acknowledge that this is tricky, which is why they recommended keeping memos throughout data analysis. In addition to keeping memos, the research team took notes summarizing their deliberation about each data chunk, domain assignment, core idea, and category within each domain. The auditor was present to observe the final meeting where the research team reached consensus on the model showing relationships between domains and categories. In vivo, she observed and listened for groupthink, "forgetting," and bias as the research team reached consensus on

the findings. She also offered input into the actual model demonstrating the relationship between participants' perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors (discussed in Chapter 4).

**Primary researcher bias, expectations, and assumptions.** Hays and Singh (2012) discussed the influence of the researcher's experiential knowledge on developing the conceptual framework for the research study. This involves identifying researcher bias, which consists of assumptions, values, and beliefs about the study, and also reflects critical theory. Sim et al. (2012) also discussed the difference between bias and expectations, claiming that researchers must identify both. Kline (2008) described rigor in terms of identifying researcher bias, assumptions, and expectations throughout selecting the research design, and collecting and analyzing the data.

The primary researcher in this study was the counseling clinic manager for UCO, which included providing individual and group counseling to most of the participants in this study and supervising counselor trainees who worked with many study participants. Her experiential knowledge is based on her work with these participants. She believes potential participants have a lot to teach those who provide education and mental health services and assumes they want to share about their experiences. While working for UCO, potential participants oftentimes asked her why there are so few programs such as this one. It is estimated that over 600 applicants have been on the waiting list (UCO former Executive Director, personal communication, March 7, 2012). They wondered how society would view them after they graduated. Will they always be seen as "at-risk," "dropouts," and "drains on society?" The primary researcher learned from potential participants about pertinent issues that affected their daily lives, such as affordable

childcare, housing, and transportation. She learned about their hopes and dreams for their futures. Potential participants shared about caring for siblings and parents, dodging government officials, raising children, prison and juvenile hall, gang life, drug dealing, crossing the border each day, and life in refugee camps. She learned of hope, inspiration, determination, and creativity in finding resolutions to complex problems with limited resources. In hearing their stories, she understood their lives in the context within which they lived, past and present.

She also was continually frustrated by the lack of access granted to potential participants to engage in dialogue and decision-making within the organization, school, community, and system-at-large about policies that affect their success. Instead, they were often condemned by administrators and government officials based on their status as former dropouts, which influenced policies that continued to limit their opportunities for success.

The researcher expected potential participants' responses to the interview protocol to include evidence of a process of change. Many overcame great odds to be enrolled in UCO. For instance, many of them crossed the border each day to attend school because they lived in Mexico. She expected that they would be able to identify specific elements and experiences in mainstream high school and UCO that they apply to their lives today. For instance, perhaps they may reflect on career exploration activities and connect those to their current educational program or job. She also expected that they faced challenges after graduation and hoped to hear that some of what they learned in the program helped them overcome those challenges. Finally, she expected that their families benefitted from their graduation from UCO.

The primary researcher's values reflect Crethar et al.'s (2008) description of social justice in terms of equity, access, participation, and harmony. One motivation to conduct this study was to increase the participation of these participants in characterizing their experiences within the current public and alternative high school systems. Her experiential knowledge and social justice values were bracketed through memoing, and using a research team and auditor.

### **Research Plan**

This section provides additional details describing the UCO context within which this research took place. It also outlines the sampling method and participant demographics, measures taken to ensure participant safety, and data collection procedures.

**Organizational context.** UCO, established in 1989, is located in a southern California city and is part of a national program based on the Civilian Conservation Corps established in the 1930's by President Franklin D. Roosevelt (CCC Brief History, 2011). UCO is 1 of 13 local Certified Conservation Corps recognized by the state, but operates independently. Since 1989, more than 10,000 youth have participated in the program. UCO students (study participants) must apply for acceptance into the program, which typically lasts for up to one year. While in the program, study participants worked 4 days each week on conservation-related projects in the community where they learned "green" job skills. They attended an onsite charter high school one day each week to complete credits needed to earn a diploma. They also had access to a career center and mental health counseling clinic during their education day and after work. UCO students either dropped out of mainstream high school or were international refugees without any education in the United States. The former UCO CEO initially signed an informed

consent outlining the purpose, risks, benefits, and requirements of partnering in the study that included a request for organization anonymity (Appendix C). The current UCO CEO amended this informed consent requesting that UCO be identified in the study (Appendix C). UCO agreed to assist the primary researcher by providing contact information for program alumni and offering space to conduct interviews, and member checking and peer debriefing meetings. However, only pilot study interviews, two member checking meetings, and one peer debriefing session were conducted at UCO's facility.

**Sampling method.** Hill et al. (1997; 2005) instructed researchers to utilize a homogenous sample of 8 to 15 participants who are randomly selected. Later, Hill and Williams (2012) revised this recommendation to include between 12-15 participants or more given the number of subgroups that may emerge. This study utilized criterion sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) to determine a homogeneous sample population. The criteria for the sample population consisted of UCO alumni who graduated in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, and October 2010, and had some mainstream high school experience from a school located within the United States. Graduates from these specific cohorts were included because they attended during the primary researcher's employment at the organization and had been out of the program for a long enough period of time to experience employment, possible continued education, and changes in personal life, but not more than three years (Burkard, Knox, & Hill, 2012). These reasons for this time period are important because the primary researcher had an established relationship with the participants, which is recommended for qualitative research as established relationships are likely to yield more in-depth responses by participants (Hays & Singh, 2012).

A total of 50 participants were eligible to participate in the study. However, two participants were eliminated by the researcher after consulting with her dissertation chair because of intense counseling experiences in her former role as counseling clinic director. Two out of the remaining 48 were selected for the pilot study. This left a remaining 46 participants eligible for participation in this study. The researcher anticipated challenges in making contact with potential participants because the telephone numbers and email addresses provided by UCO were not up to date. To this end, the researcher assigned eligible participants a number from 1 to 46. Fifteen participants were randomly selected to be contacted for inclusion in the study by drawing 15 numbers out of a bag. One participant was reached during the first attempt of contacting the 15 randomly selected potential participants. Of the remaining 14 randomly selected potential participants, two participants were left a voicemail, two received a voicemail and email, five participants were only emailed, and the contact information for five participants was not current. In total, contact with the initial randomly selected 15 potential participants yielded three interviews, one declined to participant, one did not show up to the interview and ten never responded.

Given that the minimum 12 participants needed for CQR was not scheduled, the remaining 31 participants that were not randomly selected, but who met the inclusion criteria were contacted by telephone. Seven potential participants had active phone numbers and received a voicemail message. One participant returned the voicemail message and declined to participate because of a busy work schedule. One participant never responded. Five participants returned the voicemail message and agreed to participate.

To identify the remaining seven participants, the primary researcher enlisted the assistance of the pilot study participants, those scheduled for interviews, and UCO staff. At the suggestion of pilot and actual study participants and UCO staff, she created a Facebook account not linked to her personal Facebook page, where she was able to more easily connect with eligible participants. This proved fruitful as the remaining seven participants were contacted and agreed to participate in the study. Two declined to participate due to personal reasons after being contacted through Facebook. In total, 18 (39%) of the eligible participants responded to the primary researcher's attempts through voicemail, email, or Facebook, of which 15 participants were interviewed within ten days in August 2012. Participants' race, gender, education, employment, and family status are displayed in Table 7.

Table 7

*Participant Demographic, Employment, and Education Status Data*

ID	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Current Jobs	Employment		Continuing Education		Highest level of education	Children <sup>2</sup>	HS <sup>3</sup>	UCO <sup>3</sup>
				Status	Description	Enrollment Status	Description				
P003	African American/ Black	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	Trade certificate	Some community college	4	12	18
P004	Latino/a	Male	0	Unemployed	Actively applying	No	General Education	Some community college	0	24	36
P005	Asian American	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	n/a	High school diploma	0	24	8
P006	African American/ Black	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	n/a	High school diploma Some vocational training above and beyond UCO	0	48	6
P007	Latino	Male	1	FT	Temporary	No	Trade certificate	High school diploma	2	54	9
P008	Latino/a	Male	1	PT	Temporary	No	Trade Certificate <sup>1</sup>	Some community college	0	24	18
P009	Latino/a	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	General Education	High school diploma	2	42	8
P010	Latino/a	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	Trade certificate		2	24	12



P011	Latino/a	Female	0	Unemployed	Actively applying	No	General Education <sup>1</sup>	High school diploma	3	24	60
P012	Multiracial	Male	0	Unemployed	n/a	No	n/a	High school diploma	1	30	15
P013	Latino/a	Male	2	PT and FT	Entrepreneur and Permanent	No	General Education	Some community college	1	48	14
P014	Multiracial	Male	2	PT and FT	Staffing Agency	No	General Education	Some community college	3	60	12
P015	Multiracial	Female	1	FT	Temporary	No	Trade certificate	Some community college	0	24	6
P016	Asian American	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	Trade certificate	High school diploma	0	24	8
P017	African American/Black	Female	2	PT and FT	Permanent and Internship	Yes	Trade certificate	Some community college	0	48	23

*Note.* Data presented in Table 7 were reported on the Demographic Survey and reflect participants at the time of their interview. FT= full time employment; PT = part time employment; HS= public high school; UCO = Urban Corps of San Diego County; <sup>1</sup>= indicated intent to return to community college or vocational program during interview; <sup>2</sup>= Number of born or expecting children; <sup>3</sup>= Number of months in either public high school or UCO.

**Measures to ensure participant safety.** This study was approved by the Darden College of Education's Human Subjects Committee at Old Dominion University (see Appendix D). Data collection began after the study was approved. Participants were given an informed consent (see Appendix E) that outlined the purpose of the project, how the data would be used, confidentiality, risk, benefits, and consent to record the interviews. Participants had an opportunity to read the verbatim transcript immediately upon completion of the transcript, and attend a presentation of the findings to make changes if necessary in February 2013. Ongoing consent was sought at each point of contact by reviewing voluntary consent and getting verbal or written agreement to continue or discontinue depending on the type of correspondence (i.e., in person or via email). Participants were also reminded that should they choose to withdraw from the study at any time, they would not have to repay the \$10 and their interview transcript would be removed from analysis.

The interviews for this study were conducted at locations convenient for study participants (i.e., Starbucks and participants' homes). In all cases, participants selected the venue and seating arrangements so that they were comfortable. These usually included seats outside and/or away from other patrons or family members. In three instances, participants' family and/or other patrons were in close enough proximity to overhear participants' responses. The primary researcher consistently checked in throughout these interviews offering to move the location of the interview and reminded participants that they could pass on any question that they did not feel comfortable answering. Only one participant passed on one question, which was a probe and not a primary question on the interview protocol.

**Instruments.** A semi-structured interview protocol and self-report demographic survey was developed in four stages to increase trustworthiness (see Appendix B). Using a table of specifications based on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development and the time period in which participants were asked to reflect upon, the initial protocol included open-ended questions crafted by the primary researcher based on the literature and her personal experiences. Tables of specifications increase content validity of an instrument in that items are easily mapped to a theoretical framework (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The initial demographic survey was also developed based on the literature and the research questions.

The initial protocol and demographic survey were reviewed and revised by two content area experts using a feedback form created by the researcher (Burkard et al., 2012) (see Appendix B). One content area expert was recruited based on his knowledge of relevant theory and current literature, and his research within alternative high school settings (see Jones, 2011; 2013a; 2013b). The second content area expert was an UCO staff member who reflected the same criteria as participants except she graduated from UCO prior to 2009. She has worked for UCO since her graduation and has prolonged engagement with potential participants in this study. The pilot study data also informed the development of the interview protocol and demographic survey (Burkard et al., 2012) (see Appendix B). In addition to completing the interview and demographic sheet, pilot study participants were asked to provide feedback on the questions using the same feedback form as the expert reviews.

The primary research team, auditor, and dissertation faculty chair reviewed the four feedback forms leading to the final semi-structured interview protocol. Table 8

displays the semi-structured interview protocol used in this study based on the table of specifications using Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theoretical framework. Information collected using the final demographic sheet is displayed in Table 8.

Table 8

*Semi-structured Interview Protocol Table of Specifications*

Time Period	Individual Layer	Microsystem	All layers/systems
Before Urban Corps	8. Describe yourself at that time in your life.	6. Prior to starting at Urban Corps, you attended a mainstream high school. Tell me about your experience there.	7. What were some of the key events that led to you leaving a mainstream high school?  9. What was going on in your life in between mainstream high school and Urban Corp?  10. What went into your decision to apply to the Urban Corps?
During Urban Corps	2. Describe yourself when you entered Urban Corps.  3. What changes did you notice in yourself over the course of the Urban Corps, if any?  4. How did attending the program affect how you thought about yourself as a person?  15. One of your peers once asked me "what will I be to society after I graduate, will I still be a high school dropout?" Based on your experiences, how would you answer this question?	1. Please describe your experience in Urban Corps.	5. How, if at all, did your experiences in the program impact your life outside of the program?  16. Another of your peers once asked me "why aren't there more programs like Urban Corps?" Do you think there should be more programs like this one? Why or why not?
After Urban Corps	13. Describe the person you are today.		11. What were your plans after you graduated?  12. Please tell me about your life today.

18. What advice would you give your younger self? Your future self?

19. If you were in my shoes, what would you want to ask yourself?

14. Are there any specific skills, lessons, or experiences from Urban Corps that you continue to use today? If so, please describe them.

17. Tell me about your future plans.

20. What else do you want to share that I have not yet asked you about?

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*Note.* This table of specifications illustrates the connection between specific semi-structured interview questions and the bioecological theory of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005).

**Data collection procedures.** Unlike constant comparison methods, all data are collected at the same time in a CQR study (Burkard et al., 2012). The primary researcher conducted 14 individual face-to-face interviews and one telephone interview over ten days at the end of August 2012. All but two participants were emailed a copy of the interview protocol and the informed consent prior to the actual interview (Burkard et al., 2012). Two interviews were scheduled within hours of the initial contact and emailing was not possible. In these cases, the researcher gave them a copy of the interview protocol and informed consent prior to starting the interview for review. The researcher verbally reviewed these documents with all participants prior and during the interviews, and reminded them of voluntary consent when they were contacted for member checking. Participants received \$10 to assist in covering any expenses incurred as a result of participating in the study.

Interviews took place in Starbucks, an outdoor mall, and participants' homes. Interviews lasted between 26 and 125 minutes, averaging 53 minutes in length. After the first 11 interviews, the primary researcher completed a contact summary sheet to capture relevant observations and themes, and a reflexive memo to record feelings, reflections, and potential bias. The contact summary sheets and reflexive memos for the remaining four interviews were completed after the primary researcher transcribed the interviews or read through transcriptions. These were not completed immediately following the interview due to time constraints. The researcher waited until transcription so the interview was fresh in her mind to capture relevant information.

The primary researcher transcribed 13 interviews and a research assistant transcribed two interviews. Participants received a copy of their transcript immediately

following transcript completion, which occurred between one week and three months of their interview. The primary researcher corresponded via email and Facebook messaging with all participants throughout the three months offering updates on the status of transcription, seeking on going voluntary consent, and asking for any additions to their initial transcripts. Seven participants responded to acknowledge that they received their transcript and offered consent to continue participation in the study. Eight participants did not respond to any correspondences from the researcher during this round of member checking.

Additional member checking occurred in early February after data analysis was complete. All participants were invited to attend one of two in person presentations of the findings given by the researcher through Facebook messaging and email. Eight participants responded to the primary researchers message/email. Of the eight, two were unable to attend, four asked questions about the presentations and did not attend, and two attended one of the presentations. Participants who attended were asked to compare their experiences to the findings using a written form, and to provide verbal feedback after a presentation of the findings. Participants who did not attend were emailed a copy of the final model and a brief summary of the model. They were asked to provide feedback. To date, none of them responded with feedback.

### **Data Analysis**

The data analysis structure first outlined by Hill et al. (1997; 2005), and later revised by Thompson et al. (2012), and Ladany, Thompson, and Hill (2012) guided the analysis process for this study. Research team and auditor immersion in the data throughout the analysis process is a key principle in CQR analysis. To this end, research



team members continuously returned to raw data, reviewed domains, and completed memos at each consensus meeting. Hill et al. (1997, 2005), Thompson et al. (2012), and Ladany et al. (2012) outlined four main steps to data analysis that occurred in a linear process: within case analysis, cross analysis, examining patterns in the data, and developing narrative accounts across cases. At each stage, the primary research team reached consensus and sent the final consensus versions to the auditor. The auditor reviewed and provided feedback on the research team's consensus versions, which was reviewed by the research team. The auditor and research team reached consensus on all final versions within each stage prior to moving to the next stage. This data analysis process was completed over seven months.

**Within case analysis.** Within case analysis involves creating domains within which raw transcript data is chunked to inform the development of core ideas (Hill et al., 1997; Thompson et al., 2012). Chunked data focuses on one main idea that reflects a domain. In rare cases, the same data chunk may be double coded in two domains. Core ideas are summaries of the chunked raw data given the domain in which the data is chunked. Core ideas are used in cross analysis. The research team met over 25 times for 2 to 4 hours each, and completed individual work throughout within case analysis. In total, the final domain list, Domain List 5, consisted of 10 domains including a domain for data not relevant to this study. Table 9 displays domain names, operational definitions, sample raw data chunks, and core ideas for Domain List 5.

Table 9

*Domain List 5 Domain Names, Operational Definitions, Sample Data Chunks and Core Ideas*

Domain	Domain Name	Operational Definition	Raw Data Chunk	Core Idea
1	Barriers before, during, and after the program	Obstacles rooted in systems (i.e., judicial, educational, employment, political, family), environments/cultures (i.e., streets, poverty, partying), specific settings (i.e., high school, college), and internal (i.e., participants' attitudes, behaviors). Obstacles may occur across time or be limited to specific periods in participants' lives.	10: The only problem is I need to be living in U.S. CITY. I am trying to get a real good job, or kind of good job, to have enough to come back over here [from another country].	He needs to be living in the U.S. to get a job with the Border Patrol, so he is trying to get a good job so he can have enough money to come back over here.
2	Positive influence of peers and/or family at any time	Ways in which participants were positively impacted by peers and family. Peers are defined as friends, class/workmates, and other people who are like them in terms of age, level of employment, or who are in similar social settings (i.e., school or work). Family refers to individuals who are part of participants' family of origin, current family members, and significant others.	16: A good friend's brother, he graduated from UC valedictorian and I saw him do good afterward. They used to tell stories about how bad he used to be. He sounded just like me, but worse. I was like "wow look how good he turned out. He's working. He's helping out his friend and parents. He might not have much, but look what he is doing. He's always looking for work, he's hard working, changed his mind set about doing all the bad things in life."	His good friend's brother turned his life around and graduated from the program. He saw himself in his good friend's brother.
3	Program factors that influence change	Factors related to the program structure, environment, staff/teachers, or corpsmembers that impact participants.	7: And that is what people at Urban Corps does. They are small classes, they get to help you. There are so many staff. All the grandmas. A lot of help. That big schools, high schools, don't have. On top of that they give you money. You have a job.	The teachers and volunteer grandmas in the program helped him. The classes were small, too. The program also gave him money for the work he did.

4	<p>Future plans and goals; Actual future happenings</p>	<p>Long and short term goals, plans or dreams developed while participants were enrolled in the program for after graduation or developed after graduation for participants' future; participants' actual career and academic experiences after the program including unplanned happenings.</p>	<p>I: How much longer in your school? 17: December 20th I graduate. I: Then on to RN? Do you know where or anything yet? 17: I haven't gotten into the school I want to get into yet. I'm still planning ahead right now because I'm trying to focus on getting CNA out of the way. So focus on what is happening now.</p>	<p>She will graduate from the CNA program in December. She hasn't looked into RN programs, yet.</p>
5	<p>Giving back during and after the program</p>	<p>Attitudes or activities demonstrating a sense of service to others, desire to inspire others, making a difference in the community, and environmental stewardship. This does not include helping others out of obligation.</p>	<p>9: Not only are we helping out, you know, I don't want to say unfortunate, but we are helping out people that want help, but we are also helping out the community and nature.</p>	<p>He and the program are helping people that want to help and the community and nature.</p>
6 <sup>1</sup>	<p>Specific job and life skills gained from program and/or used in life after the program</p>	<p>Set of skills, sometimes distinguished with certificates or high school diploma that participants attribute directly to the program. Participants' job/life skills from the program are clearly applied in their life after the program.</p>	<p>3: That's what I was telling you, all the stuff I learned from UCO I put that into effect with this guy and then I learned from this guy and we had contracts with management companies. I: When you say management companies you mean 3: Like property management companies. Like the ones that manage this building.</p>	<p>He learned stuff from the program and the landscaping guy and they had contracts with management companies.</p>

7 <sup>1</sup>	View of self before, during, and after the program	Participants' descriptions of their attitudes, behaviors, and intrapersonal characteristics that demonstrate their self-concept. These descriptions may be reflections on changes over time (i.e., "I went from being a nobody to being a somebody") or may describe participants' way of being/self concept before, during, or after the program (i.e., "I became more open-minded," "I have always been a people person," "I was just so angry."). Participants may refer to ways they would like to change if they could go back in time.	I: What advice would you give your younger self? 5: Gosh. Don't be hasty it will come. Don't be hasty it will come. Like um, opportunity, everything comes with time and patience. Like don't be in such a rush, don't be in a rush. It boogles me when I think about how many opportunities closed for me because I was in a rush to get somewhere. So I mean, just patience. Because I am so impatient. I: What about advice for your future self? 5: Keep growing and keep learning. That's it.	He was hasty and in a rush when he was younger. He was impatient and had many opportunities close. He wants to keep growing and learning.
8 <sup>1</sup>	Motivating events/interactions at any time	Specific occurrences, such as interactions with another person or situations that mark positive or negative turning points in participants' lives.	11: I found out I had to be on a good track when I found out I was having a baby. That is what it took me to a right track. But I guess if I wouldn't have had my son, I would have just, I don't know. I guess I would have been a different person.	Having her son got her on the right track. Without her son, she would be a different person.
9 <sup>1</sup>	Other: Program Evaluation	Data chunks that don't fit in another domain, but are relevant and important were included in other.	I: So another one of your fellow corpsmembers asked me why there aren't more programs like Urban Corps. Do you think there should be more programs like this? Why or Why not? 14: yeah, I guess. There should be more. But not exactly the same because if it is just all the same it might get all boring. But I mean if there are different people out there, I mean, I 'm sorry, if there are more people out there that are willing to help you and to push you forward, then why not go to it.	There should be more programs like UCO with people that are willing to push and help people move forward.

10 <sup>1</sup>	Irrelevant	Data that does not pertain to the study	I: Anytime you have any questions, need me to clarify, or want to pass, just say so. 12: O.K.	N/A
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*Note.*<sup>1</sup> = Domain Lists 1, 2, 3 and 4 consisted of 11 domains. In Domain List 5, domain 6 and domain 7 from previous lists were collapsed. This resulted in domain 8, 9, 10, and 11 from previous lists becoming domain 7,8, 9, and 10 in Domain List 5. In previous lists, domain 7 was “program lessons applied to life after the program,” and similar data was chunked in domain 6. The only difference was the time period being reflected on.

Within these domains, the research team and auditor identified 1,025 chunks of data through consensus. Of these, 75 chunks were irrelevant to this study and 24 were double coded. Core ideas were developed for 926 chunks of data. Appendix F shows the number of data chunks per domain per participant using Domain List 5.

Domain List 1 was created using pilot study data. Each research team member individually created domains after reading the transcripts that reflected key overarching codes in the data. One research team member identified eight domains, a second identified 11, and the primary researcher identified nine. The primary researcher compiled the domains from each member into one list and asked research team members to review and collapse domains individually. The primary research team met and reached consensus on ten domain names and operational definitions that were sent to the auditor. The research team and auditor met and reached consensus on Domain List 1, which consisted of 11 domain names and operational definitions that were used to chunk data from five cases.

The primary research team individually chunked data for two cases using Domain List 1. Prior to meeting, the primary researcher merged the three individually chunked transcripts into one Excel spreadsheet for each case and highlighted differences for review by the research team. They met to reach consensus on the data chunks and domains for these two transcripts. Because there were several differences in data chunks, the research team decided to meet as a group to chunk three more transcripts into domains. To avoid groupthink, research team members wrote down line numbers and assigned domains before discussing to reach consensus. The research team line numbers and assigned domains were recorded in an Excel spreadsheet to assist the auditor in

reviewing the consensus process. Additionally, the operational definitions for the domains were revised to better reflect the data chunks from these five cases resulting in Domain List 2. Consensus was reached among the research team, and between the research team and auditor on the data chunks and assigned domains for these five transcripts, and Domain List 2 after two rounds of feedback.

The remaining ten cases were divided between the research team members to be chunked using Domain List 2. Four transcripts were chunked and assigned domains by the primary researcher and one team member, and six were chunked and assigned domains by the primary researcher and another team member. The auditor agreed with the research team's chunked data and assigned domains for one transcript. Six cases required two rounds of feedback from the auditor before consensus was reached and three cases required three rounds of feedback before consensus was reached.

The domain list was also revised two more times during within case analysis for these 10 cases resulting in Domain List 3 and 4. Domain List 3's revisions focused on clarifying, but not changing, operational definitions. Domain List 4 expanded one domain to include additional information. In this situation, Thompson et al. (2012) recommend reviewing data chunks in previous cases to ensure that chunks accurately reflect the updated domains. To this end, the primary researcher reviewed all 15 cases and highlighted raw data chunks that seemed to reflect the expanded domain indicating that the chunk needed to be moved. One other research team member and the auditor reviewed these highlighted raw data chunks before consensus was reached.

After consensus was reached on all data chunks using Domain List 4, the primary researcher abstracted core ideas for each data chunk. The abstracting process is meant to

“capture the essence of what the interviewee has said about the domain in fewer words and with more clarity” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 546). Core ideas for eight cases were reviewed by one research team member and seven cases were reviewed by another research team member. The primary research team member revised core ideas based on feedback from research team members before sending core ideas for all cases to the auditor. The auditor agreed with all core ideas for four cases and provided feedback on eleven cases. All feedback except one was used to revise core ideas within these eleven cases. “Consensus summaries” of each domain were created by merging participant codes, raw data line numbers, and core ideas for all data chunks that fell into each domain. In total, ten consensus summaries were created for cross analysis based on Domain List 4.

**Cross analysis.** Cross analysis involves generating categories by clustering the abstracted core ideas from each domain across cases (Ladany et al., 2012). The ten consensus summaries were divided in half so that the primary researcher and one research team member individually developed categories for five consensus summaries each. The primary researcher and one research team member developed categories for domains 1, 2, 3, 5, and 9. The primary researcher and another research team member developed categories for domains 4, 6, 7, 8, and 10. Prior to the initial consensus meeting, the primary researcher compiled the categories from each research team member into one document and asked each research team member to collapse categories. The primary researcher met with each research team member to develop the first category list within each domain. A second meeting with each research team member resulted in consensus on categories within each domain that was sent to the auditor. During this process, Domains 6 and 7 were combined because the categories were the same for those



domains. The primary researcher and auditor met to review the process used in developing the categories to assist the auditor in providing feedback. Consensus was reached by the auditor and research team on the categories resulting in Domain List 5 (see Table 9). Additionally, a typicality index was determined based on how frequently the categories applied to the entire sample using the following labels: *general* for all or all but one of the cases, *typical* for more than half of the cases to the general minimum, *variant* for at least three cases up to the typical minimum, and *rare* for two or less cases (Hill et al., 2005; Williams & Hill, 2012). The categories within each domain including the typicality index are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

**Examining patterns.** Finally, the research team and auditor met to “chart the results” or develop a series of patterns and pathways to illustrate relationships between the categories and domains (Ladany et al., 2012). Each research team member and auditor reviewed the final categories and developed patterns and pathways individually prior to the meeting. These individually developed patterns and pathways were shared at the consensus meeting and led to the final model of corpsmembers’ perceived process of change in terms of developmental outcomes, influencing factors, and program outcomes, which is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4. This model was shared during member checking and peer debriefing to solicit further feedback on the final results in February 2013. The suggested changes from participants and UCO staff focused mainly on the typicality index for Barriers (Domain 1) and Job and Life Skills Used After the Program (Domain 6). The primary researcher paid special attention to these categories when comparing individual cases to the final domain and category structure in the final stage of analysis- developing narrative accounts.

**Developing narrative accounts.** The primary researcher presented the final perceived process of change, influencing factors, and outcomes to the participants and asked them to compare it to their experiences (member checking). UCO leaders, staff, and teachers were also invited to provide feedback on the final process of change, influencing factors, and outcomes (peer debriefing). Two domains and the categories under them were questioned consistently during member checking and peer debriefing: Barriers and Job and Life Skills applied after the program. The primary researcher compared individual transcripts to the categories, paying especially close attention to these two domains and category areas when developing the “brief narrative write-ups” (Hill et al., 1997, p. 55). These write-ups or summaries informed the final results and assisted with visually representing the data in a way that most closely reflected participants’ experiences.

### **Strategies for Establishing Trustworthiness**

Hays and Singh (2012) described several criteria for trustworthiness and provided specific strategies to address each criterion. Williams and Hill (2012) incorporated many of these criteria in their discussion of establishing trustworthiness in CQR studies. They described dependability as having integrity of the data shown through consistent results and methods over time. Dependability was established through the use of consensus coding using a research team and auditor, and relying on existing theories.

Providing a thick description of the organizational context, sample population, and research design and method, and through the triangulation of researchers in data analysis enhanced transferability, or the “generalizability” of the study. Additionally, transferability was established by the typicality index for the findings.

Credibility was established through memoing after each interview and during each consensus meeting, triangulation of researchers, negative case analysis by the auditor, providing thick descriptions, and referential adequacy. In CQR, referential adequacy occurs throughout data analysis because the research team consistently connected individual cases to categories, and the final process of change developed in the third stage of analysis.

To ensure confirmability, the research team followed Sim et al.'s (2012) recommendations to “forget,” bracket researcher bias and expectations through memoing during consensus meetings, and return to the raw data to stay as closely aligned with participants’ voices as possible. Sampling adequacy was based on the criteria relevant to CQR, and was met through member checking and referential adequacy throughout data analysis.

Hays and Singh (2012) included coherence, ethical validation, substantive validation, and creativity as additional criteria for trustworthiness that are not included in Williams and Hill (2012). Coherence was established by detailing the rationale for selecting the critical theory paradigm and CQR tradition (see discussion earlier in this chapter). Ethical validation was based on the “real-world” issue of high school dropouts and the need for reforming education to be relevant to the needs of diverse populations and communities. Ethical validation was enhanced by the use of on-going informed consent, reflexive journaling during data collection, memoing during consensus meetings, peer debriefing, and member checking to ensure that the “nature of human, cultural, and social contexts” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 202) were represented.

Substantive validation was evidenced by the primary researchers prolonged engagement with the organization and participants, memoing, member checking, triangulation of investigators, model development capturing the process of change, negative case analysis, thick description, use of an audit trail, and referential adequacy. Creativity was established in the presentation of the data that clearly communicates findings in a way that participants understood, especially during member checking. An audit trail provided evidence of the strategies for trustworthiness.

### **Conclusion**

This study sought to provide insight into the experience of transforming from a high school dropout to a high school graduate through enrollment in UCO, the only Certified Conservation Corps to offer mental health counseling services in California. Additionally, this study sought to identify perceived long term program outcomes and influencing factors that impacted participants' process of change and outcomes based on Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecology theory of human development. Through CQR and critical theory, the research team and auditor attempted to remain objective in seeking consensus throughout data analysis. This research design allowed participants' voice to remain at the core of the findings, which reflects CQR, critical theory, and social justice principles (Crethar et al., 2008). Participants' thick description of their experiences and perceptions of UCO informed a perceived process of change based on developmental outcomes, identification of program outcomes, and clarification of influencing factors that may guide second chance programs, such as UCO, with mental health counseling clinics in serving this at-risk young adult population.

## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS

This study sought to better understand the perceived process of change, influencing factors, and outcomes experienced by former high school dropouts who re-engaged with school and successfully earned a high school diploma. The time period within which this study was situated started at the point of dropping out of high school to up to three years post graduation from UCO. Specifically, the findings were anchored in three distinct periods: before, during, and after the program. These distinct time periods are also reflected in the research questions:

1. How did participants experience a process of change, if any, in Urban Corps of San Diego County?
2. What changes, if any, do participants report post program?
3. What program factors, if any, impact the participants' process of change and experience post program?
  - a. What additional factors, if any, impact the participants' process of change and experience post program?

The research team identified 9 main categories and 34 subcategories that answer the research questions (see Table 10). These categories and subcategories will be discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

Table 10

*Main Categories and Subcategories by Research Question*

Research Question	Domain	Category	Subcategory
1 & 2	7	Change in view of self	1. Positive Attitudinal 2. Positive Behavioral 3. Positive Intrapersonal 4. Negative Behavioral 5. Negative Attitudinal
1 & 2	1	Change in exposure to barriers	6. Institutionalization 7. Money 8. Family 9. Border 10. Personal 11. Education 12. Employment 13. Gangs 14. Specific Orgs
2	4	Future plans/goals outcomes	15. Education 16. Employment 17. American Dream
2	5	Giving back outcomes	18. Attitude 19. Action
2	6	Job/Life skills outcomes	20. Personal 21. Academic/work 22. Independent Living 23. Interpersonal 24. Work Ethic
3 & 3.1	3	Program factors	25. Program staff, teachers, environment 26. Program structure 27. CM diversity 28. Access to services
3 & 3.1	2	Peers/Family factors	29. Gave advice, support

3 & 3.1	8	Factors related to specific motivating events/ interactions	30. Reliable
			31. Family, SO, Kids
			32. Barrier
			33. Beneficial Policy
3	9	Other	34. Program Improvement Recommendations

*Note.* The connection between research questions, domains, categories, and subcategories demonstrates coherence across rounds of data analysis.

A typicality index was used to show the frequency with which participants reported a category or subcategory at least once (Ladany et al., 2012). The Typicality Index provides parameters for the representativeness of categories. Table 11 displays the Typicality Index used in this study. Participants' gender will remain neutral to maintain participant anonymity given that only three women participated, some categories include a small number of participants, and the demographic information (see Table 7) could easily connect to descriptions of some categories and subcategories. Participants were referred to as "he/she" or "him/her" when reporting specific quotes in this chapter.

Table 11

*Typicality Index for Categories*

Label	<i>n</i>	% of participants
General	14 to 15	93.33% - 100%
Typical	8 to 13	53.33% - 86.67%
Variant	3 to 7	20% - 46.67%
Rare	1 to 2	6.67% - 13.33%

*Note.* *n* = number of participants. Typicality Index is based on Hill (2012). Each participant is counted up to one time per category unless otherwise noted.

**Perceived Process of Change in View of Self and Exposure to Barriers**

Participants indicated experiencing a process of change in two main areas. First, participants' view of self changed over time in terms of behaviors, attitudes, and

intrapersonal ways of being. Change occurred in positive, and to a lesser extent, negative directions over time. Second, reported exposure to barriers experienced by participants changed over time. Nine barriers were identified and distinct patterns highlighted how participants' experience of each barrier decreased and/or increased over time.

### **Change in View of Self**

Participants reported generally experiencing a positive and/or negative process of change in at least one area (i.e., attitude, behavior, and intrapersonal). Participants also generally experienced a process of change in more than one area. The research team identified positive and negative changes in terms of attitude and behaviors, and positive changes in terms of intrapersonal ways of being. Table 12 displays the category and sub categories associated with participants' change in view of self.

Table 12

#### *Perceived Changes in View of Self with Typicality Index*

Category	<i>n</i>	Typicality Index
View of Self Change Across Time	15	General
Positive Behavioral Change Across Time	14	General
Positive Attitudinal Change Across Time	14	General
Positive Intrapersonal Change Across Time	6	Variant
Negative Behavioral Post Program	1	Rare
Negative Attitudinal Post Program	1	Rare
# of Participants w/ >1 Change	15	General

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting change at least once unless otherwise noted.



**Positive behavioral change across time.** Fourteen out of 15 participants (93.33%) experienced positive behavioral changes over time. Participants described themselves as “rebellious knuckleheads” before the program. Words used to describe their behaviors before the program included immature, young, heathens, involved in gangs and street life, partying, ditching school, and smoking. Over the course of the program and after the program they stated that they were thinking with their heads, staying out of trouble, and caring for their families. One participant described his/her behaviors in high school: “I ditched a lot. I was in ROTC for a good 2 semesters. I didn’t ditch at all. You know I got my friends. And I just stopped going to school.” This participant recalls a period in time when he/she attended regularly, but that changed with a new friend group. However, when this participant was enrolled in the program, his/her behavior changed in that he/she did not ditch school or work, and he/she worked hard on the job.

Another participant described how his/her behavior in terms of working hard has paid off after the program. He/she stated,

Because back then [before the program] I couldn’t afford nothing. And now, you know, I work my butt off for what I have and I am happy. I can honestly say, I probably have a pair of shoes to wear once every month. I got a lot of shoes. Prior to the program, this participant’s family struggled financially. However, he/she recalled earning money through illegal activities, not working hard, and spending all his/her earnings on partying. This shift in behaviors (i.e., partying and ditching before the program to working hard during and after the program) captures the general participant experience.

**Positive attitudinal change over time.** Participant changes in terms of their attitudes were related to thoughts and beliefs about who they are. Fourteen out of 15 participants (93.33%) went from reporting self-sabotaging beliefs (i.e., “I think I am a loser”) to believing in their potential (i.e., “I can do anything,” “I am worth something”). One participant stated his/her attitudinal shift in simple terms. He/she said “I am somebody now.” Another participant recounted the moment he/she decided a change in mindset was in order:

I told myself an ultimatum “Okay, you gotta get it together. You have to get your diploma. You don’t want to be 30 years old without your diploma.” I’m like, I don’t want to be a loser because I am not a loser. That is something I always tell myself, “never be a loser.” I still tell myself “never be a loser.” Losers suck. He/she started the program with this attitude and has continued to embrace this attitude since graduation from the program.

Some participants talked about the attitudinal change in terms of having increased self-awareness and confidence, which was often attributed to having others, such as staff, teachers, and significant others, believing in them. One participant described

When I entered Urban Corps, I didn’t have a lot of confidence. I was, I kind of had a negative outlook as far as where I was with my education. I knew that I had a lot to get done. I didn’t have a lot of time to do it. Going in there, I came out completely different than when I went in and it just really increased my confidence. And that is something that is very necessary. I feel like if you don’t believe in yourself, you can’t expect other people to believe in you. And they [program staff and teachers] helped me believe in myself.

This participant demonstrated his/her attitudinal change from before to after the program, indicating that the program staff and teachers helped him/her believe in him/herself.

**Positive intrapersonal changes over time.** Six participants (40%) described change in terms of how they view their relation to others. Typically, participants described a sense of being lost, not having good friends or being friendless, and not trusting others before the program. For instance, one participant stated, “[The program] made me realize the world isn’t out for you. ‘You can trust people, it’s all in your head.’ It made me overcome that... my [social] anxiety issues. It made me overcome that.” Many shared that they did not belong anywhere except with their friends who were involved with gangs, graffiti, skateboarding, and partying.

During and after the program, they described having a sense of belonging, which led to a feeling of being found. They described having a sense of direction focused on the future. One participant reflected on being lost and finding him/herself. He/she stated, “Where was I? Was I just nowhere? At the night I just think to myself, ‘I was just nowhere XXX. Look where I am now.’ And I just smile. I’m like ‘yup.’” This participant found direction, a sense of belonging, and this intrapersonal change brings a smile to his/her face.

**Negative changes post program.** One participant reported a negative attitudinal shift after the program. This participant felt helpless, described symptoms related to depression, and cried a lot during the interview. This participant has been unemployed since the program despite efforts to get a job and was not able to access the scholarship awarded at graduation to continue education. Another participant reported negative behavioral changes after the program. This participant experienced several traumatic

events post program and described post program behaviors such as procrastination in getting a job, “laziness” in finishing a court-mandated community service requirement, and often partying with friends.

### **Changes in Experiences With Barriers Across Time**

In total, the research team identified nine barriers that affected participants’ lives across time. All participants experienced at least one barrier across time (i.e., before, during, and after the program). Participants experienced a barrier more than one time less frequently. The nine barriers included issues with (a) institutionalization, (b) finances/money, (c) family, (d) crossing the border, (e) personal, (f) education, (g) employment, (h) gangs, and (i) specific academic organizations. Table 13 displays the barrier categories based on participants’ experiencing them at least once at any time and at least once during two or more time periods.

Table 13

*Perceived Barrier Subcategories Experienced At Least One Time and More Than One Time Period*

Sub Category	$n^1$	Typicality Index	$n^2$	Typicality Index
1. Issues with Specific Academic Organizations	15	General	10	Typical
2. Family Issues	15	General	9	Typical
3. Personal Issues	15	General	8	Typical
4. Employment Issues	13	Typical	4	Variant
5. Education Issues	11	Typical	7	Variant
6. Money Issues	11	Typical	7	Variant
7. Institutionalization	10	Typical	0	Not Reported
8. Gang Involvement	10	Typical	1	Rare

9. Issues Crossing the  
Border

2

Rare

2

Rare

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*Note.*  $n^1$  = number of participants reporting barrier at least one time.  $n^2$  = number of participants reporting barrier at more than one time. (i.e., before and after, before and during, during and after).

In general, participants were exposed to family and personal issues, and issues with specific academic organizations at least once. Fewer participants experienced barriers more than one time compared to those experiencing barriers at least once, except those reporting *issues crossing the border*. Perhaps most noteworthy were that not one participant experienced institutionalization at more than one time period and only one participant experienced issues with gangs at more than one time period.

Table 14 offers another illustration of changes in barriers across time as it captures the frequency with which participants reported each barrier at least once before, during, and after the program. The patterns displayed here indicate additional ways in which participants experienced a process of change over time.

Table 14

*Perceived Barrier Subcategories Experienced By Participants Before, During, and After the Program*

Sub Category	$n$ Before	$n$ During	$n$ After
1. Issues with Specific Academic Organizations	15	8	8
2. Family Issues	14	4	9
3. Personal Issues	15	3	7
4. Employment Issues	7	0	10
5. Education Issues	10	6	4
6. Money Issues	8	2	10

7. Institutionalization	6	0	3
8. Gang Involvement	10	1	0
9. Issues Crossing the Border	2	2	2

*Note.*  $n$  = number of participants reporting the barrier at least once before, during, or after the program.

**Issues with specific academic organizations.** In general, participants experienced issues within specific academic organizations before the program (i.e., mainstream high school), during the program, and after the program (i.e., community college). While the number of participants reporting similar issues during and after the program decreased from before the program, 53% still reported struggling with UCO and community colleges or vocational training programs after graduation. These issues are aligned with the status of education reported by participants post-program on the demographic survey (i.e., the majority of participants attempted, but did not finish an academic or vocational program after they graduated from Urban Corps).

The majority of participants did not like their high school experience and reported attending more than one high school. Participants' perceptions of teachers, administrators, and school environments as being unsupportive, unsafe, uncaring, and negative were most frequently noted. In two rare circumstances, participants described experiencing racism in school. One participant stated,

I really hated HS. I made no friends. I went to a mostly white people, because I went to school in [the Midwest]. There were a handful of Asians. And there's a lot of racism. I got a lot of shit. The second day of school freshman year I got a rock thrown at my head. I was happy to go to school. I thought I'd be welcomed, but it happened in middle school, all day long, I'd be called racist names by random people I didn't even know. I had to stop riding the bus because I had a

problem with this one kid and I just wanted to rip him apart. I got in a fight with him because he would sit behind me and make racist remarks, like “Chink,” or something like that. I was like “what is this kid talking about!?” And he would just make me snap. That’s where I got my anger problems from. I have a lot of resentment for people who just don’t know.

Another participant described a fight he/she had with another student who was bullying him/her based on his/her race. The exchange below illustrates the reaction of the principals and teachers to this fight that reinforced his/her experience of racism.

P: XXX High school wasn’t the best education place for someone like me. *I: What do you mean by that?* P: To be not only, I hate to pull this and I don’t like to say this, but it is so true. To be a black student there and have us be the minority and our teachers and our faculty and our principals and everybody there... *I: reinforcing racism?* P: Like being in the same corner as the kids when they are doing racist things, it was really hard to plead your case and be o.k. *I: There is no way you would have fairness or equity or safety.* P: The majority of the kids who were black there didn’t last. They left. The parents either pulled them out or they were suspended for little things. Things were twisted.

Other participants did not overtly state that they experienced racism in school. Instead they described interactions with teachers and principals where they were targeted based on their behaviors. They also felt frustrated by the lack of individual attention and support given to students. Many noted that they did not have additional support when they did not understand a lesson, and then felt extra frustrated when they performed poorly on tests.

Participants reported three issues with UCO. These included issues with the absence policy, favoritism of staff, and difficulty doing homework after working long shifts. One participant reflected on his/her experience with the coursework at Urban Corps in the following passage:

Some of it was troublesome because I would go to work and we were in environmental, and we would probably cut down, I cut down anywhere from 60 to 85 trees a day. And then picking all that stuff up and come back with scratches.

Then having to do the homework, I was just “ahhh.”

In a related struggle, participants noted that the absence policy was strictly enforced, and staff and teachers could be more flexible. Participants were allowed up to three excused absences, which was challenging when commuting long distances using public transportation. Some participants shared that childcare interfered with their attendance, which increased challenges in completing the program.

After the program, participants noted several struggles with specific community colleges and vocational training programs. Financial constraints restricted participants' access to educational opportunities as noted by the participant who had to withdraw from a cosmetology program (see “Money Issues”). Other participants described struggling to understand the community college matriculation process making persistence in college out of reach. Still others talked about starting in vocational programs, but family issues kept them from finishing. One participant stated,

I went to the [vocational training program] to become a fiber optics certified in premise cabling, computers, solar panels, like they teach you to do all that. I went



there for 8 months, I think that was what it was to get your graduation. I think I went for like 6 before stuff happened in my house that I had to leave.

Issues with specific organizations persist at a fairly consistent level, although reasons for these issues vary. Reasons before and during the program seem to focus on school staff, teachers, policies, and the environment; whereas reasons after the program seem to connect to other issues, such as money and family.

**Family issues.** In general, participants' experienced issues with family, such as divorce, death, domestic violence, illness, lack of support and encouragement, getting kicked out, gang and court involvement, single and absent parents, and alcoholism. One participant described family issues before the program. He/she stated, "My mom didn't support anything. For school supplies I had to walk my ass to the store. Mom never took me anywhere and would always complain about money. She was getting child support from my father." This participant was living in a single parent home and had limited contact with his/her father after the 4<sup>th</sup> grade. At another point in the interview, this participant described his/her mother's perspective of him/her before the program. "My mother hated me."

During the program, participants primarily described families as seeing them differently. Families were proud of them for completing the program, which could account for the decrease in reported family issues during the program. However, childcare, and family member death and illness were barriers reported by participants during the program.

After the program, family issues were more often related to participants' own families versus their families of origin. One participant described tumultuous relationships with the fathers/mothers of his/her children. He/she stated,

I guess it just, like they [children] were accidents. But I feel bad because they are all different [dads/moms] and they all want to be with me. But I'm just like if I be with one then they will all get mad. Like my son's [dad/mom, he/she] likes me.

This participant struggled to make ends meet because of the financial strain related to having multiple children with different partners.

**Personal issues.** Participants' personal issues decreased from before to after the program. Personal issues included anger, defiance, anxiety, making bad choices (e.g., choosing to ditch school), being lazy, procrastinating, setting priorities other than school or work, and drinking and doing drugs. One participant reflected on becoming less lazy during the program. He/she said,

[The program] helped because I mean, when I went in there, I saw myself...I already knew I was lazy when I went in there, so I was just like I don't want to do anything. I don't want to work. And then I got in there, so it made me force myself to do more things then I thought I could.

Another participant described his/her choices before the program that led to other barriers. He/she stated,

I decided to adopt beliefs that were on the street and just hang out. I decided to do things different then the education way, and that is shocking to me because culturally and my background and my culture that is what it pushes, like education. And I totally pushed it away and deflected it and did it my own way.

The last example highlighted how personal issues impacted a participant's life during the program. He/she stated, "I had a bit of a defiant issue. I was rough." While these quotes illustrate different personal barriers, they all capture at least one internal characteristic or way of being that prevented success and often times connected to other barriers.

Several participants noted that corpsmembers were more successful in the program when they were committed to learning, growing, and overcoming their personal barriers. One participant stated, "That program really pushes the ones that want to succeed...If you were proactive enough and wanted to do something different, they gave you the opportunity." This could account for the decrease in reported issues with personal barriers during the program.

**Employment issues.** Participants experienced more issues with employment after the program than before the program. Employment was not a barrier during the program because it is a paid job training program. Several possibilities may explain the increase from before to after the program. First, before the program, not as many participants reported needing to work. Those that did report needing to work often struggled with balancing work and school, and pointed to this struggle as a main reason for dropping out of high school. For instance, one participant said,

I was working two jobs and I wasn't even supposed to because I was 16 when I first started working ... you had to only work a certain amount of hours. And that is part of the reasons why I didn't graduate because I wasn't able to focus, I wasn't able to study like I needed to and like I should've been. But I had to work. I had to.

Similarly, a second explanation for the increase in employment issues post program is more participants needed to work to support themselves and their growing families. Yet, they struggled with actually getting and keeping full time permanent jobs that offered high enough pay. One participant described his/her attempts to find permanent employment after the program at a pay rate that could support his/her family. He/she stated, “But, now I have a full time job. I am working 40 hours a week, but it is just not enough what they pay me. So that is why I am looking for more jobs with better opportunity.” Another participant shared that the \$10 compensation for participating in this study allowed him/her to purchase diapers for his/her new baby.

**Education issues.** Participants expressed decreased education issues over time. Issues related to education included struggles to pass standardized test, general comments highlighting negative school environments, uncaring teachers, and school rules, and experiences attending more than one high school because school officials moved them. Participants recalled taking one or both high school exit exams between two and 13 times before passing them. Some participants described uncaring, unsupportive, and discouraging school environments. For instance, one participant said,

I thought [the rules] were dumb. I would talk on my cell phone all the time. And I would get in so much trouble for it. And I wouldn't care because I needed to know what was going on with my family. I needed to know what was going on with my grandmother. She was in and out of the hospital a lot during high school. This participant described inflexible school policies, such as no cell phone use, that clashed with his/her family needs. All participants had to pass the high school exit exams to graduate, which could account for the decrease in education issues post program. Post

program education issues were concerned with accessing funding and high quality support services that assist in college matriculation and persistence.

**Money issues.** Participants reported struggling with money at higher rates after than before and during the program. The struggle with money at time periods other than during the program make sense in that the program provides a steady paycheck, which was reportedly not the case before and after the program. One participant described his/her issues with money before the program. He/she stated, “It was mostly money problems. I continued going to school, but it was just money problems and since I had to pay rent.” Post program, participants described money problems in connection to issues with employment and furthering education. One participant said,

I went to school, but it was hard for me to stay in school because not so much of the work, I needed a job. I had no income coming in, financial aide was not paying bills, covering anything, and...[vocational training program] is not cheap.

Participants reflected that during the program their paychecks were always the same. They were paid for 32 hours of work each week. While the paychecks were based on minimum wage, the steady income allowed participants to manage their finances, although they struggled with living paycheck to paycheck.

**Institutionalization.** Participants reporting a barrier due to institutionalization were involved in the judicial, juvenile justice, and/or family court systems. Five participants experienced institutionalization in relation to the judicial or juvenile justice systems and one participant grew up in the foster care system (family court) before the program. One participant described his/her involvement with the judicial system before the program. He/she stated, “In between [high school and the program], I was fighting

and getting arrested. I've been to juvenile hall, I've been to jail, I've been to prison, I've been through the whole judicial system. And that is what my recklessness led me to. Any crime committed, I've done it almost." He/she highlights connections to other barriers, such as personal barriers.

While the foster care system is different than the juvenile justice and judicial systems, the research team included one participant's experience in foster care in the institutionalization subcategory because there are similarities in terms of having limited choices when in foster care, juvenile hall, jail, or prison. He/she talked at length about struggling with adulthood because he/she was forced out of the group home upon aging out of the system with very little preparation for the real world. He/she stated,

[I was] just trying to find out who I am as an adult. How does being an adult work? Really, in the group homes, they don't explain to you that you have to pay taxes, how to get an apartment, or whatever after you leave the system. Things that happen to you once you become an adult, it is not the same as when you are a kid and you are in the group home and you get a way with a lot of stuff. In the real world you go to jail for certain things that you do, that you have done in the group home outside of the group home.

Interestingly, three different participants experienced the judicial and family court systems after the program. One participant spent time in jail for domestic violence, and another was summoned to court for a ticket resulting in community service that kept him/her from keeping a job. A third participant was forced to move because of a child custody case. One of these participants indicated that he/she choose not to fight a

domestic violence charge because he/she hoped to gain access to mental health care as part of his/her punishment. He/she stated,

I could've fought it, but something told me not to. I think the two weeks of domestic violence really helps you with anger management. Which I needed and I didn't have money to pay for it. So I think that is why I did it. I just stayed quiet. I told the judge "no contest."

Participants' issues with institutionalization were often times connected to other barriers, such as personal and family barriers.

**Gang involvement.** Gang involvement or attempts to avoid gangs were typical before the program. One participant recapped how he/she tried to avoid gangs in high school. He/she stated,

I didn't want to be no gang member, I didn't want to follow into the same footsteps as my brother. So, I attended XXX High School, which pretty much made that really hard, not to be in any types of gangs or anything. But, you know, I got into graffiti and stuff like that. That was, it wasn't gangs, so it was o.k.

This participant valued his/her friend group's involvement with graffiti as less bad than gangs. Needless to say, in his/her attempt to avoid gangs, he/she engaged in destructive and illegal activities.

One participant discussed issues with gangs during the program, but before UCO moved to its current location. He/she described the former facility location as being in a gang neighborhood. He/she stated,

My first experience [in the program] there was a lot of gang activities and I was from other places that everybody would get cluttered in there. So tension built up,

you can't do nothing because it is a job, but still I was always afraid that on the way out they would try to do something to me. So I didn't feel safe at first you know.

This participant noted that the current facility location was removed from the gang neighborhoods and did not have issues with gangs the second time in the program.

Participants did not report issues with gang involvement after the program. One described how the experience in the program changed his/her gang involvement. He/she said,

It [The program] would get me away from all that gang activity that I had. All the negative stuff. I was actually believe it or not, when I got in there, I started boxing better, too. I had more energy because I was doing hard work here, plus boxing, so when I actually go out and train I felt that I had more energy.

Everything just flipped around for me.

Post program, participants reported wanting to spend time with their families, hanging out with friends who were not involved with gangs, and having a strong desire to work hard instead of actively engaging in or avoiding gangs.

**Issues crossing the border.** Urban Corps is located in San Diego, which is close to the border with Mexico. Two participants consistently reported issues with crossing the border. One participant has lived in Mexico since high school. Another participant was involved with smuggling before the program, lived in Mexico for some part of the program, and discussed the negative economic impact of illegal immigrant labor on the job market after the program. He/she stated,



Right here there is just poverty and go nowhere jobs. It just, you know, especially because we are so close to the border here, like jobs don't pay good because people from TJ come over here and they get paid bank at eight bucks an hour, but we struggle because eight bucks is not enough to make it, to pay bills.

Participants' process of change incorporates changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and intrapersonal ways of being, and changes in their exposure to nine barriers. The findings support that participants' generally reported a positive change in their behaviors and attitudes and that participants' exposure to barriers decrease overtime with some exceptions.

### **Perceived Post Program Outcomes**

The second main research question focused on the corpsmember experience post program. Several outcomes were identified post program, many of which were directly connected to program factors (see "Perceived Factors Influencing Corpsmembers' Process of Change and Outcomes"). Five specific job and life skills, and attitudes and actions focused on giving back were gained in the program and applied in their lives after the program. Additional post program goals and dreams were described by participants demonstrating education, employment, and lifestyle outcomes.

#### **Outcomes Related to Specific Job and Life Skills Gained from the Program**

Five skill areas were identified and participant frequency was calculated at two time periods: during and after the program. The representativeness of each skill area at both time periods is displayed in Table 15. Participant statements about skills they learned in the program were included in *during the program*. Participant statements

about using skills learned in the program in some capacity after the program were included in *after the program*.

Table 15

*Perceived Specific Job and Life Skills Gained From the Program with Typicality Index*

Outcomes	<i>n</i> During	<i>n</i> After	Typicality Index
Academic & Professional Skills	15	14	General
Personal Skills	14	13	General to Typical
Work Ethic Skills	14	12	General to Typical
Interpersonal Skills	10	9	Typical
Independent Living Skills	8	5	Typical to Variant

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting each skill area at any time at least once during and after the program.

Several reasons may explain the decline in number of participants reporting use of a skill area post program. The questions related to skills learned in the program and used post program may have been confusing. The skills gained in the program may have become ingrained, so that participants do not associate the skills with their post program experiences. Another explanation is that the skill areas may not be applicable to participants' lives post program.

**Academic and professional skills.** This skill area refers to study skills, learning to use tools (e.g., weedwacker, chainsaw), recycling and water conservation, and commercial painting. Skills in this area may be noted in terms of a certificate or diploma

(e.g., food handlers card, forklift training certificate, high school diploma). Participants talking about certificates and diplomas often connected these to opening doors in terms of employment post program. One participant described an academic skill. He/she stated, "I learned a lot of English." Another participant described how the forklift training he/she received in the program helped him/her in a job after the program. He/she said, "Remember [my job] had a forklift? That's where I originally learned it. That is why I told them [my employers] 'hey I know how to [use] the forklift' because there was one at Urban Corps."

**Personal skills.** Personal Skills included reports of learning anger management, overcoming social anxiety, taking life more serious, not being afraid to try new things, and making choices resulting in more positive situations (i.e., choosing not to hang with bad crowds, choosing to live at home to save money). Participants generally gained personal skills in the program. One participant stated, "I stayed more determined to not go out, not get in trouble, always worried about work." Another participant described how his/her personal skills developed in the program and impacts his life today. He/she stated, "I don't have a problem doing things that I am not used to doing. Because going through there really helped me so much. I honestly feel like if I hadn't have been through that program, a lot of things I would be afraid to do." This participant further described his/her love of yoga and learning about natural home remedies that he/she would have been afraid to try before the program.

**Work ethic skills.** Participants generally reported developing work ethic skills while in the program and the majority described using these skills in their lives after the program. Work Ethic Skills included learning to brand oneself, understanding that

wearing the uniform means they represent the organization both on and off the job, punctuality on the job, work endurance, leadership, and being able to give and receive feedback about job performance. Branding oneself, work endurance, and leadership on the job were noted at both time periods suggesting that these three skills may be important to post program success. One participant described his/her application of leadership skills in his/her current job. He/she said, "I want to say leadership for one. I am able to, especially when no one else takes charge, I raise my hand and be like, 'hey I'll do it.'" Another participant stated, "Getting up early in the morning. I was never in to that." This participant attributed that learning of the importance of punctuality to his/her success as an entrepreneur post program.

**Interpersonal skills.** Typically, participants learned interpersonal skills while in the program and use these skills in their lives today. Interpersonal skills included learning to talk with all people, accepting diversity, and being more patient and understanding with significant others, co-workers and customers or clients. One participant shared about the impact of his/her interpersonal skill development on his/her relationship. He/she stated, "It helped me pretty much with my relationship with my [partner]. It taught me how to be more understanding because at Urban Corps it was o.k., they took the time to hear about what you had to say. I kind of took from that and heard what my [partner] had to say."

**Independent living skills.** The fewest number of participants reported learning skills relevant to living independently. Examples of skills in this area were financial management and remodeling or repairing homes. One participant stated,

They helped me get a bank account. Before I didn't have a bank account and I didn't really know much about that area. They got me a bank account where I wasn't charged anything to have a bank account so that allowed me to go and cash my checks at the bank and have money in the bank. And start savings. They helped me with financial management. They helped me learn how to prioritize what I needed to prioritize and the rest throw it in savings, if you can.

While a smaller number of participants learned skills in this area, it highlights an outcome area that has yet to be included in other studies set in similar organizational contexts.

### **Outcomes Related to Giving Back**

Outcomes related to environmental stewardship and community service, were noted in other studies involving Conservation Corps participants (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011). Typically, participants reported shifting attitudes and taking actions related to giving back to others, their communities, and the environment over time. Table 16 displays participants' actions and attitudes related to giving back over time.

Table 16

#### *Perceived Attitudes and Actions Related to Giving Back*

Outcome	<i>n</i> During	<i>n</i> After	Typicality Index
Giving Back Action	6	9	Variant to Typical
Giving Back Attitude	5	10	Variant to Typical

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting outcome at least once during and after the program.

Eight participants reported both actions and attitudes related to giving back. Participants noted taking specific actions and attitudinal changes as having increased after the program because of values and skills learned in the program. One participant described,

It [the program] made me feel more of a better person because not only was I making the community look nicer by removing a lot of the ugly graffiti that was out there. In that aspect it opened my eyes how much better San Diego can look if we take off a lot of that graffiti.

Other participants shared about developing a desire to inspire others, especially those who are faced with similar barriers, to make changes and to take care of the environment. For instance, during member checking one participant reiterated how he/she has different recycle tubs in his/her house and directs all visitors to appropriately use the tubs. He/she also commented on helping friends and family set up their own recycling tubs.

### **Education, Employment, and Lifestyle Outcomes**

Positive outcomes related to participants' future plans and goals are described here. Three categories described participants' future plans and goals: (a) Stable employment and striving to improve employment; (b) Hoping for the American Dream; and (c) Enrolled in school and planning to finish the program. Barriers in terms of employment and education were described above highlighting challenges in these outcome areas. Table 17 displays these outcomes.

Table 17

*Perceived Education, Employment, and Lifestyle Outcomes Reported Post Program*

Outcome	<i>n</i>	Typicality Index
Stable Employment	8	Typical
American Dream	6	Variant
Finish School	2	Rare
# of Participants w/ >1 Plan/Goal	5	Variant

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting outcome at least once unless otherwise noted.

**Employment.** Eight participants (53.33%) described being in permanent, stable employment in the following areas: construction, landscaping, security, helping professions, military, and retail sales. Of these, three participants reported that they were entrepreneurs, which decreased the impact of their criminal record on their employment. Many of these participants described goals related to improving their current employment by seeking higher paying jobs and implementing strategies to grow their businesses.

**American dream.** Six participants (40%) described wanting to achieve the American Dream in terms of having freedom, getting married, owning homes, and providing for their families. When asked about future plans, one participant stated,

Marriage, kids, white picket fence, I don't know a dog. I mean work is going to be work...I am going to work for as long as I can. I just want what every American has. The freedom of choice to do whatever I want. If I so choose to do it, and I do. I don't know where the wind blows or where it will take me or what I will choose to do tomorrow. But definitely happy.

Five additional participants described similar hopes to make their own choices, have a family, and be happy.

**Education.** Enrolling in and completing coursework post program was rare for participants in this study. Only two participants were enrolled in school at the time of the interview. One was completing a certificate in nursing and another was taking courses related to specialized job training for electricians. Both participants had plans to continue with school to advance in their chosen careers. Most participants expressed that they had planned to continue going to school after they graduated, but were unable to start and/or finish the courses and programs they enrolled in post program. This is described in more detail in the section about barriers.

### **Perceived Factors Influencing Processes of Change and Outcomes**

The third research question and subquestion asked what influencing factors impacted participants' process of change and post program experiences. The research team identified three main influencing factors that impacted participant change: program factors, positive influence of peers and/or family, and motivating events or interactions. Additional subcategories under each main factor further describe participants' perceived influencing factors. Post program barriers also impacted participants' experiences after the program and were described in greater detail in that section.

#### **Program Factors**

The research team identified four program factors that influenced participants' process of change and outcomes during and after the program. These program factors included: (a) program structure; (b) program staff, teachers, and environment; (c) access



to program services; and (d) corpsmember diversity. Table 18 displays the representativeness of these four factors at two time periods. Additionally, participants typically offered recommendations for program improvement included in Domain 9 (“Other”) that will be reported here.

Table 18

*Perceived Program Factors Influencing Corpsmembers’ Process of Change and Outcomes During and After the Program*

Factor	<i>n</i> During	<i>n</i> After	Typicality Index
Program Structure	15	11	General to Typical
Program Staff, Teachers, Environment	14	5	General to Variant
Access to Services	11	4	Typical to Variant
Corpsmember Diversity	10	10	Typical

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting factor at least once during and after the program.

The program structure and corpsmember diversity were reported most frequently post program indicating that these two factors seemed to impact program outcomes. The other two factors, program staff, teachers, and the environment and access to services, also were reported by a high number of participants as influential during the program, but less so after the program. This decrease in typicality could be related to UCO alumni having decreased connection with the program in general meaning they were likely interacting less frequently with program staff and teachers in work, school, counseling, and employment assistance.

**Program structure.** In general, participants described the program structure as offering corpsmembers an opportunity to learn how to work and go to school while earning a paycheck and highlighted several policies as being particularly impactful (e.g., uniform, grooming, and punctuality). One participant reflected on how the program structure helped him/her succeed in work and school in the following statement:

Once I saw how they combined work with education, which was you work 4 days and go to school 1 day, that really made it a lot easier to do your homework. You have more time to do your homework. And if you need time right after work, you were right there at school, so you don't really need to go anywhere else. All you need is to go and get what you need help with.

This participant noted the benefit of having school and work located in one facility, which allowed him/her to complete homework and easily get help when needed.

Similarly, all participants highlighted that having the option to earn their high school diploma was motivating and opened doors for them in the future. One participant described the importance of earning the high school diploma. He/she said,

I got my high school diploma. That is mainly why I was there. The whole reason why I was there because getting a job with a GED is really really hard. You can't do it. It is not possible. Everybody is looking for the high school diploma.

After the program, participants typically reflected on program policies that helped prepare them for work. These policies were related to the Work Ethic skill area. One participant stated, "The program helped me learn how to work."

**Program staff, teachers and environment.** Program staff, teachers, and the environment were generally noted by participants as being positive, supportive, offering

of individual attention, appropriately challenging, caring, and believing in them. One participant stated, “I realized that they are, the teachers are there because they really care. If they didn’t care, they wouldn’t be there. You know, they were there to help you. But they are also there to give you that constructive criticism too, you know.” Participants’ often connected this factor to their change in view of self.

**Access to program services.** Participants’ typical experience in the program included access to additional support services other than school and job training, although fewer participants noted utilization of these services post program. These support services included free mental health counseling, case management, employment assistance, financial education, and drivers training. Many of these factors connect to employment and education outcomes, personal and interpersonal skill development, and corpsmembers’ process of change. During the program, participants often commented on the significance of having onsite counseling. One participant stated,

I felt better about myself with counseling and everything that Urban Corps provides helped out a lot because there is a lot of stuff that is in my brain and I can’t explain it. It feels good when you talk about it.

This participant later described learning through counseling that it is o.k. to cry and now sees crying as a way to release tension instead of fighting.

A variant experience included accessing these services post program. The majority of participants who commented on post program access to services referred to assistance with employment. One stated, “I didn’t know what to do after Urban Corps. I thought I’d apply for a city job, doing any labor. But then one of the [employment assistance staff], she found me a job as an electrician at a company called XXX.” Later

this participant said he/she was able to join a union through this job and was making enough money to help support his/her grandparents and save money for school.

**Corpsmember diversity.** Two thirds of participants noted that they are more open-minded and accepting of others after interacting with corpsmembers from different cultures and races during the program. The interaction with diverse corpsmembers may be connected to interpersonal skills and changes in view of self. For instance, one participant who was previously involved in gangs reflected on interactions with corpsmembers from Iraq. This corpsmember stated,

I got to meet other people. I started hanging around with Iraqis. Before that I used to see an Iraqi and be like “oh man, does he have a bomb” or something like that. I got to realize that that was a stupid mentality that I had. It kind of opened my mentality to hang around other people and have an open mind and just say something different. Before that it was just Mexicans.

Some of these participants also noted that interaction with diverse corpsmembers helped them situate themselves in terms of their relationship to the program, their neighborhoods, the law, and their future. One participant demonstrated this impact of corpsmember diversity:

There is a big diversity of why people are at the Corps. You have the people who are at the Corps from third world countries and value it. Then you see the United States corpsmembers that really don't care much for it or are just there just to be there. I'm not saying you can't fake it to make it, or you can assimilate, or you can some way through osmosis take in what you need to take in, but I just

seen this like dichotomy of different types of people there for different types of reasons and it really let me assess what I am there for.

Participants also noted that exposure to corpsmembers from other cultures and races helped them in the jobs after the program. For instance, they reported being more open minded and accepting of co-workers, and advocating for clients/customers who do not speak English fluently. One participant described an interaction with an Iraqi woman who was a bystander witness of a fight to which he/she had to respond as the security guard on duty. He/she described,

It was a big gang rival thing so everybody was fighting against each other. I showed up and a lady, she was in her 50s maybe 60s, she came up to me and tried to speak to me like she was trying really her hardest to speak English. Luckily from Urban Corps, I could understand her basically because I was patient. So every time she would try to say a word that she didn't know she would try to keep on repeating it until I finally got it down and I didn't get mad or start getting angry or anything. So she was actually happy with it and my supervisors were there so they noticed it.

Interactions with diverse corpsmembers seemed to impact participants' change in view of self, and outcomes related interpersonal and personal skills, giving back, and employment post program.

**Program improvement recommendations.** Nine participants (60%) offered recommendations for program improvement. Recommendations included offering transportation vouchers, childcare services, and marketing exposure to international

corpsmembers. For instance one participant made the following suggestion when asked if there was anything else to share at the end of the interview:

They [UCO] should actually put that in their pamphlet. About the people at Urban Corps. Because they should probably put it “diversity, meeting a diverse group, meeting people from all around the world. Urban Corps is meeting, getting to know somebody’s story of how they got here, why they got there, and what they did to get there from Iraq, Africa, Thailand, Mexico, America.” I mean they can fix it, I am just trying to think of something.

This participant’s recommendation illustrates the impact of the program factor related to corpsmember diversity. Other recommendations reflect potential program factors that may serve to decrease barriers and increase corpsmembers’ chances for program completion.

### **Factors Related to Peers and/or Family**

Family and peers played an important role in participants’ lives. The research team identified two factors describing peers’ and family’s impact on positive change, successful completion of the program, and outcomes related to giving back before, during, and after the program. The two factors are: (a) Family, peers, significant others, and children (born and expecting) give support, encouragement, and believe in corpsmember; and (b) Family, peer, and significant other overcame similar hardships. Participants also report families and peers as presenting challenges to their success, which were described in the barriers section. Table 19 displays the factors related to peers and/or family.

Table 19

*Perceived Factors Related to Peers and/or Family*

Factor	<i>n</i> Before	<i>n</i> During	<i>n</i> After	Typicality Index
Gave Advice, Support, etc.	11	4	4	Typical to Variant
Relatable	2	5	2	Rare to Variant to Rare

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting family and peer factors before, during, and after the program at least once.

Three participants experienced both factors, but only one experienced both factors at the same time.

**Family, peers, significant others, and children (born and expecting) give support, encouragement, and belief in corpsmember.** Typically participants described at least one family member, usually a parent, encouraging them to do better in school, make better choices, and hang out with friends who were good influences before the program. One participant described the influence of his/her significant other on his/her belief in him/herself before the program. He/she stated “You don’t know you are worth anything. You just think you are whatever you think you are. But if someone who is unbiased totally believes in you for some, whatever reasons, it gives you something to work off of.” During and after the program, fewer participants talked about friends, significant others, children, and family of origin encouraging and believing in them. Some participants reflected on their desire to be better parents, so having children encouraged them to change. One participant said, “I want better for my kids.”

**Family, peer, or significant other overcame similar hardships.** Not surprisingly, many participants shared about the impact of being surrounded by people

who overcame similar barriers while in the program as compared to before or after the program. Participants' ability to relate to these people, which positively impacted them. One participant described his/her experience meeting with other peers in the program. He/she expected that his/her peers would want to fight like in high school. He/she stated,

I noticed that everyone was pretty much in the same boat that I was. You know, just trying to do something better for themselves. Not really trying to look for problems, just doing what they want to do. Go to work and go to school and go home like any other regular person. So, I made a lot of friends.

Family, significant others, children, and peers impacted participants' lives in two main ways: by encouraging and by overcoming similar barriers. Participants did not always listen to positive encouragement, especially before the program. However, these factors seemed to impact participants' enrollment in and completion of the program, and connected to their process of change and post program outcomes.

### **Factors Related to Specific Motivating Events and/or Interactions**

Participants described specific events and/or interactions with others that marked positive turning points in their lives. The research team identified these events and/or interactions when participants described the situation or encounter in detail including that it only happened one time. Three categories describe the factors related to motivating events and/or interactions: (a) Specific interaction with a family member, significant other, child(ren), or other people; (b) Experience with an institutional barrier; and (c) Experience with a beneficial institutional policy. Table 20 displays these factors before, during, and after the program.



Table 20

*Perceived Factors Related to Motivating Events and/or Interactions Before, During, and After the Program*

Factor	<i>n</i> Before	<i>n</i> During	<i>n</i> After	Typicality Index
Interaction w/ family, SO, kids, other	10	2	8	Typical to rare to Typical
Experience with barrier	6	1	1	Variant to Rare
Experience with beneficial policy	4	1	0	Variant to Rare to Not Reported

*Note.* *n* = number of participants reporting that factor at least once before, during and after the program. SO = significant other.

Seven participants reported experiencing more than one factor or experiencing a factor more than one time.

**Specific interaction with a family member, significant other, child(ren), or other people.** Participants typically experienced a specific one time event or interaction with a family member, significant other, child(ren), or others that motivated them to change before and after the program. This factor, like the other two factors, were rarely reported during the program. Examples of one time events or interactions include finding out about a pregnancy, death, illness, or moving because of a significant other's job. These events and interactions could be similar to categories described under family and peer influences, except these factors were described by participants as specific turning points in their lives. In contrast, the categories described under peer and family factors were described by participants in more general terms.

One participant described the experience of finding out he/she was expecting a child. He/she stated, "I found out I had to be on a good track when I found out I was having a baby. That is what took me to a right track. But I guess if I wouldn't have had my son, I would have just, I don't know. I guess I would have been a different person." Another participant described taking a risk by moving with his/her significant other when he/she got a job out of the area after the program. He/she stated,

My [partner] got a job up here. So I took a chance, we took a chance.

And I was on Craigslist looking for a job one morning and stumbled upon a warehouse job and was working there. Four or five months into it, someone there seen me with maybe an ability to do something different. So they gave me an opportunity to become a CEO of my own company. I have two [online retail stores]. Last month I yielded about \$19,000 and this month I am about there.

Both participant quotes illustrate specific events that led to positive change in their lives. Other participants shared detailed conversations that sparked an internal desire to make a change in their lives.

**Experience with institutional barrier.** Many participants described an experience with an institutional barrier that resulted in positive change. Examples include aging out of foster care, getting released from prison, jail, juvenile hall, house arrest, or drug treatment, and decreasing the frequency of meetings with parole and probation officers. One participant described feeling motivated when he/she was released from prison. He/she stated, "I had just gotten out of prison when I got back to the program so I wanted to change. Describe myself? Ambitious. Ambitious to get that

chapter over in my life and get my diploma.” The majority of these experiences led participants to apply to the program.

**Experience with a beneficial institutional policy.** The least frequently reported factor influencing participants’ process of change and outcomes includes participants’ experiences with an institutional policy that benefitted them. All participants reporting this factor described opportunities to earn high school credits and/or GEDs while in juvenile hall or prison. They believed these opportunities increased their chances of acceptance into the program and helped them earn their high school diplomas within UCO’s one-year time limit. One participant stated, “I was in a behavioral facility and I was doing good. I was getting double the credits and I was supposed to graduate when I was 16.”

In total, the research team identified 14 subcategories describing participants’ perceived process of change, ten subcategories describing perceived outcomes, and nine subcategories describing perceived factors that influenced change and outcomes. Participants changed in terms of their attitudes (positive and negative), behaviors (positive and negative), and intrapersonal ways of being (positive); and in their exposure to nine barriers over time. Outcomes included five specific job and life skills, attitudes and actions related to giving back, and goals related to education, employment, and the American Dream. Influencing factors included four program factors, two general factors related to influence of peers and/or family, and three factors related to specific interactions and/or events. Table 21 displays the research questions, domains, categories and subcategories. The next section will describe a tentative model showing connections between these findings.

Table 21

*Categories and Subcategories by Research Questions and Domains*

Research Question	Domain	Category	Subcategory	Typicality Index <sup>1</sup>			
1 & 2	7	1- Change in view of self over time	1. Positive Attitudinal	General			
			2. Positive Behavioral	General			
			3. Positive Intrapersonal	Variant			
			4. Negative Behavioral	Rare			
			5. Negative Attitudinal	Rare			
1 & 2	1	2- Change in exposure to barriers over time	6. Specific Academic Organizations	General to Typical			
			7. Family	General to Variant to Typical			
			8. Personal	General to Variant			
			9. Money	Typical to Rare to Typical			
			10. Education	Typical to Variant			
			11. Gangs	Typical to Rare to 0			
			12. Employment	Variant to Typical			
			13. Institutionalization	Variant to 0 to Variant			
			14. Border	Rare			
			2	4	3- Future plans/goals outcomes after the program	15. Stable Employment	Typical
						16. American Dream	Variant
						17. Enrolled in School	Rare
			2	5	4- Giving back outcomes during and after the program	18. Action	Variant to Typical
						19. Attitude	Variant to Typical
2	6	5- Job/Life skills outcomes during and after the program	20. Academic/ Professional Skills	General			
			21. Personal Skills	General to Typical			
			22. Work Ethic Skills	General to Typical			

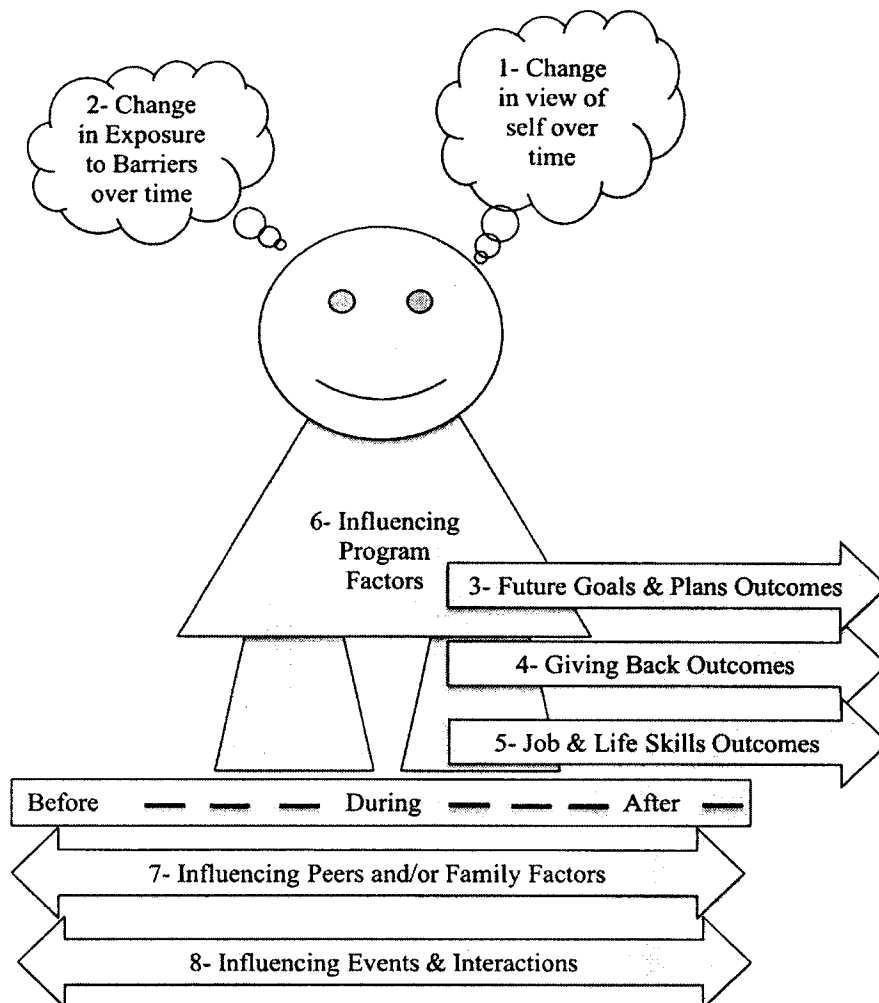
			23. Interpersonal Skills	Typical
			24. Independent Living Skills	Typical to Variant
3 & 3.1	3	6- Influencing Program factors during and after the program		
			25. Program structure	General to Typical
			26. Program staff, teachers, environment	General to Variant
			27. CM diversity	Typical
			28. Access to services	Typical to Variant
3 & 3.1	2	7- Influencing Peers/Family factors over time		
			29. Gave advice, support	Typical to Variant Rare to Variant to Rare
			30. Relatable	
3 & 3.1	8	8 - Specific motivating events/ interactions over time		
			31. Interaction with family, SO, kids	Typical to Rare to Typical
			32. Experience with barrier	Variant to Rare
			33. Experience with beneficial policy	Variant to Rare to 0
3	9	9- Program Recommendations		

*Note.* The categories and subcategories were based on the domain structure and answered each research question. The typicality index is based on Hill (2012). General = 14 to 15; Typical = 8 to 13; Variant = 3 to 7; Rare = 1 to 2.

### **Model Illustrating Corpsmembers' Perceived Process of Change, Influencing Factors, and Outcomes**

Figure 4 shows the relationship between the domains that assist in understanding corpsmembers' process of change, influencing factors, and long-term outcomes described by the categories.

**Figure 4.** Model of the Relationships between Perceived Process of Change, Influencing Factors, and long-term outcomes



*Figure 3.* The person at the center represents participants. The person appears to be standing on a street indicating the time periods within which the findings are situated. *Barriers Over Time, Change in View of Self, and Future Goals and Plans After the Program* illustrate ways in which participants experienced a process of change. *Program Factors* are at the heart of the person. *Influence of Peers and/or Family and Motivating Events and Interactions* illustrate the occurrence of these factors across time. *Job and Life Skills and Giving Back* are in arrows from during to after the program illustrating the time periods in which these occurred.

A corpsmember is at the center of the model to emphasize that these findings are based on their perspectives of their experiences before, during, and after the program. The words “before,” “during,” and “after” are embedded in a road to show that corpsmembers’

development is unfolding overtime. *Barriers Before, During, and After* (Domain 1), *View of Self Before, During, and After* (Domain 7), and *Future Plans and Goals After the Program* (Domain 4) are in call outs to illustrate that these categories seemed to impact outcomes in participants behaviors, attitudes, and/or intrapersonal ways of being across time. *Peer and Family Influences* (Domain 2) and *Motivating Events and Interactions* (Domain 8) are in bi-directional arrows under the road to illustrate that corpsmembers experience these factors across time. *Job and Life Skills* (Domain 6), and *Giving Back* (Domain 5) are in arrows that move from during to after the program to indicate long-term outcomes. Finally, *Program Factors Influencing Change* (Domain 3) is directly over “during” and in the heart of the corpsmember because this study was situated around their experiences in Urban Corps. *Program Recommendations* (Domain 9) was not included in the model because, while important, they do not directly relate to the perceived process of change, influencing factors, and long-term outcomes.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION

This study sought to understand corpsmembers' perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors that related to their experiences in UCO, a second chance job training-high school diploma program. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) bioecological theory of human development provided a theoretical framework because this study sought to understand UCO alumni's development-in-context over time. Through understanding participants' experiences in high school, UCO, and up to three years post program, depth was given to existing studies that examined specific variables and constructs related to students' degree of engagement with high school over time.

To explore participants' process of change through an ecological lens, time parameters were established offering boundaries for the study. While this study specifically looked at the process of change during the program, interview data was collected based on three distinct time periods to gather sufficient evidence to identify a process of change: before, during, and after the program. Before the program included participants' experiences in high school, dropping out of high school, and the time between high school and the program. During the program included participants' experiences while enrolled in UCO up to graduation. After the program included up to three years of experiences post graduation, and plans for the future. Findings offered insight into a perceived process of change, highlighted perceived outcomes learned during and applied post program, and provided evidence for perceived influencing factors relevant to the work of counselors, educators, and staff working in programs like UCO.



The findings consisted of nine categories within nine domains and 34 subcategories. A perceived process of change was illustrated by the following categories and subcategories: (a) Change in view of self in terms of positive and negative behavioral and attitudinal changes, and positive intrapersonal changes; and (b) Change in exposure to nine barriers including institutionalization, money, family, crossing the border, personal, education, employment, gangs, and specific academic organizations. Perceived outcomes included the following categories and subcategories: (a) Future plans and goals related to education, employment, and the American Dream; (b) Giving back in terms of attitude and actions; and (c) Job and life skills in the areas of personal, academic and work, independent living, interpersonal, and work ethic. Perceived factors influencing the process of change and outcomes consisted of the following categories and subcategories: (a) UCO program factors including positive program staff, teachers, and environment, the program structure, corpsmember diversity, and access to support services during and after the program; (b) Peer and family factors including support, advice and encouragement, and being relatable in overcoming similar barriers; and (c) Factors related to specific motivating events and interactions with families, significant others and children, experiences with institutional barriers, and experiences with beneficial institutional policies.

### **Theoretical Implications**

UCO alumni's perceived process of change may be illustrative of the bioecological theory of human development, specifically as they related to the individual, microsystem, and macrosystem layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The perceived change in view of self may be understood as developmental outcomes

defined as “psychological development...that takes place within the mind [and] involve evolution, through the life course, of established patterns of mental organization and content that are characteristic of the particular person” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 87). Developmental outcomes are observed from the “characteristic ways in which the person subjectively experiences and objectively deals with the world in which he or she lives (including perceptions of the behaviors of others toward the self)” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 87). UCO alumni perceived changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and intrapersonal ways of being from high school to up to three years post graduation. These perceived changes were evident from their reflections on increasing their belief in themselves, and moving from a sense of being lost to a sense of belonging and having direction. They also experienced behavioral changes that reflect new ways of interacting with their microsystems. For instance, they experienced moving from behaving like “heathens” engaged in “street life” to behaving more “maturely” by going to work each day and spending time with family. UCO alumni’s view of self evolved over the course of time under study.

Some of these developmental outcomes may reflect typical developmental changes for adolescents and emerging adults. Many participants reflected that their “rebellious knucklehead” behaviors in high school were appropriate given the developmental timeframe within which they were situated at the time. They were simply doing what “normal” teenagers do: partying, hanging out with friends, disregarding parental advice, and ignoring authority (Berk, 2012). In terms of their self-sabotaging attitudes, these could also be considered somewhat normal for teenagers. The sense of

being lost and without direction is also common in teenagers and early adults (Berk, 2012). However, most teenagers do not drop out of high school (see Chapters 1 and 2).

UCO alumni experienced an *ecological transition*, or a “move by the developing person into a new and different ecological context” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) when they enrolled in the program. The UCO program structure required participants to play a different role and engage in activities that they had not previously experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). UCO’s supportive staff and teachers, and positive environment seemed to set participants on *developmental trajectories*, or sustained patterns of motivation to change their way of being (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). The program structure and support services seemed to contribute to UCO alumni’s experience of developmental trajectories in that expectations for behavior were outlined, routines were established, and mental health and employment needs were attended to.

Perhaps these program factors may be linked to the decline in experiencing most barriers during the program. Specifically, employment issues and institutionalization were not reported as issues during the program. Money, personal, and family issues were only reported by 13%, 20% and 27% of participants during the program, respectively, as compared to 53%, 100%, and 93%, respectively, of participants before and 67%, 47%, and 60%, respectively, of participants after the program. Most other barriers followed a similar trend of being more prevalent before and after than during the program with one exception. Issues with gangs were not reported at all post program. The decline in experiencing issues with gangs may be linked to corpsmember diversity, a perceived program factor. UCO alumni in this study consistently attributed exposure to diverse corpsmembers from around the world through work and school to helping open their

minds to accept all people. Diverse corpsmembers may have *developmentally instigative characteristics* or aspects to their life stories that “produced powerful interactive effects” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 148) in the two thirds of participants who reported issues with gangs before the program.

UCO alumni also experienced interactions with family, significant others, and their children that may have contributed to their developmental trajectories. For instance, UCO alumni reported both negative encounters (e.g., death of a family member) and positive experiences (e.g., moving to be with a significant other resulting in a better paying job) that led to changes within themselves and their environments. In another example of an ecological transition, participants reported the experience of being a father or mother (change in family microsystem role) motivated them to change their lives, most frequently reported in terms of returning to school to earn their diploma. Specific turning points occurred for some when they transitioned out of institutionalization. Ecological transitions such as these (e.g., release from prison, aging out of foster care) were described as key moments along their process of change “to be somebody.”

Over the course of the program, UCO alumni’s roles and activities changed, which are necessary for developmental change to occur (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). A closer look at their perceived outcomes may further illuminate their changing roles and activities. All UCO alumni learned new activities related to academic and professional skills (e.g., essay writing, use of landscaping tools) during the program and all but one reported using these skills post program. Personal, work ethic, and interpersonal skills may have impacted both how they experienced their role and gave them new activities to navigate personal, job, and relationship challenges. For

instance, UCO alumni “learned how to work” (e.g., grooming, punctuality), and learned strategies to manage anger (e.g., count to ten before responding in frustrating situations). They also learned to accept all people and many were not afraid to try new things. These outcomes are indicators of ways in which UCO alumni “became somebody.” These outcomes may also reflect education, employment, life skills, and risky behavior outcomes measured in previous studies of participants in programs such as UCO (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011).

Other outcomes also highlight changes in their roles and activities, some of which also connect to previous research focused on programs such as UCO (i.e., Conservation Corps, Youth Corps, and Youthbuild). Most closely aligned with outcomes measured in studies of programs similar to UCO are outcomes related to giving back through inspiring and encouraging others, and through actions. The frequency of UCO alumni having attitudes and taking actions related to giving back increased post program. Duerden et al. (2011) also found corpsmembers participation in a conservation corps program was associated with civic engagement. Independent living outcomes do not appear in existing research involving Conservation Corps and Youth Corps programs. However, UCO alumni seemed to learn important activities, such as financial management and home remodeling, that also contributed to their new role of “being somebody.”

In terms of their future, UCO alumni reported three outcomes, of which two have been consistently measured in previous studies of programs such as UCO (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011). Stable employment offering adequate compensation and continuing education post program continue to be challenging for many UCO alumni. Many UCO alumni in this study also reported having plans to

continue school immediately following graduation from UCO and/or return to school in the future. Price et al. (2011) also found that corpsmembers had expectations to continue school and have a steady, high paying job, but participants in their study did not actually show significant education and employment outcomes compared to a control group. In terms of understanding development-in-context, the education and employment outcomes highlight that while many learned new job-related activities associated with changing the way they view their role as students and employees, challenges in actually continuing education and securing stable employment persist post program.

The individual and microsystems have been the focus of discussion to this point. One outcome illustrates the impact of the macrosystem on UCO alumni's development: Striving for the American Dream. Forty percent of participants in this study described what one participant called "the American Dream." They expressed a desire to earn a living to support a family, buy a house, and be free to choose to do whatever they want. Their expressed desire reflects a "set of characteristic beliefs and lifestyles" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 150) pertaining to a macrosystem impacting participants' development.

The majority of findings related to the perceived process of change and influencing factors in this study can be connected to the bioecological model of human development (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Additionally, the perceived process of change and most of the influencing factors can be substantiated by existing literature focused on risk and protective factors that impact high school students' level of engagement in school. Understanding UCO alumni's development-in-context captures the added complexity within which students such as these grow over time. Understanding the findings in terms

of the bioecological theory of human development may explain, in part, their “atypical” disengagement from high school and re-engagement in a second chance high school program like UCO.

### **Implications for Practice and Future Research**

Understanding UCO alumni’s development-in-context illuminates the complexity within which they live and grow. Comprehensive programs rooted in social justice may address the many needs described by participants in this study. Davis (2006) supported the need for comprehensive programs, such as Youthbuild in offering multiple opportunities for academic achievement and job skills training. Koffman et al. (2011) recommended that comprehensive gang prevention programs include “microinterventions in four areas: (a) biobehavioral, (b) psychosocial-emotional, (c) academic, and (d) family system support” (p. 240). Jones (2011; 2013a) described an alternative high school program based on choice theory that empowers students to engage in self-directed learning by giving students space to make choices about their behavior in school. UCO’s program components (see Chapter 1) and the perceived influencing factors reported by participants also illustrated a comprehensive program with potential to address many of the needs of students such as those in this study.

Counselors and counselor educators are in a unique position to contribute to the development of comprehensive programs rooted in social justice, especially given the emphasis on interventions addressing at-risk students’ mental health concerns (i.e., biobehavioral, psychosocial-emotional, family systems support, and choice theory). Counselors are prepared to design and engage in individual and group interventions that address complex needs and seek to assist clients in a change process (Neukrug &

Schwitzer, 2006). Social justice has been identified as the fifth force of counseling (Lee, 2012). At its core, social justice is rooted in the belief that all people deserve to be treated with equity, have access to social capital-building resources, and participate in making decisions about policies and laws that impact their lives (Crethar et al., 2008; Lee, 2012). Social justice counseling calls for counselors to be leaders and advocates within their organizations for clients' wellbeing (Chang, Barrio Minton, Dixon, Myers, & Sweeney, 2012). One way for counselors to be leaders in social justice and advocacy is to infuse evidence-based practice in their work with clients and organizations (Hays et al., 2012).

This study demonstrated social justice in action in several ways that may offer counselors guidelines for integrating social justice in their work with students similar to UCO alumni. Counselors may consider sharing the model of the relationships between perceived process of change, influencing factors, and long-term outcomes (see Figure 4) with clients so that clients may fill in processes of change, outcomes, and influencing factors directly related to their lived experiences. In group settings, social justice counselors may design opportunities for cross-cultural dialogue based on clients' individual experiences of change, outcomes, and influencing factors. These suggestions align with engaging in individualized social justice counseling (Lee, 2012).

Within the organization, counselors may use Figure 4 as a guide to engage in social justice work organizations. For instance, counselors may consider conducting a needs assessment to confirm which perceived barriers, outcomes, and influencing factors may be most relevant to their client populations (Hays et al., 2012). Perhaps barriers may be expanded or revised and the program outcomes may be modified to more closely



reflect the needs of the organization. Counselors and counselor educators may also provide staff development aimed at increasing teacher's and program staff's social justice preparedness in addressing academic, career, and mental health needs of at-risk students (Brubaker & Goodman, 2012). For instance, Smith (2012) worked with UCO teachers and counselors to design and implement a one and a half day training aimed at increasing their multicultural and advocacy competencies and facilitation skills of activities focused on cross-cultural dialogues and developing personal resources (e.g., increased self-awareness, self-reliance). This training was designed after a needs assessment and participatory action research study was conducted with UCO teachers and counselors. Another way counselors may consider working with programs like UCO would be to engage in staff development focused on enhancing student motivation and resilience as motivation and resilience are linked to establishing a caring and supportive environment (Moen & Erikson, 1995).

Other ways in which program staff and counselors may utilize these findings could include working with clients/students to enhance or implement policies that UCO alumni identified as important to their experience (e.g., personal grooming). Programs similar to UCO may consider enrolling diverse students from around the world and Finally, programs such as UCO may consider offering employment assistance and mental health services on site for enrolled students and alumni.

Two brief vignettes describe comprehensive interventions based on social justice principles that relate to building professional and work ethic skills, and academic and personal skills across UCO's program components. UCO students working on a graffiti removal crew are likely to learn professional job skills related to commercial painting,

power washing, and using boom lifts (UCO, 2009). In science class, perhaps lessons might focus on water pollution and water quality control including intentionally discussing the applicability of the lesson to their work. A counseling psychoeducational group might focus on leadership development and teamwork, both work ethic skills, and connect students' learning about their leadership style to their experiences working on the graffiti removal crew. Finally, employment assistance case managers may help students communicate to future employers about their work and work ethic skills to enhance students' job marketability. Employment outreach coordinators may also contact potential employers in commercial painting to establish internship and job opportunities for students. In terms of social justice, UCO students may build their capacity to access employment by having opportunities to connect their work with their academic and personal learning.

Similarly, personal and academic skills may be reinforced by program components other than mental health counseling and the charter school. UCO students used to engage in daily journal writing while in work and school with topics related to self-awareness, environmental issues, and other relevant topics to their experience in UCO (Education Director, personal communication, February 14, 2013). During member checking, one participant recalled a journal prompt focused on a metaphor for changing his/her view of self that he/she still thinks about today. Specifically, that journal prompt compared UCO students' changing attitude to an egg, a carrot, and coffee beans. When cooked, the raw egg becomes hard, the raw carrot becomes soft, and the coffee beans become a delicious mixture of flavors in liquid form that is flexible, adaptable, and comforting. Teachers may assist UCO students in writing mechanics (e.g., grammar,

paragraph structure) by providing feedback on journals. Counselors may discuss the personal connection UCO students have to the journal topics, such as the connection described by the participant during member checking. Supervisors may structure the work schedule so that students have time during the workday to write and discuss journal topics. Employment assistance case managers may connect cover letter writing with journal writing by helping students with paragraph structure and grammar, and by incorporating journal topics about career development. Journal prompts may also focus on ways that UCO students' work gives back to the community, changes in their behaviors, responses to barriers in their lives, and any other topic relevant to their experiences and growth. In this example, UCO students may be empowered by increasing self-awareness and developing skills needed to advocate for themselves in the job search process (Kress & Paylo, 2012).

A final program development recommendation is related to future research. Programs, such as UCO, might consider working with counselor educators who are trained in developing an outcome measures (CACREP, 2009) that are valid and relevant to the program (Hays et al., 2012). For instance, an outcome measure based on these findings might include items to assess for the impact of different barriers, skill areas, and experience of influencing factors. Specific items based on these findings may include "I have felt like a failure," "I am somebody," "I choose to spend time with my family more often than with my friends," "I have regularly interact with people who of a different race, ethnicity, or nationality than me," or "I have a bank account." The outcome measure could be administered when potential students apply to the program, during program orientation, once during each quarter of enrollment, at graduation, and after the program.

This will allow programs to further understand student needs, and assess program impact over time. An outcome measure such as one briefly described here may be validated and used in future research and program evaluation.

Future research is also needed in other areas. The participant sample was predominantly male. This study may be replicated with female corpsmembers, international refugees, and those corpsmembers who do not complete the program. Qualitative studies such as this one offer a unique opportunity for marginalized populations to be heard. Quasi or experimental research designs using more advanced statistical analyses may assist in identifying correlations and causal connections between the subcategories identified under the perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors. For instance, quasi or experimental research designs may quantify correlations and determine possible cause and effect relationships between interactions with diverse corpsmembers, changes in view of self, and changes in exposure to barriers, such as gang and personal barriers. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) offered several quasi and experimental research design and method suggestions to capture development-in-context within different systems. Research focused on development-in-context may assist educators, counselors, and program staff to better understand and address their needs given the complexity within which these at-risk youth are coming of age.

### **Limitations**

The process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors were based on perceptions of a small sample of UCO alumni. Their experience of outcomes, particularly post program, may be dependent on where they were during the change process. For instance, the research team determined that only one participant had

experienced negative behavioral changes post program. However, more than one reported court-involvement due to domestic violence and trespassing post program. Yet at the time of the interview, one reported doing well and one did not in terms of their behaviors. The subcategories under the change in view of self need to be flushed out. For instance, perhaps labeling changes in terms of *positive* and *negative* are too limiting, and may not be accurate in describing participants' change patterns.

The process of change (i.e., positive and negative changes in view of self based on behavior, attitude, and interpersonal ways of being) needs to be further differentiated from the perceived outcomes. For instance, outcomes related to personal skills (e.g., accepting all people, anger management, and taking risks) seem to be associated with some of the ways participants experienced changes in their view of self. Similarly, several subcodes share labels. *Employment* appears as a barrier and outcomes related to future goals and plans. *Family* appears as a barrier and as an influencing factor. *Education* and *academics* may be found in barriers and outcomes, and are associated with program factors (i.e., program structure). CQR champions participant as expert and use of a research team for consensus coding. The categories and subcategories reported here reflect research team consensus on 1,025 data chunks, of which only 24 were double coded. The number of data chunks, including those double coded, is important because the research team identified categories and subcategories based on data that did not overlap with few exceptions. Additionally, participants reviewed and gave feedback that confirmed these findings reflected their experiences. To maintain the integrity of the application of CQR, the researcher did not further collapse categories and subcategories after the final research team consensus and member checking meetings.

Three additional limitations related to CQR may have impacted the findings in this study. Hill et al. (2005) recommended using between eight and ten interview questions per interview hour to allow for depth in participant responses. The semi-structured interview protocol in this study used 20 questions to gather data on experiences before, during, and after the program and the average interview length was slightly less than an hour. Using more than ten questions may have led to “thin data that resemble questionnaire information rather than an in-depth description of a participant’s experience” (Burkard et al., 2012). Additionally, the main researcher in CQR dissertations is responsible for managing data throughout the process (Hill et al., 1997). Research team members may not have been as closely immersed in the data because they were not managing data throughout the analysis process. Also, the data management process was an incredibly time-consuming that took seven months. There were times when multiple weeks passed between research team meetings so that research team members had to re-immense themselves in the data. The time between research team meetings and research team distance from the data due to this project being a dissertation may have impacted research team members’ closeness to the data (Thompson et al., 2012).

The theoretical framework aimed to understand development-in-context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The bioecological theory of human development allows for existing literature on risk and protective factors to be understood and provides theoretical support for findings. However, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), Bronfenbrenner and Mahoney (1975), and Moen, Elder, and Luscher (1995) offered research design models to specifically research development-in-context. This study did

not use any recommended developmental research design models because none of them were based solely on conducting qualitative research. Perhaps an alternative theoretical framework may have assisted in differentiating the perceived process of change, outcomes, and influencing factors, such as the Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change (Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2010) or educational resilience (Wayman, 2002).

Limited data sources, social desirability, researcher bias, and the primary researcher relationship with participants were also limitations in this study. Hill et al. (1997) recommended triangulating data sources, meaning more than one data source. For instance, they recommended utilizing a measurement related to the topic to triangulate the data. However, they also supported using one type of data source, in this case individual interview transcripts, as long as the sample size is 12 to 15. The demographic questionnaire asked participants to report on their current employment status and post graduation career and education activities, which provided additional data to triangulate results. However, both of these data sources rely on participant self-report. Self-report data limits the credibility of results because of participants' potential to respond with social desirability.

The primary researcher conducted all of the interviews. While the benefits included consistency in data collection, especially given the existing relationship with participants, researcher bias potentially entered data collection. Additionally, the existing relationship with the researcher may have increased participants' social desirability. Finally, research team member bias may have entered data analysis and impacted final results despite efforts to minimize bias (e.g., memoing).

## CHAPTER VI

### MANUSCRIPT

#### A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of Perceived Processes of Change and Outcomes Experienced by Second Chance High School Alumni

##### Abstract

This study focused on understanding the perceived processes of change and outcomes experienced by high school graduates of Urban Corps of San Diego County (UCO) from a bioecological theory of human development standpoint. UCO is a second chance high school diploma-job training program that offers students free mental health counseling and employment assistance. Limited research charted former high school dropouts' process of re-engagement with school and experiences after graduation. Using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) and Critical Theory, a research team identified four categories and 15 subcategories based on 15 semi-structured interviews with a homogenous sample of UCO alumni. Theoretical implications supported the utility of the bioecological theory of human development in understanding UCO alumni development-in-context. Findings may be applied in social justice counseling, advocacy, and outcome research.

*Keywords:* student development-in-context, process of change, high school dropout, social justice counseling, qualitative research



## A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of Perceived Processes of Change and Outcomes Experienced by Second Chance High School Alumni

Although research has documented the risk and protective factors related to high school student success and disengagement with school (e.g., academic self-efficacy, school-family connection), research provides few models illustrating a developmental process of change for those students who choose to re-engage in high school after dropping out (see Finnan & Chasin, 2007; Freado & Long, 2005). Fewer empirical studies report on perspectives of re-engaged high school alumni to identify their perceived long-term outcomes from earning a diploma. This study seeks to promote social justice by inviting former high school dropouts who successfully re-engaged with school and graduated from Urban Corps of San Diego County (UCO) to share their lived experiences over time.

UCO offered students who dropped out of mainstream high school a second chance at earning a high school diploma and learning environmental job skills (e.g., recycling, habitat restoration, water quality control). Similar programs include Conservation Corps and Youth Corps. Jastrzab, Blomquist, Masker, and Orr (1997) and Duerden, Edwards and Lizzo (2011) indicated positive impacts on participants of Youth Corps and Conservation Corps programs in terms of employment, education, income, civic engagement, and recidivism compared to control groups. However Price, Williams, Simpson, Jastrzab, and Markovitz (2011) did not find significant results in similar outcomes with Youth Corps program alumni. Price et al. (2011) conducted a national evaluation of the impact of Youth Corps using an experimental design to assess outcomes in terms of education, employment, civic engagement and life skills, and risky behaviors.

They compared alumni of Youth Corps programs and a similar comparison group up to 30 months post program. They did not find significant results in terms of education, employment, risky behavior, civic engagement and life skills for either the treatment or control groups. However, they did find that Youth Corps participants' educational expectations, perceived ability to make ends meet, and earnings were significantly different than the comparison group who did not attend Youth Corps. These findings suggested that Youth Corps program participants fair slightly better in educational expectations and some employment related outcomes, but do not actually attain educational degrees or secure stable employment at higher rates than non-program participants.

Instead of looking at specific outcomes post program, Bronfenbrenner (2005) suggested examining individual's *development-in-context*. Bronfenbrenner's (2005) model incorporated four key dimensions that provide a theoretical framework for studying human development-in-context: process, person, context, and time. The developmental *process* captures the dynamic interaction between the *person* and the *context*, which results in development outcomes over *time*. Cairns and Cairns (1995) suggested expanding existing research design methods to include identification of patterns and behavioral characteristics within individuals given their development-in-context. Bronfenbrenner (2005) also contended that future research designs should allow for the inclusion of subjective experiences of individuals' ecological context (i.e., micro-, meso-, exo-, and macrosystems). Using Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) and Critical Theory, researchers sought to understand UCO student's development-in-context using the following research questions: (a) How did participants experience a process of

change, if any, in Urban Corps of San Diego County?; and (b) What changes, if any, do participants report post program?

### **Research Design**

Qualitative research seeks to provide in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of participants in a study (Hays & Singh, 2012; Hill, 2012). The emphasis on collecting data from a smaller number of participants who are intimately connected to the focus of the study is a major difference from quantitative research designs. CQR and critical theory best fit the study because emphasis is on participant voice and researchers use strategies to minimize the impact of their subjectivity (Hill, 2012) and the participant-researcher power differential (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Organizational Context**

UCO was 1 of 13 Certified Conservation Corps in California and operated independently with a local board of directors (California Association of Local Conservation Corps [CALCC], 2008). There were four program components. Green Jobs Training included paid work in energy, water, and environmental conservation. The Charter High School offered a high school diploma program including preparation courses for the math and English California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE). Free mental health counseling services were provided for enrolled students and alumni, and included individual and group counseling and psychoeducational training related to personal, career, and academic needs. Employment assistance services were provided for enrolled students and alumni, and included resume writing, interview preparation, and employment networking. Students applied to the program and attended a 3-day orientation prior to being assigned to work in 1 of 7 environmental service

departments. Students worked four days per week and attended school one day per week starting at 7:30 AM and ending by 5:00 PM Monday thru Friday, with the exception of a few departments that worked nights and weekends depending on the fee-for-service contract. Please contact the first author for additional UCO information.

In terms of student race and nationality, 43% were Iraqi, 32% were Latino, 18% were African American, 7% were Asian, 1% was American Indian/Alaska Native, and less than 1% were White (UCO Charter School, 2010). More than 85% of the student population dropped out of mainstream high school and 65% are single parents (UCO, 2009). UCO (2009) reported that 71% of its students experienced improved economic status, 75% of the alumni were still employed, and students living in stable conditions improved from 50% to 79%. Over 1,400 students have earned a high school diploma and UCO has served over 6,000 youth (UCO, 2009).

### **Sampling Method**

This study utilized criterion sampling (Hays & Singh, 2012) to determine a homogeneous sample population. The criteria for the sample population consisted of UCO alumni who graduated in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, and October 2010, and had some mainstream high school experience from a school located within the United States. Graduates from these specific cohorts were included because they attended during the primary researcher's employment at the organization and had been out of the program for a long enough period of time to experience employment, possible continued education, and changes in personal life, but not more than three years (Burkard, Knox, & Hill, 2012). The primary researcher's prolonged engagement with the participants was likely to yield more in-depth interview responses (Hays & Singh, 2012).

A total of 46 participants were eligible to participate in the study. Of the 15 participants randomly selected only three participants agreed to participate. All remaining eligible participants were contacted and 12 more participants agreed to participate, which met the recommended sample size for CQR (Hill & Williams, 2012). Fourteen interviews occurred at Starbucks, an outdoor mall, or at participants' homes and one occurred over the telephone. In all cases, participants selected the venue and seating arrangements so that they were comfortable. Participants signed an informed consent and voluntary on-going consent was sought during member checking. Table 1 displays participant demographic, education, and employment information.

Table 1

*Participant Demographic, Employment, and Education Status Data*

ID	Race/ Ethnicity	Gender	Current Jobs	Employment		Continuing Education		Highest level of education	Children <sup>2</sup>	HS <sup>3</sup>	UCO <sup>3</sup>
				Status	Description	Enroll- ment Status	Description				
P003	African American/ Black	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	Trade certificate	Some community college	4	12	18
P004	Latino/a	Male	0	Unemployed	Actively applying	No	General Education	Some community college	0	24	36
P005	Asian American	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	n/a	High school diploma	0	24	8
P006	African American/ Black	Male	1	FT	Entrepreneur	No	n/a	High school diploma Some vocational training above and beyond	0	48	6
P007	Latino	Male	1	FT	Temporary	No	Trade certificate	UCO	2	54	9
P008	Latino/a	Male	1	PT	Temporary	No	Trade Certificate <sup>1</sup>	High school diploma	0	24	18
P009	Latino/a	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	General Education	Some community college	2	42	8
P010	Latino/a	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	Trade certificate	High school diploma	2	24	12
P011	Latino/a	Female	0	Unemployed	Actively applying	No	General Education <sup>1</sup>	High school diploma	3	24	60

P012	Multiracia	Male	0	Unemployed	n/a	No	n/a	High school diploma	1	30	15
P013	Latino/a	Male	2	PT and FT	Entrepreneur and Permanent	No	General Education	Some community college	1	48	14
P014	Multiracia	Male	2	PT and FT	Staffing Agency	No	General Education	Some community college	3	60	12
P015	Multiracia	Female	1	FT	Temporary	No	Trade certificate	Some community college	0	24	6
P016	Asian American	Male	1	FT	Permanent	No	Trade certificate	High school diploma	0	24	8
P017	African American/Black	Female	2	PT and FT	Permanent and Internship	Yes	Trade certificate	Some community college	0	48	23

*Note.* FT= full time employment; PT = part time employment; HS= public high school; UCO = Urban Corps of San Diego County; <sup>1</sup>= indicated intent to return to community college or vocational program during interview; <sup>2</sup>= Number of born or expecting children; <sup>3</sup>= Number of months in either public high school or UCO.

## **Research Plan**

A semi-structured interview protocol and self-report demographic survey was developed in four stages to increase trustworthiness and used a table of specifications based on the bioecological theory of human development and the time period in which participants were asked to reflect upon. Tables of specifications increase content validity of an instrument in that items are easily mapped to a theoretical framework (Leedy & Ormrod, 2010). The initial protocol and demographic survey were reviewed and revised by two content area experts and tested during a pilot study (Burkard et al., 2012). For instance, a prompt focused on before the program was “Prior to starting at Urban Corps, you attended a mainstream high school. Tell me about your experience there.” A question focused on during the program was “What changes did you notice in yourself over the course of the Urban Corps, if any?” A prompt focused on after the program was “Please tell me about your life today.”

Researchers incorporated additional strategies for trustworthiness including use of a research team to reach consensus during analysis. The research team consisted of three doctoral counseling students and an assistant professor who served as the external auditor. All research team members attended a 2-day orientation that consisted of CQR training, individual reflection, and team building facilitated mainly by the first author, and in part by the outdoor education specialist. By the end of the orientation, the research team members identified and discussed their individual bias, expectations, and assumptions, practiced identifying domains, abstracting codes, and cross-analysis through consensus, and strengthened relationships and communication skills. In addition, the research team members reached consensus on the final interview protocol.



Additional criteria to increase trustworthiness included dependability, transferability, credibility, confirmability, sampling adequacy, authenticity, substantive validation, and ethical validation (Hays & Singh, 2012). These criteria were met by using a research team and auditor, relying on existing theories, providing a thick description of the organizational context, sample population, and research design and method, memoing after each interview and during each consensus meeting, negative case analysis by the auditor, referential adequacy, member checking, and peer debriefing (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Data Analysis**

Research team and auditor immersion in the data throughout the analysis process is a key principle in CQR analysis (Hill et al., 2005). To this end, research team members continuously returned to raw data, reviewed domains, and completed memos at each consensus meeting. Three steps to data analysis occurred in a linear process over seven months: within case analysis, cross analysis, and developing narrative accounts across cases (Ladany, Thompson, & Hill, 2012; Thompson, Vivino, & Hill, 2012). The primary research team reached consensus and sent the final consensus versions during within and cross case analysis to the auditor. The auditor reviewed and provided feedback on the research team's consensus versions. The auditor and research team reached consensus on all final versions within each stage prior to moving to the next stage. Participants reviewed the narrative summaries during member checking.

The research team met over 25 times for 2 to 4 hours each, and completed individual work throughout within case analysis. Within case analysis involved creating five domains to which 548 raw data chunks were assigned (Thompson et al., 2012). The

final domain list consisted of the following five domains: (a) Future plans and goals, and actual future happenings; (b) Giving back during and after the program; (c) Specific job and life skills gained during the program and/or used in life after the program; (d) View of self before, during, and after the program; and (e) Irrelevant data. Twenty-four data chunks were double coded and 75 were irrelevant. Core ideas summarized the remaining 449 data chunks and were used in cross analysis.

Cross analysis involved generating four categories and 15 subcategories by clustering the abstracted core ideas from each domain across cases (Ladany et al., 2012). Additionally, a typicality index was determined based on how frequently the categories applied to the entire sample using the following labels: *general* for 14 to 15 participants, *typical* for 8 to 13 participants, *variant* for 3 to 7 participants, and *rare* 1 or 2 participants (Williams & Hill, 2012). The primary researcher compared individual transcripts to the categories and subcategories to develop the “brief narrative write-ups” and participants reviewed these during member checking (Hill, Thompson, & Williams, 1997, p. 55). These write-ups or summaries informed the final results and assisted with visually representing the data in a way that most closely reflected participants’ experiences.

### **Findings**

Participants’ perceived development-in-context was described as changes in view of self over time in terms of behaviors, attitudes, and intrapersonal ways of being. Participants also reported perceived outcomes post program in three categories that provided more depth to the developmental changes in view of self. These three categories included job and life skills, giving back, and future plans and goals for

employment, education, and lifestyle. Table 2 displays categories and subcategories with the typicality index.

Table 2

*Categories and Subcategories with Typicality Index*

Domain	Category	Subcategory	Typicality Index	
			During	After
View of self before, during and after	Change in view of self over time	1. Positive Attitudinal		General
		2. Positive Behavioral		General
		3. Positive Intrapersonal		Variant
		4. Negative Behavioral		Rare
		5. Negative Attitudinal		Rare
Specific job and life skills gained during the program and/or used in life after the program	Job and life skills outcomes during and after	6. Academic/work	General	General
		7. Personal	General	Typical
		8. Work Ethic	General	Typical
		9. Interpersonal	Typical	Typical
		10. Independent Living	Typical	Variant
Giving back during and after the program	Giving back outcomes during and after	11. Attitude	Variant	General Typical
		12. Action	Variant	Typical
Future plans and goals, and actual future happenings	Future plans and goals outcomes after the program	13. Employment		Typical
		14. American Dream		Typical
		15. Education		Variant Rare

*Note.* Cells left blank mean that categories and subcategories were not counted during that time period.

**Perceived Process of Change in View of Self**

Change occurred in positive, and to a lesser extent, negative directions over time in terms of behavior, attitude, and intrapersonal ways of being. Researchers identified perceived change over time in these three areas based on participant statements reflecting ways in which participants grew from before to after the program. Participants ( $n=15$ ) reported generally experiencing a positive and/or negative process of change in at least one area (i.e., attitude, behavior, and intrapersonal). Participants ( $n=15$ ) also generally experienced a process of change in more than one area. Fourteen participants experienced positive attitudinal and behavioral change, and six participants reported positive changes in terms of intrapersonal ways of being. It was rare for participants to experience negative attitude ( $n=1$ ) and behavior ( $n=1$ ) change over time.

**Positive behavioral change across time.** Fourteen out of 15 participants (93.33%) experienced positive behavioral changes over time. Participants described themselves as “rebellious knuckleheads” before the program. Words used to describe their behaviors before the program included immature, young, heathens, involved in gangs and street life, partying, ditching school, and smoking. Over the course of the program and after the program they stated that they were thinking with their heads, staying out of trouble, and caring for their families. One participant described his/her behaviors in high school: “I ditched a lot. I was in ROTC for a good 2 semesters. I didn’t ditch at all. You know I got my friends. And I just stopped going to school.” This participant recalls a period in time when he/she attended regularly, but that changed with a new friend group. However, when this participant was enrolled in the program, his/her behavior changed in that he/she did not ditch school or work, and he/she worked hard on the job.

Another participant described how his/her behavior in terms of working hard has paid off after the program. He/she stated,

Because back then [before the program] I couldn't afford nothing. And now, you know, I work my butt off for what I have and I am happy. I can honestly say, I probably have a pair of shoes to wear once every month. I got a lot of shoes.

Prior to the program, this participant's family struggled financially. However, he/she recalled earning money through illegal activities, not working hard, and spending all his/her earnings on partying. This shift in behaviors (i.e., partying and ditching before the program to working hard during and after the program) captures the general participant experience.

**Positive attitudinal change over time.** Participant changes in terms of their attitudes were related to thoughts and beliefs about who they are. Fourteen out of 15 participants (93.33%) went from reporting self-sabotaging beliefs (i.e., "I think I am a loser") to believing in their potential (i.e., "I can do anything," "I am worth something"). One participant stated his/her attitudinal shift in simple terms. He/she said "I am somebody now." Another participant recounted the moment he/she decided a change in mindset was in order:

I told myself an ultimatum "Okay, you gotta get it together. You have to get your diploma. You don't want to be 30 years old without your diploma." I'm like, I don't want to be a loser because I am not a loser. That is something I always tell myself, "never be a loser." I still tell myself "never be a loser." Losers suck.

He/she started the program with this attitude and has continued to embrace this attitude since graduation from the program.

Some participants talked about the attitudinal change in terms of having increased self-awareness and confidence, which was often attributed to having others, such as staff, teachers, and significant others, believing in them. One participant described

When I entered Urban Corps, I didn't have a lot of confidence. I was, I kind of had a negative outlook as far as where I was with my education. I knew that I had a lot to get done. I didn't have a lot of time to do it. Going in there, I came out completely different than when I went in and it just really increased my confidence. And that is something that is very necessary. I feel like if you don't believe in yourself, you can't expect other people to believe in you. And they [program staff and teachers] helped me believe in myself.

This participant demonstrated his/her attitudinal change from before to after the program, indicating that the program staff and teachers helped him/her believe in him/herself.

**Positive intrapersonal changes over time.** Six participants (40%) described change in terms of how they view their relation to others. Typically, participants described a sense of being lost, not having good friends or being friendless, and not trusting others before the program. For instance, one participant stated, “[The program] made me realize the world isn't out for you. ‘You can trust people, it's all in your head.’ It made me overcome that... my [social] anxiety issues. It made me overcome that.” Many shared that they did not belong anywhere except with their friends who were involved with gangs, graffiti, skateboarding, and partying.

During and after the program, they described having a sense of belonging, which led to a feeling of being found. They described having a sense of direction focused on the future. One participant reflected on being lost and finding him/herself. He/she stated,

“Where was I? Was I just nowhere? At the night I just think to myself, ‘I was just nowhere XXX. Look where I am now.’ And I just smile. I’m like ‘yup.’” This participant found direction, a sense of belonging, and this intrapersonal change brings a smile to his/her face.

**Negative changes post program.** One participant reported a negative attitudinal shift after the program. This participant felt helpless, described symptoms related to depression, and cried a lot during the interview. This participant has been unemployed since the program despite efforts to get a job and was not able to access the scholarship awarded at graduation to continue education. Another participant reported negative behavioral changes after the program. This participant experienced several traumatic events post program and described post program behaviors such as procrastination in getting a job, “laziness” in finishing a court-mandated community service requirement, and often partying with friends.

### **Perceived Post Program Outcomes**

Participants reported changes post program in terms of outcomes in job and life skills, giving back, and future goals. The research team calculated a typicality index during and after the program for job and life skill and giving back outcomes because participants reported learning from the program and using them in their lives post program. The typicality index for future goals and plans were only calculated post program because this category and subcategories pertained only to their lives post program.

**Job and life skills outcomes.** Generally, participants made statements about job and life skills they learned in the program. Participant statements about using specific

skills learned in the program (first  $n$  below) in some capacity after the program (second  $n$  below) included the following five job and life skills: (a) Academic and professional skills ( $n=15$ ;  $n=14$ ); (b) Personal skills ( $n=14$ ;  $n=13$ ); (c) Work ethic skills ( $n=14$ ;  $n=12$ ); (d) Interpersonal skills ( $n=10$ ;  $n=9$ ); and (e) Independent living skills ( $n=8$ ;  $n=5$ ).

Academic and professional skills referred to study skills, learning to use tools (e.g., weedwacker, chainsaw), recycling and water conservation, and commercial painting. Skills in this area may be noted in terms of a certificate or diploma (e.g., food handlers card, forklift training certificate, high school diploma). Participants talking about certificates and diplomas often connected these to opening doors in terms of employment post program. One participant described an academic skill. He/she stated, "I learned a lot of English." Another participant described how the forklift training he/she received in the program helped him/her in a job after the program. He/she said, "Remember [my job] had a forklift? That's where I originally learned it. That is why I told them [my employers] 'hey I know how to [use] the forklift' because there was one at Urban Corps."

Personal Skills included reports of learning anger management, overcoming social anxiety, taking life more serious, not being afraid to try new things, and making choices resulting in more positive situations (i.e., choosing not to hang with bad crowds, choosing to live at home to save money). Participants generally gained personal skills in the program. One participant stated, "I stayed more determined to not go out, not get in trouble, always worried about work [in the program]." Another participant described how his/her personal skills developed in the program and impacts his life today. He/she stated, "I don't have a problem doing things that I am not used to doing. Because going



through there really helped me so much. I honestly feel like if I hadn't have been through that program, a lot of things I would be afraid to do." This participant further described his/her love of yoga and learning about natural home remedies that he/she would have been afraid to try before the program.

Participants generally reported developing work ethic skills while in the program and the majority described using these skills in their lives after the program. Work Ethic Skills included learning to brand oneself, understanding that wearing the uniform means they represent the organization both on and off the job, punctuality on the job, work endurance, leadership, and being able to give and receive feedback about job performance. Branding oneself, work endurance, and leadership on the job were noted at both time periods suggesting that these three skills may be important to post program success. One participant described his/her application of leadership skills in his/her current job. He/she said, "I want to say leadership for one. I am able to, especially when no one else takes charge, I raise my hand and be like, 'hey I'll do it.'" Another participant stated, "Getting up early in the morning. I was never in to that." This participant attributed that learning of the importance of punctuality to his/her success as an entrepreneur post program.

Typically, participants learned interpersonal skills while in the program and use these skills in their lives today. Interpersonal skills included learning to talk with all people, accepting diversity, and being more patient and understanding with significant others, co-workers and customers or clients. One participant shared about the impact of his/her interpersonal skill development on his/her relationship. He/she stated, "It helped me pretty much with my relationship with my [partner]. It taught me how to be more

understanding because at Urban Corps it was o.k., they took the time to hear about what you had to say. I kind of took from that and heard what my [partner] had to say.”

The fewest number of participants reported learning skills relevant to living independently. Examples of skills in this area were financial management and remodeling or repairing homes. One participant stated,

They helped me get a bank account. Before I didn't have a bank account and I didn't really know much about that area. They got me a bank account where I wasn't charged anything to have a bank account so that allowed me to go and cash my checks at the bank and have money in the bank. And start savings. They helped me with financial management. They helped me learn how to prioritize what I needed to prioritize and the rest throw it in savings, if you can.

While a smaller number of participants learned skills in this area, it highlights an outcome area that has yet to be included in other studies set in similar organizational contexts.

**Giving back outcomes.** Outcomes related to environmental stewardship and community service, were noted in other studies involving Conservation Corps participants (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011). Typically, participants reported shifting attitudes ( $n=5$ ;  $n=10$ ) and taking actions ( $n=6$ ;  $n=9$ ) related to giving back to others, their communities, and the environment. Eight participants reported both actions and attitudes related to giving back. Participants noted taking specific actions and attitudinal changes as having increased after the program because of values and skills learned in the program. One participant described,

It [the program] made me feel more of a better person because not only was I making the community look nicer by removing a lot of the ugly graffiti that was out there. In that aspect it opened my eyes how much better San Diego can look if we take off a lot of that graffiti.

Other participants shared about developing a desire to inspire others, especially those who are faced with similar barriers, to make changes and to take care of the environment. For instance, during member checking one participant reiterated how he/she has different recycle tubs in his/her house and directs all visitors to appropriately use the tubs. He/she also commented on helping friends and family set up their own recycling tubs.

**Education, employment, and lifestyle Outcomes.** Positive outcomes related to participants' future plans and goals included the following three subcategories: (a) Stable employment and striving to improve employment ( $n=8$ ); (b) Hoping for the American Dream ( $n=6$ ); and (c) Enrolled in school and planning to finish the program ( $n=2$ ). Five participants reported more than one future plan and goal.

Eight participants (53.33%) described being in permanent, stable employment in the following areas: construction, landscaping, security, helping professions, military, and retail sales. Of these, three participants reported that they were entrepreneurs, which decreased the impact of their criminal record on their employment. Many of these participants described goals related to improving their current employment by seeking higher paying jobs and implementing strategies to grow their businesses.

Six participants (40%) described wanting to achieve the American Dream in terms of having freedom, getting married, owning homes, and providing for their families. When asked about future plans, one participant stated,

Marriage, kids, white picket fence, I don't know a dog. I mean work is going to be work...I am going to work for as long as I can. I just want what every American has. The freedom of choice to do whatever I want. If I so choose to do it, and I do. I don't know where the wind blows or where it will take me or what I will choose to do tomorrow. But definitely happy.

Five additional participants described similar hopes to make their own choices, have a family, and be happy.

Participants rarely enrolled in and completed coursework post program. Only two participants were enrolled in school at the time of the interview. One was completing a certificate in nursing and another was taking courses related to specialized job training for electricians. Both participants had plans to continue with school to advance in their chosen careers. Most participants expressed that they had planned to continue going to school after they graduated, but were unable to start and/or finish the courses and programs they enrolled in post program.

### **Discussion**

This study sought to understand corpsmembers' perceived process of change from a bioecological theory of human development standpoint (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Bronfenbrenner's (2005) theoretical framework allowed researchers to understand UCO alumni's development-in-context over time. Through understanding participants' experiences in high school, UCO, and up to three years post program, depth was given to existing studies that examined specific variables and constructs related to students' degree of engagement with high school over time. Additionally, the four categories and

15 subcategories identified perceived post program outcomes that confirmed and expanded outcomes identified in previous research on programs such as UCO.

UCO alumni's perceived process of change may be illustrative of the bioecological theory of human development, specifically as they related to the individual, microsystem, and macrosystem layers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). The perceived changes in view of self may be understood as developmental outcomes defined as "psychological development...that takes place within the mind [and] involve evolution, through the life course, of established patterns of mental organization and content that are characteristic of the particular person" (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 87). UCO alumni perceived changes in their attitudes, behaviors, and intrapersonal were evident from their reflections on increasing their belief in themselves, and moving from a sense of being lost to a sense of belonging and having direction. They also experienced behavioral changes that reflect new ways of interacting with their microsystems. For instance, they experienced moving from behaving like "heathens" engaged in "street life" to behaving more "maturely" by going to work each day and spending time with family. UCO alumni's view of self evolved over the course of time under study.

Some of these developmental outcomes may reflect typical developmental changes for adolescents and emerging adults. Many participants reflected that their "rebellious knucklehead" behaviors in high school were appropriate given the developmental timeframe within which they were situated at the time. They were simply doing what "normal" teenagers do: partying, hanging out with friends, disregarding parental advice, and ignoring authority (Berk, 2012). In terms of their self-sabotaging attitudes, these could also be considered somewhat normal for teenagers. The sense of

being lost and without direction is also common in teenagers and early adults (Berk, 2012). However, most teenagers do not drop out of high school. UCO alumni experienced an *ecological transition*, or a “move by the developing person into a new and different ecological context” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005) when they enrolled in the program. The UCO program structure required participants to play a different role and engage in activities that they had not previously experienced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). All UCO alumni learned new activities related to academic and professional skills (e.g., essay writing, use of landscaping tools) during the program and all but one reported using these skills post program. Personal, work ethic, and interpersonal skills may have impacted both how they experienced their role and gave them new activities to navigate personal, job, and relationship challenges. For instance, UCO alumni “learned how to work” (e.g., grooming, punctuality), and learned strategies to manage anger (e.g., count to ten before responding in frustrating situations). They also learned to accept all people and many were not afraid to try new things. These outcomes are indicators of ways in which UCO alumni “became somebody.” These outcomes may also reflect education, employment, life skills, and risky behavior outcomes measured in previous studies of participants in programs such as UCO (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011).

Other outcomes also highlight changes in their roles and activities, some of which connect to previous research focused on programs such as UCO (i.e., Conservation Corps, Youth Corps, and Youthbuild). Most closely aligned with outcomes measured in studies of programs similar to UCO are outcomes related to giving back through inspiring and encouraging others, and through actions. The frequency of UCO alumni having attitudes

and taking actions related to giving back increased post program. Duerden et al. (2011) also found corpsmembers participation in a conservation corps program was associated with civic engagement. Independent living outcomes do not appear in existing research involving Conservation Corps and Youth Corps programs. However, UCO alumni seemed to learn important activities, such as financial management and home remodeling, that contributed to their new role of “being somebody.”

In terms of their future, UCO alumni reported three outcomes, of which two have been consistently measured in previous studies of programs such as UCO (Duerden et al., 2011; Jastrzab et al., 1997; Price et al., 2011). Stable employment offering adequate compensation and continuing education post program continued to be challenging for many UCO alumni. Many UCO alumni in this study also reported having plans to continue school immediately following graduation from UCO and/or return to school in the future. Price et al. (2011) also found that participants in their study had expectations to continue school and have a steady, high paying job, but did not actually show significant education and employment outcomes compared to a control group. In terms of understanding development-in-context, the education and employment outcomes highlight that while many UCO alumni learned new job-related activities associated with changing the way they view their role as students and employees, challenges in actually continuing education and securing stable employment persisted post program.

The individual and microsystems have been the focus of discussion to this point. One outcome illustrates the impact of the macrosystem on UCO alumni’s development: Striving for the American Dream. Forty percent of participants in this study described what one participant called “the American Dream.” They expressed a desire to earn a

living to support a family, buy a house, and have freedom to choose to do whatever they want. Their expressed desire reflects a “set of characteristic beliefs and lifestyles” (Bronfenbrenner, 2005, p. 150) pertaining to part of their macrosystem.

### **Practical Implications and Future Research**

Understanding UCO alumni’s development-in-context illuminates the complexity within which they live and grow. Comprehensive programs rooted in social justice may address the many needs described by participants in this study. Davis’ (2006) supported the need for comprehensive programs, such as Youthbuild in offering multiple opportunities for academic achievement and job skills training. Koffman et al. (2009) recommended that comprehensive gang prevention programs included “microinterventions in four areas: (a) biobehavioral, (b) psychosocial-emotional, (c) academic, and (d) family system support” (p. 240). Jones (2011; 2013a) described an alternative high school program based on choice theory that empowers students to engage in self-directed learning by giving students space to make choices about their behavior in school. UCO’s program components also illustrated a comprehensive program with potential to address many of the needs of students such as those in this study.

Counselors and counselor educators are in a unique position to contribute to the development of comprehensive programs rooted in social justice, especially given the emphasis on interventions addressing at-risk students’ mental health concerns (i.e., biobehavioral, psychosocial-emotional, family systems support, and choice theory). Counselors are prepared to design and engage in individual and group interventions that address complex needs and seek to assist clients in a change process (Neukrug & Schwitzer, 2006). Social justice has been identified as the fifth force of counseling (Lee,



2012). At its core, social justice is rooted in the belief that all people deserve to be treated with equity, have access to social capital-building resources, and participate in making decisions about policies and laws that impact their lives (Crethar et al., 2008; Lee, 2012). Social justice counseling calls for counselors to be leaders and advocates within their organizations for clients' wellbeing and counselor education programs to train counselors as such (Chang, Barrio Minton, Dixon, Myers, & Sweeney, 2012). One way for counselors to be leaders in social justice and advocacy is to infuse evidence-based practice in their work with clients and organizations and counselor education programs may consider integrating opportunities for trainees to become critical consumers of best practice research (Hays, Wood, & Smith, 2012). Counselors working in alternative high school settings with students such as those from UCO may consider developing data-driven interventions that promote social justice to assist students in developing job and life skills, civic engagement, and future plans and goals (Dixon, Tucker, & Clark, 2010). Counselor training, including supervision, can prepare counselors to engage in social justice-based interventions that include psychoeducation and individual and group counseling that focus on increasing self-awareness, enhancing tools to advocate for oneself, and understanding students-in-context (Akos & Galassi, 2004; Ratts, Anthony, & Santos, 2010).

Programs, such as UCO, might consider working with counselor educators who are trained in developing an outcome measures (CACREP, 2009) that are valid and relevant to the program (Hays et al., 2012). For instance, an outcome measure based on these findings might include items to assess for the change in attitudes, behaviors, and intrapersonal ways of being, and program outcomes. Specific items based on these

findings may include “I have felt like a failure,” “I am somebody,” “I choose to spend time with my family more often than with my friends,” “I have regularly interact with people who of a different race, ethnicity, or nationality than me,” or “I have a bank account.” The outcome measure could be administered when potential students apply to the program, during program orientation, once during each quarter of enrollment, at graduation, and after the program. This would allow programs to further understand student needs, and assess program impact over time. An outcome measure such as one briefly described here may be validated and used in future research and program evaluation.

Future research is also needed in other areas. The participant sample was predominantly male. This study may be replicated with female corpsmembers, international refugees, and those corpsmembers who do not complete the program. Qualitative studies such as this one offer a unique opportunity for marginalized populations to be heard. Quasi or experimental research designs using more advanced statistical analyses may assist in identifying correlations and causal connections between subcategories. For instance, quasi or experimental research designs could determine if participants’ stage in the process of change interacts with program outcomes. Bronfenbrenner (1979; 2005) offered several quasi and experimental research design and method suggestions to capture development-in-context within different systems. Research focused on development-in-context may assist educators, counselors, and program staff to better understand and address their needs given the complexity within which these at-risk youth are coming of age.

### Limitations

The process of change and outcomes were based on perceptions of a small sample of UCO alumni. Their experience of outcomes, particularly post program, may be dependent on where they were during the change process. The subcategories under change in view of self need to be flushed out. For instance, perhaps labeling changes in terms of *positive* and *negative* are too limiting, and may not be accurate in describing participants' change patterns. The process of change (i.e., positive and negative changes in view of self based on behavior, attitude, and interpersonal ways of being) needs to be further differentiated from the perceived outcomes. For instance, outcomes related to personal skills (e.g., accepting all people, anger management, and taking risks) seem to be associated with some of the ways participants experienced changes in their view of self. CQR champions participant as expert and use of a research team for consensus coding. Participants reviewed and gave feedback confirming that these findings reflect their experiences. To maintain the integrity of the application of CQR, the first author did not further differentiate categories and subcategories after the final research team consensus and member checking meetings.

The theoretical framework aimed to understand development-in-context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 2005). However, Bronfenbrenner (1979, 2005), Bronfenbrenner and Mahoney (1975), and Moen, Elder, and Luscher (1995) offered research design models to specifically research development-in-context. This study did not use any recommended developmental research design models because none of them were based solely on conducting qualitative research. Perhaps an alternative theoretical framework may have assisted in differentiating the perceived process of change,

outcomes, and influencing factors, such as the Transtheoretical Model of Stages of Change (Norcross, Krebs, & Prochaska, 2010) or educational resilience (Wayman, 2002).

Hill et al. (2005) recommended using between eight and ten interview questions per interview hour to allow for depth in participant responses. The semi-structured interview protocol in this study used 20 questions to gather data on experiences before, during, and after the program and the average interview length was 53 minutes. Using more than ten questions may have led to “thin data that resemble questionnaire information rather than an in-depth description of a participant’s experience” (Burkard et al., 2012).

Limited self-report data sources, social desirability, researcher bias, and the primary researcher relationship with participants could have limited the study. Hill et al. (1997) recommended triangulating data sources. The demographic questionnaire asked participants to report on their current employment status and post graduation career and education activities, which provided additional data to triangulate results. However, both of these data sources rely on participant self-report. Self-report data limits the credibility of results because of participants’ potential to respond with social desirability.

The primary researcher conducted all of the interviews. While the benefits included consistency in data collection, researcher bias potentially entered data collection. Additionally, the existing relationship with the researcher may have increased participants’ social desirability. Finally, research team member bias may have entered data analysis and impacted final results despite efforts to minimize bias (e.g., memoing).

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## APPENDIX A

### Research Team Member Contract

**Research Purpose:** To understand the experience of moving from being a “high school dropout” to being a “second chance program graduate” in a second chance high school diploma program providing mental health counseling.

**Research Tradition & Paradigm:** Consensual Qualitative Research tradition and Critical Theory paradigm

**Research Team Member Characteristics & Skills:** Active listening, confrontation, empathy, respect, confident, conflict resolution, long-term commitment, self-starter, takes initiative, dependable; completed at least 1 doctoral-level qualitative research class; willingness to immerse yourself in the data; availability and time for data analysis over several months (see below for specific dates).

#### **Research Team Member Responsibilities & Commitments:**

- Research Design & Analysis
  - Development of Interview Protocol
  - Analysis of 12-15 individual transcripts into domains & codes done independently
  - Cross-analysis of transcripts as a whole done independently
  - Identify patterns and pathways between domains from previous rounds of analysis
  - Attendance of up to ten consensus coding meetings and 1 orientation on the dates/times listed in the following section. Dates are subject to change.
- Orientation & Meetings
  - **June 9-10, 2012:** 2-day Overnight Orientation
  - **\*August 25-26, 2012:** 2-Day Consensus Meeting (Individual transcripts)
  - **September 2012:** 1-Day Consensus Meeting (Auditor Feedback)
  - **October 2012:** 1-Day Consensus Meeting (Cross-analysis)
  - **November 2012:** 1-Day Follow-up Consensus Meeting (Cross-analysis) or Consensus Meeting (Auditor Feedback)
  - **December 2012:** 1-Day Consensus Meeting (Patterns & Pathways)
  - **January 2013:** 1-Day Consensus Meeting (Narrative Summaries)
  - **February 2013:** Final Consensus Meeting

#### **Research Team Member Incentives**

- Increase knowledge and experience in CQR/qualitative research
- Potential authorship on submitted manuscript(s) related to this project
- Weekend getaways including transportation, accommodation, and food

\*Tentative

## **Auditor Contract**

**Research Purpose:** To understand the experience of moving from being a “high school drop out” to being a “second chance program graduate” in a second chance high school diploma program providing mental health counseling.

**Research Tradition & Paradigm:** Consensual Qualitative Research tradition and Critical Theory paradigm

**Research Team Member Characteristics & Skills:** Knowledge and experience in qualitative research and CQR, long-term commitment, dependable, organized, detail-oriented; completed at least 1 doctoral-level qualitative research class; willingness to immerse yourself in the data; availability and time for data analysis over several months (see below for specific dates).

### **Research Team Member Responsibilities & Commitments:**

- Research Design & Analysis
  - Development of Interview Protocol
  - Audit the analysis of 12-15 individual transcripts into domains & codes done independently & the consensus coding of individual transcripts
  - Audit the cross-analysis of transcripts as a whole done independently & the consensus coding of cross-analysis
  - Audit the patterns and pathways identified individually & through consensus coding
- Orientation & Auditing Dates (Last date on each bullet audit deadline)
  - **June 9-10, 2012:** 2-day Overnight Orientation- attend part of it
  - **September 2012:** Audit domains & codes
  - **October 2012:** Review research team response to Audit
  - **October - November 16, 2012:** Audit Cross-analysis
  - **December 16 - January 11, 2013:** Audit Patterns & Pathways
  - **January 2013:** Audit Narrative Summaries
  - **January - February 14, 2013:** Final Audit

### **Auditor Incentives**

- Increase knowledge and experience in CQR/qualitative research
- Potential authorship on submitted manuscript(s) related to this project
- Weekend getaways including transportation, accommodation, and food, if applicable

## APPENDIX B

### DESCRIPTION OF PILOT STUDY

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY  
APPLICATION FOR EXEMPT RESEARCH: #201102057  
A Consensual Qualitative Research Pilot Study to Evaluate a Semi-structured Interview  
Protocol Focused on the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School  
Graduate

Danica G. Hays, PhD, LPC, NCC, (Responsible Project Investigator)  
Jayne E. Smith, M.A., NCC (Principal Research Assistant)  
LaShauna Dean, M.A., CSAC, NCC (Research Assistant)  
Erik Braun, M.A. (Research Assistant)  
Kate Bender, M.A. (Research Assistant)

The proposed pilot study will provide an evaluation of a semi-structured interview protocol and demographic survey that will be used in a future study focused on understanding the transformation from high school dropout to graduate from a second chance work-learn program. Burkard, Knox, and Hill (2012) recommended piloting the protocol and demographic survey with “at least two people who fulfill the participation criteria” (p. 87) to increase trustworthiness of the future study. There are not any published qualitative studies focused on participants or alumni of these programs to date. Likewise, there are not any published qualitative studies of participants’ experience with second chance programs that offer mental health counseling services. The research questions for this pilot study are:

1. How relevant is the interview protocol and demographic survey in producing data that reflects the participants’ process of change from high school dropout to graduate?
2. What revisions are needed to improve the interview protocol and demographic survey?

**Purpose**

This proposed pilot study will test and refine an interview protocol and demographic survey to be used in the future study briefly described above. This research project will utilize the Consensual Qualitative Research (CQR) tradition with a Critical Theory paradigm (Hays & Singh, 2012). According to Hill (2012), CQR combines phenomenology, grounded theory, and comprehensive process analysis to understand “long-term or individualized effects of therapist or client behaviors” (p. 517). This pilot study will follow the recommendation from Burkard, Knox, and Hill (2012) as it reflects one strategy for increasing trustworthiness of the CQR study.

**Method**

The proposed pilot study will utilize criterion sampling to identify up to two participants that reflects the same criteria for inclusion in the future study. Participants will be limited to alumni of the second chance program that graduated in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, or October 2010, and who have some mainstream high school experience from a school located within the United States. All participants will be at least 21 years old. The proposed pilot study will consist of two individual interviews, and written feedback from the participants on the interview protocol and demographic survey. Participants will be recruited by contacting them via email, and over the phone.

Interviews will last between 45 minutes to an hour, and will be semi-structured with an interview protocol that can be modified during the interview. This method allows the researcher to prepare questions targeting each research question of the study, but also provides freedom for the participant to offer additional information and new directions within each topic area. The interviews will be transcribed by the primary

research assistant who will remove all identifying information. Additionally, the primary research assistant will write field notes to record information about the fluidity of the interviews to provide evidence to assist in refining the protocol. The participants' written feedback will be included, but they will be instructed not to put their names on the document.

### **Research Team**

Research teams provide the foundation for CQR because multiple perspectives increase the likelihood of bracketing researcher bias, avoiding groupthink, objectively analyzing data, and reaching consensus (Vivino, Thompson, & Hill, 2012). Attention to group dynamics and effective management of member conflict are crucial to the success of CQR. Additionally, all research team members must have a basic understanding of CQR and an interest in the topic of study. This pilot study will utilize a primary research team of 3 to 5 doctoral level counseling students and 1 external auditor from Old Dominion University as recommended by Vivino et al.

Members will be asked to reflect on their own potential biases surrounding the topic prior to beginning the study. The research team will code the interview transcripts, written feedback on the protocol and demographic survey, and field notes from the primary research assistant individually. Then they will meet to come to consensus on a final interview protocol and demographic survey to be used in the future study. The auditor will review the research team's analysis and provide feedback to further revise the final interview protocol and demographic survey. The research team will meet to review and come to consensus on the auditor's feedback. If any of the auditor's feedback is not included, the auditor will review the research team's decision-making rationale.



This check-and-balance process will continue until consensus has been met between the research team and auditor (Schlosser, Dewey, & Hill, 2012).

Hays and Singh (2012) discussed the influence of the researcher's experiential knowledge on developing the conceptual framework for the research study. This involves identifying researcher bias, which consists of assumptions, values, and beliefs about the study. Sim, Huang, and Hill (2012) also discussed the difference between bias and expectations, claiming that researchers must identify both. Kline (2008) described rigor in terms of identifying researcher bias, assumptions, and expectations throughout selecting the research design, and collecting and analyzing the data. The primary researcher of this study was the counseling clinic manager for the second chance program until June 2010, which included providing individual and group counseling to the participants in the study and supervising counselor trainees who worked with the participants, as well. Her experiential knowledge is based on her work with these participants.

Additionally, her values are rooted in social justice. Crethar, Rivera, and Nash (2008) described social justice in terms of equity, access, participation, and harmony. The author believes that high quality education is a resource that should be equally distributed to all members of society (equity); members of society should have access to education and support services that are relevant to the needs of diverse members of society (access); all members of society should be allowed to participate in decision-making that affects their lives, including how they are educated (participation); and, decisions about distribution and access to resources are made based on the greatest common good (harmony). She is conducting this pilot study to increase the participation

of these participants in characterizing their experiences within the current public and alternative high school systems. Her experiential knowledge and social justice values will be bracketed through keeping a reflexive journal, memoing, and using a research team and auditor.

### **Semi-Structured Interview Protocol- Pilot Study**

- I. Reflection on the Second Chance Program
  - a. Please describe your experience in (second chance program).
  - b. What parts of the (second chance program) benefitted you, if any?
    - i. Possible probes:
      1. Work days
      2. School days
      3. Career assistance
      4. Counseling
      5. Interactions with peers, staff, teachers, etc.
  - c. What areas of the (second chance program) were challenging for you, if any?
    - i. Possible probes:
      1. Work days
      2. School days
      3. Career assistance
      4. Counseling
      5. Interactions with peers, staff, teachers, etc.
  - d. Prior to starting at (second chance program), you attended a mainstream high school. Can you tell me about your experience there?
    - i. Possible probes
      1. Interactions with teachers, counselors, staff, etc.
      2. Interactions with peers
      3. Classroom instruction
      4. School rules
  - e. How would you describe yourself when you left a mainstream high school?
  - f. What was your life like in between a mainstream high school and (second chance program)?
  - g. How would you describe yourself when you entered (second chance program)?
  - h. What influenced your decision to apply to the (second chance program)?
  - i. Did you change over the course of the (second chance program)? If so, how?
  - j. How, if at all, did your experiences in the program impact your life outside of the program?

- k. What else do you want to share with me about your experience in the program, if at all?

## II. Reflection on Post-program

- a. When you graduated from (second chance program), what were your plans?
  - i. Possible probes:
    - 1. Employment
    - 2. Continuing education
    - 3. Family
- b. What struggles, if any, did you face after you graduated from the program?
- c. Please tell me about your life today.
  - i. Possible probes
    - 1. Employment
    - 2. Family
    - 3. Mental health issues
    - 4. Continuing education
    - 5. Financial
- d. When you look at your life today, what impact does your experience at (second chance program) have on it, if any?
- e. Are there any specific skills, lessons, or experiences from (second chance program) that you continue to use today? If so, please describe them.
- f. How would you describe yourself today?
- g. One of your peers once asked me “what will I be to society after I graduate, will I still be a high school dropout?” Based on your experiences, how would you answer this question?
- h. Another of your peers once asked me “why aren’t there more programs like (second chance program)?” Do you think there should be more programs like this one? Why or why not?

## III. Reflection on Interview Protocol

- a. What was it like participating in this interview?
- b. What did you think about the questions in the interview?
- c. What, if anything, would you change to make this interview better?
- d. If you were in my shoes, what would you want to ask yourself?
- e. If you were interviewing me, what would you ask me?

### **Interview Protocol Written Feedback- Pilot Study**

There are two sections for written feedback. First, please complete the following 4 prompts to provide feedback on the interview protocol in the space provided. Do not put your name on this document.

1. Please cross out any question that you did not like, did not think was relevant, or should not be included in the interview. Please comment in the space provided about why you put crossed out the question.
2. Please put a star by any question that you thought was a good question and should be included in the interview. Please comment in the space provided about why you put a star by the question.
3. Please circle any other question that did not fit in “cross-out” or “star” category that you want to comment on. For instance, the wording was confusing, but you like the question. Please comment in the space provided about why you circled that question.
4. Please write down any other questions you think are important to be included in future interviews in the space provided at the end

### **Interview Question Feedback**

1. Please describe your experience in (second chance program).
2. What parts of the (second chance program) benefitted you, if any?
3. What areas of the (second chance program) were challenging for you, if any?
4. Prior to starting at (second chance program), you attended a mainstream high school. Can you tell me about your experience there?
5. How would you describe yourself when you left a mainstream high school?
6. What was your life like in between a mainstream high school and (second chance program)?
7. How would you describe yourself when you entered (second chance program)?
8. What influenced your decision to apply to (second chance program)?
9. Did you change over the course of the (second chance program)? If so, how?

10. How, if at all, did your experiences in the program impact your life outside of the program?
11. What else do you want to share with me about your experience in the program, if at all?
12. When you graduated from (second chance program), what were your plans?
13. What struggles, if any, did you face after you graduated from the program?
14. Please tell me about your life today.
15. When you look at your life today, what impact does your experience at (second chance program) have on it, if any?
16. Are there any specific skills, lessons, or experiences from (second chance program) that you continue to use today? If so, please describe them.
17. How would you describe yourself today?
18. One of your peers once asked me “what will I be to society after I graduate, will I still be a high school dropout?” Based on your experiences, how would you answer this question?
19. Another of your peers once asked me “why aren’t there more programs like (second chance program)?” Do you think there should be more programs like this one? Why or why not?

20. ADDITIONAL QUESTION:
21. ADDITIONAL QUESTION:
22. ADDITIONAL QUESTION:

### Interview Process Feedback

1. The length of the interview was (Please circle one):
  - a. Way too long
  - b. Long, but o.k.
  - c. Just right
  - d. Could have been longer
  - e. Way too short
  
2. The interviewer helped me feel (Please circle one):
  - a. Very uncomfortable the entire time
  - b. Uncomfortable most of the time
  - c. Comfortable most of the time
  - d. Very comfortable the entire time
  
3. Please share what you thought about the order of the questions. What, if any, would you change about the order of the questions?
  
4. What feedback do you have about the demographic sheet, if any?
  
5. What other feedback do you have for the interviewer to make this a better experience, if any?
  
6. Are you willing to recommend fellow alumni who graduated in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, or October 2010? (Please Circle)
  - a. Yes, whether the interview questions changes or not
  - b. Yes, if the interview questions change to reflect my feedback
  - c. No
  
7. If yes, to question 4, may the primary interview contact you in the future for assistance in contacting your fellow alumni? (Please circle)
  - a. Yes
  - b. No

### Demographic Sheet- Pilot Study

Please complete the form to the best of your ability. Please do not put your name on this form. The information on this form will be combined with other participants' information to describe the overall demographics of the research participants. No identifying information specifically about you will be reported.

1. Please check your race and ethnicity.
  - African American/Black
  - Latino/a
  - Asian American
  - Caucasian/White
  - Biracial
  - Multiracial
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
2. Please check your gender.
  - Transgender
  - Male
  - Female
  
3. Please check all that apply to your current employment status.
  - Employed full-time in 1 job
  - Employed in more than 1 job
  - Employed part-time and full-time
  - Employed part-time
  - Employed by a job-training program
  - Not employed
  - Other: \_\_\_\_\_
  
4. Please check the highest level of education that you have acquired.
  - High school diploma
  - Some community college
  - Some vocational training above and beyond (second chance program)
  - Associate's Degree
  - Vocational Certificate
  - Some 4-year college/university
  - Bachelor's Degree
  - Some graduate school
  - Master's degree
  
5. Do you have any children?
  - No
  - Yes, I have \_\_\_\_\_ (number) kids

**APPENDIX C**  
**AMMENDED INFORMED CONSENT- ORGANIZATION**

RESEARCH PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT - ORGANIZATION  
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate

INTRODUCTION

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participate in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. This study aims to better understand the process of change that alumni from your program experience from the point of entry to up to three years after graduation. A model showing the process of change may help educators, counselors, advisors, and other staff to select interventions that meet the needs of the program participant. Additionally, recommendations for program development may result from this study.

RESEARCHERS

Jayne E. Smith, doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program, is the primary research assistant on this project. Dr. Danica G. Hays, associate professor and department chair, is the primary investigator.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

This research study will take place over the course of 1 year. The primary research assistant will conduct and transcribe 12-15 participant interviews using an interview protocol that participants assist in developing. The criteria for selecting participants includes 1) graduated from Urban Corps of San Diego County; and 2) attended some mainstream high school. Participants will also be asked to complete a demographic sheet and will be given an informed consent, which outlines their voluntary participation in the program.

The primary research assistant (Jayne) will conduct and transcribe the interviews, making sure to remove all identifying information to ensure participant anonymity. The transcripts and demographic sheets will be analyzed using a research team. Research team members are doctoral students at Old Dominion University.

Urban Corps of San Diego County will be referred to by name or "UCO" unless organization representatives request to be anonymous in future reports, manuscripts, and presentations.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

All participants should have completed some high school in a mainstream U.S. based school, and graduated from the second chance program in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, or October 2010. To the best of the participants' knowledge, they should meet these two criteria. If they do not, that would keep them from participating in this study.



### RISKS AND BENEFITS

**RISKS:** If Urban Corps of San Diego County decides to participate in this study, then there is a risk of limited confidentiality if participants disclose their participation in the project. However, the researcher will attempt to minimize that risk by including a confidentiality clause in the informed consent. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is helping to better understand the participants' experiences in the program and beyond so that we may increase effectiveness in providing services. There is a possibility that results may be used in funding opportunities. I will provide an executive summary of the findings at the conclusion of the project for use by Urban Corps of San Diego County.

### COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

### NEW INFORMATION

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

### CONFIDENTIALITY

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Additionally, the primary research assistant will remove all identifying information from the interview transcripts and destroy all recorded data after transcription is complete.

### WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, the primary research assistant, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

### COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the responsible principal investigator or Dr. Nina Brown, the current Human Subjects Review Board chair for the Darden College of Education at 757-683-3245 at Old Dominion University, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

VOLUNTARY CONSENT

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Danica G. Hays, (757) 683-6278  
Jayne E. Smith, (619) 818-7838

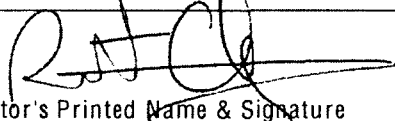
If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Nina Brown, the current Human Subjects Review Board chair for the Darden College of Education at 757-683-3245 or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Urban Corps of San Diego County Representative Printed Name & Signature	Date
---	------

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

 Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	September 10, 2012 Date
--	----------------------------

*[Faint handwritten text, possibly a signature or name, is visible at the bottom of the page.]*

## Initial Informed Consent- Organization

### **RESEARCH PARTICIPATION AGREEMENT - ORGANIZATION OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY**

**PROJECT TITLE:** A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participate in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. This study aims to better understand the process of change that alumni from your program experience from the point of entry to up to three years after graduation. A model showing the process of change may help educators, counselors, advisors, and other staff to select interventions that meet the needs of the program participant. Additionally, recommendations for program development may result from this study.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

Jayne E. Smith, doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program, is the primary research assistant on this project. Dr. Danica G. Hays, associate professor and department chair, is the primary investigator.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

This research study will take place over the course of 1 year. The primary research assistant will conduct and transcribe 12-15 participant interviews using an interview protocol that participants assist in developing. The criteria for selecting participants includes 1) graduated from Urban Corps of San Diego County; and 2) attended some mainstream high school. Participants will also be asked to complete a demographic sheet and will be given an informed consent, which outlines their voluntary participation in the program.

The primary research assistant (Jayne) will conduct and transcribe the interviews, making sure to remove all identifying information to ensure participant anonymity. The transcripts and demographic sheets will be analyzed using a research team. Research team members are doctoral students at Old Dominion University.

Urban Corps of San Diego County will also remain anonymous throughout data collection, analysis, and in the final report to ensure that the organization does not suffer any undo harm as a result of participating in this study. All references to the organization will be changed to "second chance program."

#### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

All participants should have completed some high school in a mainstream U.S. based school, and graduated from the second chance program in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, or October 2010. To the best of the participants' knowledge, they should meet these two criteria. If they do not, that would keep them from participating in this study.

**RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** If Urban Corps of San Diego County decides to participate in this study, then there is a risk of limited confidentiality if participants disclose their participation in the project. However, the researcher will attempt to minimize that risk by including a confidentiality clause in the informed consent. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is helping to better understand the participants' experiences in the program and beyond so that we may increase effectiveness in providing services. There is a possibility that results may be used in funding opportunities. I will provide an executive summary of the findings at the conclusion of the project for use by Urban Corps of San Diego County.

**COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

**NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

**CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Additionally, the primary research assistant will remove all identifying information from the interview transcripts and destroy all recorded data after transcription is complete.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, the primary research assistant, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

**COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the responsible principal investigator or Dr. Nina Brown, the current Human Subjects Review Board chair for the Darden College of Education at 757-683-3245 at Old Dominion University, who will be glad to review the matter with you.



**APPENDIX D**  
**OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY HUMAN SUBJECTS COMMITTEE**  
**APPROVAL**



May 23, 2012

Proposal Number **201102087**

Dr. Danica Hays (Smith).

Your proposal submission titled **A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate: Implications for Social Justice Counseling** is deemed EXEMPT from IRB review by the Human Subjects Review Committee of the Darden College of Education, and you may begin collecting data. If any significant changes occur, especially methodological changes, notify the Chair of the DCOE HSRC, and supply any required addenda requested. You may begin your research.

The designation of EXEMPT is granted indefinitely, provided no modifications occur. If this research is funded externally for this project in the future, you will likely have to submit an application and documentation to the University IRB for their approval as well.

If you have not done so, PRIOR TO THE START OF YOUR STUDY, you must send a signed and dated PDF file of your exemption application submission to [nbrown@odu.edu](mailto:nbrown@odu.edu).

Very sincerely yours,

Nina Brown, Ed.D., LPC, NCC, FAGPA  
Professor and Eminent Scholar, Department of Counseling and Human  
Services  
Chair, DCOE Human Subjects Review Committee  
Old Dominion University  
Norfolk, VA 23529

[nbrown@odu.edu](mailto:nbrown@odu.edu)

## **APPENDIX E**

### **INFORMED CONSENT- PARTICIPANT**

**PROJECT TITLE:** A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate

#### **INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participate in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. This study aims to better understand the process of change that you have gone through since the point of entry to up to three years after graduation from Urban Corps of San Diego County. A model showing the process of change may help educators, counselors, advisors, and other staff to select interventions that meet the needs of the program participant. Additionally, recommendations for program development may result from this study.

#### **RESEARCHERS**

Dr. Danica G. Hays, associate professor and department chair, is the primary investigator. Jayne E. Smith, doctoral student in the Counselor Education and Supervision program, is the primary research assistant on this project.

#### **DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

This research study will take place over the course of 1 year. The primary research assistant will conduct and transcribe 12-15 participant interviews using an interview protocol that participants assist in developing. The primary research assistant will contact the participants within 2 weeks of the initial interview to ask any follow up questions to clarify the initial interview. Participants will also be given a copy of the interview transcript to review. The criteria for selecting participants includes 1) graduated from Urban Corps of San Diego County; and 2) attended some mainstream high school. Participants will also be asked to complete a demographic sheet.

The primary research assistant will conduct and transcribe the interviews, making sure to remove all identifying information to ensure participant anonymity. The transcripts and demographic sheets will be analyzed using a research team. Research team members are doctoral students at Old Dominion University.

#### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

All participants should have completed some high school in a mainstream U.S. based school, and graduated from the second chance program in October 2009, February 2010, June 2010, or October 2010. To the best of the participants' knowledge, they should meet these two criteria. If they did not, that would keep them from participating in this study.

#### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, then at times you may feel uncomfortable with some of the topics and you can pass on sharing. Just in case, referrals will be provided in case you need them. You may face a risk of reflecting on memories that may cause discomfort, and possibly result in needing to seek mental health counseling. The researcher tried to reduce these risks by providing the interview questions and demographic sheet prior to the interview so that you may determine if and what you want to share. And, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** The main benefit to you for participating in this study is helping to inform second chance program development, and possibly impact funding for the development of additional programs such as this one. There are no foreseeable direct, guaranteed benefits to you.

#### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet they recognize that your participation may lead to some additional costs. In order to minimize any inconveniences you may experience through participation in this study, you will receive \$10 for your participation. As a reminder, you can drop out of this study at any time and still receive the compensation.

#### **NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

#### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

All information obtained about you in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations and publications, but the researchers will not identify you. Additionally, the primary research assistant will remove all identifying information from your interview transcript and destroy all recorded data after transcription is complete.

#### **WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, the primary research assistant, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

#### **COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact the responsible principal investigator or Dr. Nina Brown the current Darden College of Education Human Subjects Review Board chair at 757-683-3245 at Old Dominion University, who will be glad to review the matter with you.

#### **VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researchers should be able to answer them:

Dr. Danica G. Hays, (757) 683-6278  
Jayne E. Smith, (619) 818-7838

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should call Dr. Nina Brown the current Darden College of Education Human



Subjects Review Board chair at 757-683-3245 at Old Dominion University, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research, at 757-683-3460.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<b>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Parent / Legally Authorized Representative's Printed Name &amp; Signature (If applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>
<b>Witness' Printed Name &amp; Signature (if applicable)</b>	<b>Date</b>

**INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT**

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<b>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
--	-------------

**APPENDIX F**  
**FREEQUENCY OF DATA CHUNKS AND CORE IDEAS PER DOMAIN BY PARTICIPANT**

<i>n</i>	1- Barriers	2- Peer/ family	3- Program influence	4- goals/plans	5- giving back	6- job/life skills during/ after	7- view of self	8- motivating events	9- other	10- non- codable	Double coded	Total Chunks	Total Core Ideas
P003	9	4	3	4	1	7	11	5	2	7	1	54	46
P004	13	6	7	5	0	3	11	0	3	2	1	51	48
P005	14	7	12	5	0	2	13	1	2	3	3	62	56
P006	9	8	9	5	3	7	20	2	3	5	4	75	66
P007	24	21	18	15	3	7	27	2	4	17	4	142	121
P008	13	9	9	5	9	6	20	1	2	6	1	81	74
P009	3	8	5	6	3	4	13	4	1	1	1	49	47
P010	15	12	9	7	0	4	14	3	0	1	2	67	64
P011	16	11	5	10	0	6	12	1	3	12	4	80	64
P012	11	7	14	6	1	7	25	4	1	7	0	83	76
P013	4	4	11	4	0	2	17	2	3	2	0	49	47
P014	8	3	3	7	0	9	18	1	2	4	0	55	51
P015	17	16	8	4	0	2	20	0	1	3	2	73	68
P016	3	12	8	3	4	5	25	1	1	1	1	64	62
P017	3	2	7	3	1	2	16	1	1	4	0	40	36
Total	162	130	128	89	25	73	262	28	29	75	24	1025	926

*Note.* n= participant identification code. P001 and P002 were pilot study participants

**JAYNE E. SMITH, PHD, NCC, LPC-eligible**

133 Ghent Commons Court

Norfolk, VA 23517

Tel: (619) 818-7838

E-mail: jsmit252@odu.edu

**EDUCATION**

<b>Ph.D., Counseling Education &amp; Supervision</b>	Old Dominion University CACREP Accredited	2013
<b>M.A., Counseling, College Student Development</b>	University of San Diego	2005
<b>B.A., Human Development</b>	Boston College	2001

**LICENSURE & CERTIFICATION**

National Certified Counselor (#202501)

Licensed Professional Counselor- eligible, California (#130453)

**SCHOLARSHIP INTEREST AREAS**

- Program Evaluation, Outcome Research, and Qualitative Research
  - Social Justice and Advocacy Counseling and Supervision
- Teaching Qualitative Research Design and Methods, Program Evaluation, Social and Cultural Issues, Counseling Skills, Assessment, Clinical Practice, Career Counseling
  - Strengthening Education to Career Pipeline for Emerging Adults
    - High School Dropout Prevention & Intervention

**EMPLOYMENT**

The Center for Educational Partnerships, Old Dominion University <i>Graduate Research Assistant</i>	Jan. 2012- Present
Department of Counseling & Human Services, Old Dominion University <i>Graduate Teaching Assistant</i>	Aug. 2010-Dec. 2011
Urban Corps of San Diego County/John Muir Charter School <i>Manager &amp; Lead Counselor, Assessment &amp; Counseling Clinic</i>	Oct. 2008- June 2010
Department of the Graduate Counseling Program, University of San Diego <i>Adjunct Faculty &amp; University Supervisor</i>	Jan. 2009-May 2010
Cre8UrLife, LLC, San Diego, CA <i>Counselor &amp; Founder, Private Practice</i>	Jan. 2008-May 2010
Office of Student Organizations, University of California, San Diego <i>Community Service Organizations Advisor</i>	Jan. 2008- Sept. 2008
Office of Residential Life, University of California, San Diego	July 2005- Dec. 2007

*Assistant Resident Dean, Sixth College*

## **RESEARCH & PROGRAM EVALUATION INITIATIVES**

### **QUALITATIVE RESEARCH**

**Smith, J. E.,** Dean, L. M., & Johnson, K. (2012). *Heuristic Inquiry: Cross-cultural Conversations, Microaggressions- What Really Works?*. (IRB Exempt #12-141)

**Smith, J.E.,** & Garner, J. K. (2012). *A Case Study to Develop the Specialist Counselor Job Embeddedness Construct to Describe Integrating New Specialist Counselors in Established School Settings*. (IRB Exempt #11-184)

**Smith, J. E.** (2012). *A Consensual Qualitative Research Study of the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate*. (IRB Exempt #201102087)

**Smith, J. E.** (2012). *A Consensual Qualitative Research Pilot Study to Evaluate a Semi-structured Interview Protocol Focused on the Transformation from High School Dropout to High School Graduate*. (IRB Exempt #201102057)

**Smith, J.E.,** McAuliffe, G. J., & Rippard, K. (2012- Present). *Grounded Theory: What Do Graduate Counseling Students Learn Through Short-Term Study Abroad?*. (IRB Exempt #201102059)

**Smith, J. E.** (2009-2012). *Participatory Action Research: VOICE: Vocalize Our Collective & Individual Experience*. (IRB Exempt # 201001036; program development, facilitation, & facilitator training professional development for mental health counselor trainees & high school teachers)

### **PROGRAM EVALUATION**

**Smith, J.E.,** Hall, S.B., & Schwitzer, A. (2011- Present). *Clinical Mental Health Training Series: Advocacy, Psychopharmacology, & Evidenced Based Practice*. (Program development, facilitation, & evaluation)

Michel, R., Hays, D. G., Colburn, A. N., Bayne, H., & **Smith, J. E.** (2010-2011). *Non-experimental Pre/Post-test Design: HEART: Help End Abusive Relationships Today*. (IRB Exempt #201002074; Program facilitation, evaluation, & facilitator training development for mental health counseling trainees)

## **GRANTS & AWARDS**

**Smith, J. E.** (2012). *Outstanding Doctoral Student Award*. Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision. (Nominee)

Garner, J. K., & **Smith, J. E.** (External Evaluators). (2011). *Boosting Students' Mathematics Achievement and Promoting Positive Social Outcomes for Military Connected Families at Targeted Newport News Public Schools*. Sub-award from \$2,500,000. Department of Defense Education Activity.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). *Student Professional Advocacy Heroine Award*. Chi Sigma Iota International Honors Society- Omega Delta. Old Dominion University.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). *Outstanding Doctoral Student*. Chi Sigma Iota International Honors Society- Omega Delta. Old Dominion University. (Nominee)

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). *ACES Emerging Leader*. Awarded \$200. Association for Counselor Education and Supervision.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). *Graduate Student Travel Award*. Awarded \$500. Old Dominion University.

**Smith, J. E.,** Dean, L., Bonjo, L., & Hamilton, T. (2011). *ACA Ethics Competition Honorable Mention*. American Counseling Association.

**Smith, J. E.** (2010). *Professional Development Award*. Awarded \$200. Old Dominion University.

## PUBLICATIONS

**OVERVIEW OF PUBLICATION RECORD:** 1 refereed article accepted in counseling journal; 1 refereed article under review in counseling journal; 2 other refereed works published; 8 manuscripts in process; 2 invited book chapters published; 7 invited articles published.

### REFEREED PUBLICATIONS

Hays, D. G., Michel, R. E., Bayne, H. B., **Smith, J. E.**, & Colburn, A.A.N. (2012). A college student relationship violence prevention program. *Journal of College Counseling*. (In press)

Hays, D. G., Chang, C.Y., Chaney, M. P., & **Smith, J. E.** (Submitted). A Framework for Social Advocacy Readiness: A Content Analysis of Counselor Trainees' Social Advocacy Knowledge, Attitudes and Behaviors. *Journal of Humanistic Counseling*.

### OTHER REFEREED WORKS

**Smith, J. E.**, & Boland, S. C. (2012). Make computers work for you. In M. Pope, & C. W. Minor (Eds.), *Experiential Activities for Teaching Career Counseling and for Facilitating Career Groups (Volume III)*, NCDA.

Boland, S. C., & **Smith, J. E.** (2012). What's your dream? In M. Pope, & C. W. Minor (Eds.), *Experiential Activities for Teaching Career Counseling and for Facilitating Career Groups (Volume III)*, NCDA.

### MANUSCRIPTS IN PROCESS

**Smith, J. E.**, Singh, A. A. (2013). *Participatory action research to develop advocacy competencies in clinical mental health training programs*. Manuscript in preparation.

Singh, A. A., & **Smith, J. E.** (2013). A model for integrating participatory action research in supervision & training. Manuscript in preparation.

**Smith, J. E.,** Dean, L. M., & Johnson, K. (2013). *A heuristic inquiry study of female counselors' and educators' experiences with cross-cultural communication and microaggressions.* Manuscript in preparation.

**Smith, J. E.,** Rippard, K., & McAuliffe, G. J., (2013). *A grounded theory study of the impact of short-term study abroad on graduate counseling student preparation.* Manuscript in preparation.

**Smith, J. E.,** Hall, S. B., Pusateri, C. G., & Schwitzer, A. (2013). *Psychopharmacology, advocacy, & evidence-based practice: A clinical training series to fill a preparation-practice gap.* Manuscript in preparation.

Sturm, D., **Smith, J. E.,** & Bonner, M. (2013). *Counseling military families.* Manuscript in preparation.

**Smith, J. E.,** & Garner, J. K. (2013). *A case study to develop specialist counselor job embeddedness, a new construct to examine successes and challenges of grant-funded positions in existing school settings.* Manuscript in preparation.

**Smith, J. E.** (2012). *A participatory action research study of the facilitator experience in leading a social justice psychoeducational program.* Manuscript in preparation.

#### **BOOK CHAPTERS**

Sheperis, C., **Smith, J. E.,** Bullock, M. (2013). Client assessment and diagnosis. In C. Sheperis & D. Sheperis (Eds.), *Clinical Mental Health Counseling: Fundamentals in Applied Practice* (1<sup>st</sup> ed.). Columbus, OH: Pearson. (In press)

Hays, D. G., Wood, C., & **Smith, J. E.** (2012). Advocacy and leadership through research best practices in professional counseling excellence through leadership and advocacy. In C. Y. Chang, C. A. Barrio Minton, A. L. Dixon, J. E. Myers, & T. J., Sweeney (Eds.), *Professional Counseling Excellence Through Leadership and Counseling* (pp. 227-242). New York, NY: Routledge.

#### **INVITED ARTICLES**

**Smith, J. E.** (2012). ODU faculty and doctoral students partner to offer a clinical training series at the CSB: Psychopharmacology, brain, and behavior. *Reflections*, 5(2), 11.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). Calling all graduate students. *Newsnotes*, 51(2), 12.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). Counseling and human services alumni highlights. *Reflections*, 5(1), 19.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). Counseling program recognized with the NBCC professional identity award. *Reflections*, 5(1), 1.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). International counseling institutes. *Reflections*, 5(1), 2.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). Research??? In counseling??? No...On second thought, yes. *Reflections*, 5(1), 22.

**Smith, J. E.** (2010). Reflections: Moving to norfolk. *Reflections*, 4(1), 11.

## EDITORIAL EXPERIENCE

**Smith, J. E., & Dean, L. M.** (2011- Present). Newsletter Co-Editors, *Reflections*, Counseling & Human Services Department, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011). Apprentice, *A Counselor's Guide to Career Assessment Instruments* (6<sup>th</sup> ed.), National Career Development Association.

Wilkinson, C., & **Smith, J. E.** (2004). Co-editor, *Reflections in Service Learning*, Service Learning Office, Miracosta College, Oceanside, CA.

## RESEARCH DESIGN, METHOD, & PROGRAM EVALUATION DOCTORAL COURSEWORK

Introduction to Qualitative Research in Education  
 Advanced Qualitative Research Design  
 Advanced Counseling Research & Program Evaluation  
 Advanced Program Evaluation in Education  
 Introduction to Applied Statistics & Data Analysis  
 Advanced Research Design & Analysis  
 Linear Models Applied to Research in Education  
 Analysis of Variance Applied to Research  
 Dissertation Seminar

## TEACHING & SUPERVISION EXPERIENCE

**OVERVIEW OF TEACHING & SUPERVISION RECORD:** Adjunct faculty and teaching assistant for 4 graduate-level clinical mental health courses over 5 semesters; Instructor for 6 undergraduate courses in human services and first year experience over 6 semesters; Adult education teacher for a high school diploma-job training program over 4 semesters; University and site supervisor for more than 15 school and mental health counselor trainees since 2008.

### GRADUATE COURSES

- Counseling & Psychotherapy Techniques (TA)
- Advanced Counseling & Psychotherapy techniques (TA)
- Social & Cultural Issues in Counseling (TA)
- Clinical Mental Health Counseling Adult Practicum (Adjunct Faculty)

### UNDERGRADUATE COURSES

- Career Development & Appraisal in Human Services (Instructor)
- Human Services Methods (TA)
- Fundamentals of Human Growth & Development- Birth to Adolescence (Online) (Instructor)
- Introduction to Psychoeducational Groups (Instructor)
- Honors Student Seminar, First Year Experience (TA)
- Leadership in Social Change (TA)
- Values in Social Service & Healthcare (TA)

### ADULT EDUCATION COURSE

- VOICE: Vocalize Our Individual & Collective Experience (Course developer & teacher)

## SUPERVISION

- Group supervision co-facilitator for full time school counselors in a local public school district
- Individual & triadic university supervision for 5 school counselor practicum and internship students
- Individual and group university and site supervision for more than 10 mental health practicum and internship students in middle school and charter high school settings

## PRESENTATION EXPERIENCE

**OVERVIEW OF PRESENTATION RECORD:** 13 national presentations; 4 regional presentations; 1 state presentation; 24 invited presentations, trainings, & lectures.

### NATIONAL PRESENTATIONS

**Smith, J. E., & Garner, J. K.** (2013, April). *Negotiating new territory: Job embeddedness describes integrating new specialist counselors in established school settings*. AERA Annual Meeting, San Francisco, CA. (under review)

**Smith, J. E.** (2013, March). AACE: One-stop shop for assessment, research & evaluation (poster session). ACA National Conference, Cincinnati, OH.

**Smith, J. E.** (2012, September). *Preparing Future Counselor Educators to Engage in Comprehensive Program Evaluation*. AACE National Conference, Orlando, FL.

**Smith, J. E., Thomas, D., & Adams, L.** (2012, April). *Collaboration, advocacy, and organizational change through participatory action research: A project review*. 9<sup>th</sup> Annual Action Research Conference, San Diego, CA.

Pusateri, C., & **Smith, J. E.** (2012, March). *Teaching social and cultural issues from multiple perspectives: A practical guide*. ACA National Conference, San Francisco, CA.

Wood, C., Hays, D. G., & **Smith, J. E.** (2011, October). *What's up with that? Helping teach the leaders and helpers to discern between qualitative research traditions*. ACES INFORM, ACES National Conference, Nashville, TN.

Bridges, J., Braun, E., Pusateri, C., Bender, K., Jackson, T., **Smith, J.**, Dean-Nganga, L. (2011, October). *Going the distance: Reflections on applying to & surviving the first year of a doc program*. ACES National Conference, Nashville, TN.

Wood, C., & **Smith, J.** (2011, October). *How socially unjust is my program? Minding your P's & C's: Helping leaders evaluate and improve systems for teaching leaders and helpers to be agents of change*. ACES National Conference, Nashville, TN.

Michel, R. E., Hays, D. G., Neuer, A. A., Bell, T. R., & **Smith, J. E.** (2011, October). *Advocacy through dating violence outreach: Evaluating counselor trainee development*. ACES National Conference, Nashville, TN.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, September). *Training counselors to use the advocacy competencies using PAR*. AACE National Conference, Fort Worth, TX.



**Smith, J. E., & Dean-Nganga, L. M.** (2011, September). *Leadership do's and don't's for qualitative research teams*. AACE National Conference, Fort Worth, TX.

**Smith, J. E., Hays, D. G., Chang, C., Balkin, R., & Baker, D.** (2011, September). *Publication strategies from the experts*. AACE National Conference, Fort Worth, TX. (Moderator)

**Smith, J. E., Hays, D. G., Chang, C., Balkin, R., & Baker, D.** (2011, September). *Managing, mastering, and minimizing a research agenda*. AACE National Conference, Fort Worth, TX. (Moderator)

## **REGIONAL & STATE PRESENTATIONS**

**Smith, J. E., & Dean, L. M.** (2012, September). *Cross-cultural conversations, microaggressions- what really works?* SACES Regional Conference, Savannah, GA.

**Smith, J. E., McAuliffe, G. J., & Rippard, K.** (2012, September). *What do graduate students really learn through study abroad?* SACES Regional Conference, Savannah, GA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, February). *Training counselors to use the advocacy competencies using PAR*. VACES Graduate Student Conference, Williamsburg, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2010, October). *VOICE: ACA advocacy competencies in action*. SACES Regional Conference, Williamsburg, VA.

## **INVITED PRESENTATIONS, TRAININGS, & LECTURES**

**Smith, J. E.** (2012, October). *Panel for writing a dissertation proposal*. Department of Counseling & Human Services, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E., Dean, L. M., & Braun, E.** (2012, September). *Panel for introduction to qualitative research*. Research Foundations, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2012, September). *An overview of consensual qualitative research: Research design & practice*. Department of Counseling & Human Services, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2012, September). *Psychopharmacology 101 for the non-medically trained mental health practitioner*. Norfolk Community Services Board-Old Dominion University Partnership, Norfolk, VA.

Schwitzer, A., **Smith, J.E.,** Hall, S., & Hooks, K. (2012, January-February). *Clinical training series: Psychopharmacology, brain, & behavior*. Norfolk Community Services Board-Old Dominion University Partnership, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, October). *Career planning and development*. Marine Tech Grant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, April). *Consensus in leadership*. Marine Tech Grant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, March). *Are we really advocates?*. Norfolk Community Services Board/Old Dominion University Counseling Clinic, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2011, March). *Introduction to clinical mental health*. Department of Counseling, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2010, October). *Emotions in leadership*. Marine Tech Grant, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2008, November). *Careers in counseling*. Chi Sigma Iota/Department of Counseling, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E., & Estrellado, J.** (2008, September). *Bystander intervention training*. Sixth College Resident Assistant Training, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2008, May). *Bystander intervention training*. Passport to Leadership, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2007, September). *Conflict mediation & counseling skills*. Sixth College Resident Assistant Training, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E., & Estrellado, J.** (2007, September). *Programming & publicizing*. Sixth College Resident Assistant Training, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2007, May). *Ethics in counseling*. Department of Counseling, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2007, April). *What does it mean to be white?*. Privilege & Identity Conference, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E., Perez, M., & Estrellado, J.** (2007, September). *Who are we at Sixth College?*. Admit Day, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2006, November). *Introduction to counseling*. Department of Counseling, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E.** (2006, October). *Multicultural counseling with diverse populations*. Department of Counseling, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA.

Perez, M., **Smith, J. E., & Estrellado, J.** (2006, September). *Living the good life*. Sixth College Orientation, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

Trouyet, V., & **Smith, J. E.** (2005, April). *Leadership development through service-learning*. Leadership Conference, Alliant International University, San Diego, CA.

**Smith, J. E., & Boland, S.** (2005, January). *Workshop for student athletes*. Athletic Department, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA.

**Smith, J. E., & Molosky, A.** (2004, March). *Master's case study competition*. NASPA Conference, Denver, CO.

## DISSERTATION RESEARCH TEAM EXPERIENCE

Neuer, A. (2011). *Key supervision competencies: A Delphi Study*. [Round II collapsing competencies]

Hancock, R. (2012). *Factors impacting counselor competency when counseling sexual minority intimate partner violence victims*. [Qualitative data analysis]

Makris, P. (2012). *Experience of the Process and Outcomes of Group Dream Work*. [Qualitative data analysis]

## PROFESSIONAL SERVICE EXPERIENCE

**OVERVIEW OF PROFESSIONAL SERVICE RECORD:** 4 national volunteer and leadership positions; 6 regional and local volunteer and leadership positions; 9 university committee chair positions; 10 university committee member and volunteer positions.

### NATIONAL SERVICE

*Graduate Student Representative*, Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education/Association for Assessment and Research in Counseling July 2011- Present

*Volunteer*, Association for Assessment in Counseling and Education National Conference, Fort Worth, TX September 2011

*Volunteer*, American Counseling Association National Conference, New Orleans, VA March 2011

*Award Reviewer*, Chi Sigma Iota International December 2010

### REGIONAL & LOCAL SERVICE

*Volunteer*, Southern Association for Counselor Education and Supervision Regional Conference, Williamsburg, VA October 2010

*Committee member*, Annual Peace Conference, Hostelling International, San Diego, CA January- April 2009

*Election day volunteer*, No on Prop 8 Campaign, San Diego, CA November 2008

*Community Advisor*, Alternative Spring Breaks: Havasupai, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA Sept. 08 – May 2009

*Committee member*, Leadership Studies Advisory, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA Apr. – Dec. 2005

*Crisis Hotline Volunteer*, Samaritans of Boston, Boston, MA Sept. 98- May 1999

**UNIVERSITY SERVICE**

<i>Chair</i> , Graduate Student Interest Committee, Omega Delta-Chi Sigma Iota, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA	May 12 – May 2013
<i>Chair</i> , Professional Development Committee, Omega Delta-Chi Sigma Iota, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA	May 11 – May 2012
<i>Chair</i> , Fundraising Committee, Omega Delta-Chi Sigma Iota, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA	January – May 2011
<i>Panelist</i> , Student Health Insurance Initiative, Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA	December 2010
<i>Chair</i> , Counseling Group Supervision, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA	Oct. – Dec. 2008
<i>Committee member</i> , Consortium for Experiential Learning, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Jan. – Sept. 2008
<i>Committee member</i> , American Pie: What's Under the Crust?, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Jan. – Sept. 2008
<i>Committee member</i> , Senior Week Committee, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Jan. – June 2008
<i>Community Advisor</i> , Alternative Spring Breaks: Guatemala, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Dec. 07- June 2008
<i>ESL Tutor</i> , Workplace Literacy, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA	July – Dec. 2004
<i>Committee member</i> , Bystander Intervention Leadership Team, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Feb. 07 – Sept. 2008
<i>Committee member</i> , Council for Assistant Resident Deans Reclassification Committee, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Apr. 07 – Sept. 2008
<i>Chair</i> , Assistant Resident Dean Search Committee, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Apr. 07 – May 2007
<i>Chair</i> , All-campus Resident Advisor Training, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Jan. 07 – Sept. 2007
<i>Chair</i> , Just Be Cool Alcohol Awareness Campaign, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Nov. 06 – June 2007
<i>Chair</i> , Assistant Resident Dean Search Committee, University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA	Apr. 06 – May 2006

*Chair and member*, Council for Assistant Resident Deans,  
University of California, San Diego, La Jolla, CA

July 05 – Dec. 2007

*Facilitator*, Human Relations Workshops, University of San Diego, San Diego, CA January 2004

### **TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE**

Blackboard  
PASW/SPSS  
NVivo

### **PROFESSIONAL MEMBERSHIPS**

American Counseling Association (ACA)  
Association for Assessment in Counseling & Education/Association for Assessment & Research  
in Counseling (AACE/AARC)  
Association for Counselor Education & Supervision (ACES)  
    Southern Association for Counselor Education & Supervision (SACES)  
    Western Association for Counselor Education & Supervision (WACES)  
American Educational Research Association (AERA)  
California Association for Licensed Professional Clinical Counselors (CALPCC)  
Chi Sigma Iota International (CSI)  
    Omega Delta (ODU Chapter)