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FROM HOMESCHOOL TO THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE:

A MULTIPLE CASE STUDY

By

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B.S., May 1991, Mary Washington College
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the
Requirements for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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~~Dr. Molly Duggan (Director)~~

~~Dr. Kellie Sorey (Member)~~

~~Dr. Alice McAdory (Member)~~

Dr. Mitchell Williams (Member)

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ABSTRACT

The number of U.S. homeschooled students has steadily risen from the 1980's to the present, and many eventually choose to attend community colleges (Cogan, 2010; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). Homeschoolers who make community colleges their first structured educational setting outside the home do so for various reasons: (a) to obtain skills to prepare for a chosen career path or educational goal; (b) for economic reasons; and (c) to stay close to home (Ray, 2004b; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). Presently, limited research explores the homeschooled population's transition during the first year of college experience. Community colleges are very different educational settings from four year colleges (AACC, 2012). A comprehensive examination of community college homeschooled student transition is needed. Tinto's theory of college adjustment served as the theoretical framework for a multiple case study of three community college students who completed secondary school as homeschoolers. This study describes how they transitioned from the home environment to a mid-sized, Mid Atlantic community college setting, using Tinto's framework of *separation, transition, and incorporation*. (Tinto, 1993, 1997). While one student definitely achieved incorporation, it can be argued that the remaining students showed signs of incorporation by the conclusion of the study. The data collection used in this study consisted of interviews, observations, journal analysis, and finally, a focus group. The participants found services such as academic advising, disabilities services, and many teachers and classmates to be helpful to them. The participants overcame challenges including medical conditions, demanding curricula, and relocating while attending Mid Atlantic Community College. Recommendations for recruiting homeschooled students include online, community, and campus initiatives. Some suggestions for campus initiatives included may also serve to retain homeschooled students. Future research should

examine many aspects of homeschooling community college student populations, such as demographics, work/school interactions, homeschooling approaches, and faith-based comparisons.

Keywords: community college, experiences, homeschooling, transition

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The number of homeschooled students in the U.S. has increased from 250,000 students in 1990-1991 (Lines, 1999) to approximately 2 million in 2011 (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2005; Bielick, 2008; NHERI, 2012). Many homeschooled students are considering college courses and programs as they complete secondary educational goals, with some estimates suggesting approximately 30,000 homeschooled students entering colleges annually (Cox, 2003). For many homeschoolers, the community college is the ideal choice for higher education. Community colleges are often located close to home, are affordable, and usually have an open admissions policy (AACC, 2012). According to the American Association of Community Colleges, in fall 2008, community colleges accepted approximately 12.4 million students nationally (AACC, 2012). It is unknown exactly how many of these students were homeschooled.

While research has explored college admissions and entry experiences of homeschooled students (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004a; Ray & Eagleson, 2008; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a; Duggan, 2010a) and the academic performance of the homeschooled students in college (Barwegan, Falciano, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004; Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004a), few studies have explored the experiences of homeschooled students once they begin attending community colleges. Adjustment has been linked to persistence for other kinds of community college students (Sorey & Duggan, 2008b; Tinto, 1993, 1997), but such information on the homeschooled population is lacking. A more thorough understanding of the homeschooled student's first-year transition allows community college staff to better assist these students, thereby improving their transition and persistence as

community college students. Improving student experiences often leads to increased persistence rates for college students, which also results in increased graduation rates and accomplishment of student objectives for attending college (Tinto, 1993).

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore the homeschooled students' transitional experiences while attending the community college. The objective was to understand how they adjust to the community college environment while using Tinto's theory of college adjustment as the framework for investigation. This study took place at a mid-sized, Mid Atlantic region community college, and relates the stories of three homeschooled community college students from the beginning of the fall 2010 academic year of study through late spring 2011.

Background

College Student Transition

Vincent Tinto's research (1993, 1997; see also Tinto, Russell, & Kadel, 1996) concentrated upon the dynamics of group membership, specifically, that of college students and whether they decide to stay or leave the college they are attending. Tinto's theory of college adjustment in *Leaving College* is based on an earlier work by Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Gennep (1909/1960), who initially explored group assimilation and membership in tribal societies (Tinto, 1993). Tinto stated that Van Gennep's example of tribal members passing into adulthood through ceremonial stages was similar to modern students' first experience in college with both groups passing through three distinct stages of adjustment toward forming new identities. *Separation* is the first stage; students must leave behind that to which they belonged as a family member and high school student. In the next stage, *transition*, the student begins "training," or attending to the experiences of the new environment, and learning from the experiences. Finally, *incorporation* is the stage in which the student has begun to adapt and

create a niche or identity for him or herself within the college environment (Tinto, 1993). This theory of student adjustment provides a framework for longitudinal, qualitative investigations for which pre-entry attributes are “family background, skills and abilities, and prior schooling attended” (Tinto, 1993, pg. 114). These same attributes also make the homeschooled student unique and interesting to study when transitioning to the college environment. Unlike many traditional college students, homeschoolers have typically increased family interaction and have developed unique skills and abilities due to their personalized educational experiences (Ray, 2004a). Tinto suggests that all students experience the same transitional stages regardless of setting or background, even in non-residential community colleges. When students attend community colleges, the separation from their family may not be as physical, yet the transition to community college is a very “real” experience for the student (Tinto, 1993, pg. 95).

Homeschooled Students and the College Admissions Process

The process of entering college was once more challenging for homeschooled students than for their traditionally educated counterparts. Until the mid-1990’s, four-year institution admissions officers were frequently unsure how to review homeschooled students’ records. They often referred homeschoolers to community colleges, or required additional placement assessments before reluctantly admitting them (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Mason, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). After learning about the noticeably consistent, outstanding academic performance of the homeschooled students who were admitted to colleges, the overall college admissions perception has gradually changed to a more welcoming one (Barwegan, Falciano, Putnam, Reamer, & Stair, 2004; Mason, 2004; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Ray, 2004a). Still, many institutions of higher education have not fully developed policies to admit homeschooled applicants (Sorey & Duggan, 2008a).

Existing research on homeschooled students is currently very limited, although still developing. Many available sources are anecdotal at best-- particularly pieces that criticize the modern homeschooling movement (Apple, 2000; Lubienski, 2000). Qualitative research on homeschoolers in colleges is also very limited. Some previous research has explored homeschoolers' transition to the four-year institution (Bolle, et al., 2007). However, in an effort to obtain fresh, initial impressions of the college experience from these subjects, Bolle, et al.'s study excluded any subjects who had attended a community college prior to their admission to the university. Studies which explore student transition at a four-year college likely do not apply entirely to community college student experiences because community college settings differ from those of four-year colleges (Braxton, Sullivan, & Johnson, 1997; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; AACC, 2012). Today, homeschooling is being proved through research to be a viable means of pre-college preparation (Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b). Existing research also addresses the admissions process and entry experiences of these students but not the transitional experiences they have beyond college admissions and testing (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). This study seeks to fill this gap by focusing on homeschoolers' transition to the community college.

The Community College Setting and Homeschoolers

Community colleges are primarily local, affordable, and offer a variety of transfer and occupational programs which make them appealing to homeschoolers (AACC, 2012; Duggan, 2010a; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004a). Because four-year institutions may require documents such as transcripts for admission, homeschooled students often apply to community colleges with open admissions policies which may not require a transcript. The "open-door" admissions policies of community colleges allow homeschooled students to complete college-

level education credits, and thus receive official transcripts of college performance that are often necessary for four-year college admission (Ray, 2004b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a; Duggan, 2010a). Homeschooled students usually are often not acclimated to the traditional school environments of colleges, thus their initial perceptions of college classrooms, peers, instructors, administration, and facilities should be of particular interest to community college practitioners (Duggan 2010a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). These students are likely to have a fresh, new perspective of the institution to share. Student transition experiences at the community college --both beneficial and challenging-- certainly shape the student's adaptive reactions and perceptions to the newly experienced community college environment (Braxton, et al., 1997; Ray, 2004b).

Tinto stressed the importance of creating and sustaining positive student retention rates by developing responsive student services programs at the community college (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). The personal adjustment experiences of homeschooled students attending community colleges may be of interest to community college student services personnel working in admissions, financial aid, counseling, recruiting, retention, and academic advising. The trend of increasing homeschooler enrollment suggests that community college administrators should prepare to respond to the growing national rate of homeschooling in order to recruit and serve more of these students at their institutions (Duggan, 2010a; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004b; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a).

Statement of the Problem

Enrollment at the Mid Atlantic Community College reflects the national trend by showing a slight increase in homeschooler enrollment from 2004 to 2010, followed by a dip in 2010 to 2012 (see Table 1). Table 1 provides the total number of students enrolling at the

community college along with the total number of homeschoolers enrolling as new students within the same time period. As the community college population fluctuates, the number of homeschoolers fluctuates as well. Despite the relatively steady growth and presence of homeschoolers at the community college, little is known about this population and their adjustment to community college life.

Table 1

The Mid Atlantic Community College Student Enrollment and Number of Newly Enrolled Homeschoolers by Academic Year

<i>Mid Atlantic Community College Students</i>		
<i>Academic Year</i>	<i>Total Enrollment</i>	<i>New Homeschoolers</i>
2004-2005	6,342	25
2005-2006	6,041	16
2006-2007	6,394	25
2007-2008	7,240	29
2008-2009	9,726	29
2009-2010	10,512	34
2010-2011	9,769	22
2011-2012	10,187	11

Note. Data from 2004-2008 were obtained from the Virginia Community College System Annual Enrollment Table, retrieved October 3, 2009, from <http://www.vccs.edu/Research/annualhist.htm>. Data from 2008-2012 and the number of homeschoolers by academic year from 2004-2012 were obtained from internally produced enrollment reports created by the Mid Atlantic Community College Office of Institutional Effectiveness and Research.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of this multiple case study was to explore homeschooled students' transition to a community college. The objective was to understand how homeschooled students adjust from their homeschooling environment to a Mid Atlantic region community college using Tinto's theory of college adjustment as a framework for investigation. The researcher used various qualitative research methods to explore three homeschooled students' experiences while attending a community college, concentrating on their transition from homeschooling to college. These findings can assist community college leaders to better design programs or services at their institutions to meet the specific needs of homeschooled students. This study may be especially useful to college leaders and practitioners who see a marked increase in homeschoolers applying for admission to their institution. Given the rising population of homeschoolers in the United States, homeschooled students are more likely to attend community colleges where leaders and practitioners better understand their backgrounds and provide student services tailored for them, such as easier, more welcoming admissions procedures and information (Sorey & Duggan, 2008a; Duggan, 2010a).

Significance of Study

Community colleges serve their local areas by providing their constituents with career training programs and academic preparation for transfer (AACC, 2012). Because they serve residents of their local areas, community college academic programs often reflect the various types of careers readily available within the region. Community colleges also provide programs to residents using an "open-door" admissions policy, meaning that these programs are open to all who qualify academically and enroll in them within their service region (AACC).

Since the late 1980's, most state governments have amended laws that formerly restricted the right to homeschool children (Ray & Eagleson, 2008), resulting in a rising population of homeschoolers throughout the United States. The National Home Education Research Institute (NHERI) estimates there are now "almost 2 million" homeschooled students in the United States (National Home Education Research Institute website, 2012). When homeschooled students mature into young adulthood and graduate from their home-education setting, they then face personal decisions about career choice and the necessary steps to begin that career (Ray, 2004a, 2004b). For those who plan to pursue higher education, many homeschooled students discover that enrolling in the community college allows them to establish both a grade point average and a transcript, which are typically missing from the homeschooler's background. Homeschoolers can then transfer coursework to four-year colleges to continue their higher education beyond the community college (Jones & Gloeckner 2004a; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a) The open admissions policies and procedures used by community colleges allow this to occur more easily than those of the more selective four-year colleges (Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). As a result, more homeschooled students may logically attempt to enroll in community colleges before enrolling in four-year college settings. Despite this trend, current literature on the homeschooled student's transition to community colleges is scarce. This study provides qualitative information about this experience, which may lead to further research of the transitional process for homeschoolers at a community college and beyond.

Relationship of the Study to Community College Leadership

Community college leaders strive to serve all constituents of their service area and provide higher education curricula and programs that train residents for work they can enter locally or provide transfer opportunities for their residents to enter four-year colleges (AACC,

2012). To enhance retention and success rates for students at the community college, the community college leaders often study the demographics of their college service regions and then provide programs and services such as college orientation, advising, and motivational presentations to identify with noticeably larger, special populations. These services are provided to help the special population feel recognized, welcomed, and supported by their community college. Research indicates that such efforts increase retention, which leads to the attainment of several college goals such as graduation rates, job placement, and transfer (Tinto, 1993). This study focuses on the rising, special population of homeschooled students attending colleges. Past literature revealed that, in 2003, there were more than 30,000 homeschooled students attending colleges annually in the United States (Cox, 2003). Because community colleges are local, more affordable, and operate with open-door admissions policies, many homeschoolers are more apt to enroll in them (Jenkins, 1988; Ray, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). Research which focuses on the transitional process of homeschooled students to the community college may assist college leaders in providing specialized services for this growing population (see Cogan, 2010).

Multiple Case Studies as Research

The main purpose of research is to add to the knowledge of an identified topic and contribute information to the growth of knowledge about a theory (Creswell, 2007; Kumar, 2005; Patton, 2002). Research is primarily divided into two different major categories of methodology, either qualitative or quantitative studies. Some researchers have long debated the merits of qualitative research (Creswell; Kumar, 2005; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton). Qualitative studies, while lacking a set structural or statistical approach toward answering a question about a condition, are designed to explore the meaning of a condition through interviews, observation, and material analysis. In simpler terms, they explore the “what is” more

so than what “could be” of a research topic. Patton states that this particular methodology is especially useful in producing a baseline of information about an unknown situation or condition. Data collected through qualitative methods produce information that is generalizable to the topic or condition being studied (Patton). Multiple case studies offer not only the opportunity to explore the perspective of a single character, but personal world views of several characters, which then enable the researcher to compare and contrast these views to develop some generalizations concerning the topic which may be examined in other research (Creswell; Patton).

Research Questions

The research questions for this study are as follows:

1. What challenges do homeschooled students face during their enrollment at a community college?
2. How do homeschooled students experience Tinto's (1993) three stages of *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation* during their enrollment at a community college?
3. What programs or services at the community college aided and/or hindered the transitional process for the homeschooled students?

The research questions relate to Tinto’s theory of college transition as being a process; therefore, the study explored the challenges of the changes as perceived by the students. It then explored the process of the changes and concluded with identifying aspects which assisted or hindered the students’ adjustment during their community college experience (Tinto, 1993). Tinto suggests that virtually all students will experience at least some difficulty in their college transitional process (1993).

Overview of Methodology

The researcher recorded and analyzed the experiences of three individual cases of community college students who were homeschooled for a period of at least four years. Four years ensured the students' homeschool education encompassed the duration of secondary school education. Data collection methods included observations, journaling, and interviews of the cases at various points of the 2010-2011 academic year at Mid Atlantic Community College.

Triangulation of the different data collection methods resulted in a cross-examination of the data and experiences recorded (Creswell, 2007). The researcher completed data collection by holding a focus group meeting with the three subjects to discuss their reflections of the academic year.

Selection of Participants

Once the researcher obtained permission from the Institutional Review Boards of both Old Dominion University and the community college to conduct the study, the researcher sent a letter to Mid Atlantic Community College students who had been identified by the college research officer as having been homeschooled four or more years. To encourage positive responses to the invitation, an incentive of \$20 gift cards from Walmart was given to each student after each interview, and after submission of journals each semester. Of those who respond to the letter by completing and returning an attached response form, three cases were purposefully selected by the researcher based upon their potential for providing a compelling story of transition to the community college environment (Creswell, 2007). This multiple case study was considered a success because at least three cases remained in the study for the duration of the academic year. The participants were assured that they would be protected from all foreseeable problems stemming from the data collection methods, and their names and the college names were carefully concealed to protect them from identification, thus encouraging more candid responses. All physical data for this study were securely stored in a locked file

cabinet in the researcher's office. All digital data were stored on a password-protected flash drive kept by the researcher.

Interviews

The interview instrument for intake and at other intervals of the study was a modified and expanded version of the earlier instrument used in a university setting (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007). Bolle's interview instrument was originally developed by Lattibeaudiere, (Bolle, et al., 2007). To gather individualized impressions, feelings, and thoughts about the college transition experience, the questions in the interview were open-ended (Creswell, 2007).

Courses are normally offered in a fifteen-week semester at Mid Atlantic Community College, which provided a set range of simultaneous course experiences for the three cases. Interviews were conducted with the homeschooled students after classes began in October 2010 at select times during the academic year, including November 2010, January 2011, and March 2011. The research spent about an hour with the students individually for the interviews. In appreciation for their participation, the researcher provided each of the participants a \$20.00 gift card from Walmart at the conclusion of each interview.

Observations

The researcher observed the participants during their classes on campus and during the participants' free time. Observations each session lasted from two hours to an entire class day, which ranged at least two class periods and one hour of time between classes when the student was on campus for out-of-class time. Observation sessions occurred three different times during the academic year between interview sessions, resulting in approximately nine hours observational time per participant during the entire study. Observation periods of each participant's learning experiences occurred once in the first semester (October or November,

2010), and twice in the second semester (February and April 2011). Observations had to occur over an extended period of time in order to accurately gather a great amount of rich, descriptive data about the subject's experiences (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Notes were recorded on a checklist to track the activities of the participant in the classroom and campus environment. The checklist provided for coding the context, description, and theoretical generalizations of each observation experience so they could be compared later with the different cases and grouped together per experience by the researcher (Creswell).

Journals

The researcher offered either blank composition books or allowed participants to set up a word processing file to be used in journaling about their experiences for the duration of the academic year. The researcher encouraged each participant to record his or her thoughts, feelings, and college experiences at least twice per week, or more often as desired. The researcher collected the first semester journals or Microsoft Word files in December 2010 for analysis, and issued new composition books to the students before they began the following semester. Students received a \$20 gift card from Walmart as an incentive for submitting journals at the end of each semester. The researcher again collected the second issued journals or online blogs and issued gift card incentives at the focus group meeting in May 2011.

Focus Group

To protect the identity of the participants during data collection, the focus group session was held in May 2011. This was necessary to prevent any additional influence of the first year college experience among the participants. The participants were asked to attend this meeting to return the journals and a last incentive of gift cards was offered at the meeting to encourage their participation. A catered lunch was also provided at the meeting to make it a more relaxing and

friendly occasion. The participants were then introduced to one another as fellow students in the study, and they had the opportunity to share their thoughts, feelings, and experiences about the year with each other. All participants remained with the study for the duration of data collection. The focus group concluded all data collection and provided closure for the three participants of the study.

Data Analysis

Upon conclusion of data collection (interviews, observations, journals, and focus group), the researcher then separated the data collection materials by case and analyzed the information. Reviewing the data many times to comprehend the themes that emerged from it, the researcher identified themes in the case information and coded the data from the journals, interviews, and observations recorded relating to those themes. According to Creswell (2007), when coding data for a case study, potential themes are the chronology, plot, setting, and characters of each case. Sub-themes may be problems encountered, actions taken, and resolutions achieved in each challenge (Creswell). The researcher then grouped the data chronologically by interview interval, observation interval, and journals, and began studying the total experiences of each group to determine if any themes emerged which could provide general information about the experiences of students. The complete manuscript was then organized by the experiences of each case, and then aggregate experiences throughout the academic year at the community college.

Limitations

This study concerned a limited number of homeschooled students at a Mid Atlantic region community college, and the results of this study cannot be generalized to homeschooled students beyond the scope of this region. Qualitative analysis provided an individualized, very detailed account of students' thoughts, feelings, and other impressions of their academic year at

the community college. Such information now potentially contributes to other studies pertaining to longitudinal explorations of homeschoolers within their subsequent academic experiences at two-year, four-year and even graduate college studies.

Conclusion

Homeschooler enrollment is rising at community colleges, yet little research has focused this population. Although much of the research has explored the transition of traditional-aged students (Hicks & Heasitie, 2008; Karp, Hughes , & O’Gara, 2008; Reid & Moore, 2000; Tobolowsky, 2006), as well as that of non-traditional students (Sorey & Duggan, 2008b), homeschooled students are unique to both populations. Studying this special population will assist community college leaders to better meet their needs, thereby ensuring this group is successful. The first year of college is pivotal in retention research, and seeing this through the eyes of the homeschooled student provides some insight into their needs and challenges. Unlike their counterparts who come from public and private secondary schools, most homeschoolers typically have not experienced structured educational settings. Research suggests that most homeschooled students are very productive learners, and their academic ability is usually equivalent to the best students of the public and private sector schools (Barwegan, et al., 2004; Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Mason, 2004; Ray, 2004a). In fact, homeschoolers’ academic ability is usually sufficient to gain entrance to even select colleges, but research on their experiences at college typically ends there. This study takes the research into the next area, that of college transition, by actively monitoring three homeschooled students during a year of their community college experiences.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

This chapter has two main sections with several subsections. The first section, entitled “Homeschooling,” contains five subsections: “The American Homeschooling Movement,” “Pre-college Preparation of Homeschoolers,” “Challenges Facing Homeschoolers in College,” “Homeschoolers and Four-Year Colleges,” and “Homeschoolers and Community Colleges.” Section two provides an overview of Tinto’s college transition theory and its relationship to homeschooled community college students. Each section ends with a summary and critique.

Homeschooling

The American Homeschooling Movement

The American homeschooling movement gained popularity in the late 1960’s. During that time, compulsory education laws in all 50 states greatly dissuaded the act of homeschooling ones’ children, making it unpopular and illegal in some cases (Isenberg, 2007; Lines, 2001; Lyman, 1998). Only 10,000 homeschoolers existed in the U.S. in the late 1960’s (Lines); however, the number of homeschooling families quickly began to rise due to two very different critical views of public education (Collom, 2005; Romanowski, 2006). The first critical view originated from families with a more liberal-minded, “pedagogical” outlook (Collom) who felt the public school systems were too conservative and inefficient in fully educating children, and they could do a better job of educating their children at home (Romanowski). John Holt, a former teacher and author, wrote popular books which provided inspiration and reasoning for much of this thinking (Holt, 1964/1982). Families which followed his advice are credited with creating the earliest beginnings of the present day homeschooling movement (Lyman).

The second type of early critical view of public schools was based upon religion. Often referred to as conservative “ideologues” (Collom, 2005; Romanowski, 2006), these homeschooling families believed public schools were too secular in operation and wanted to blend religious education with their children’s instruction (Romanowski). As public and private schools began to adopt certain stances about sensitive family issues (e.g. sex education, and creation vs. evolution), many religiously-based families began to homeschool their children in an effort to impart their own values, not those of the public school (Isenberg, 2007; Lyman, 1998; Moore & Moore, 1982).

The momentum of the homeschooling movement has increased dramatically from the 1990’s to the present day. As the number of homeschooling families rose, compulsory education laws were challenged and overturned to eventually legalize homeschooling in all 50 states. In fact, advocate organizations such as the Home School Legal Defense Association (HSLDA) successfully included protection for homeschooled students in federal legislation such as the “No Child Left Behind Act” (Isenberg, 2007; Lyman, 1998). As homeschooling began to grow more popular, families chose to homeschool for a wider variety of reasons than mere disagreement with public schools, including reasons such as providing religious or moral instruction, providing for children’s special physical needs or special problems, enhancing family unity, and providing individualized teaching (Princiotta, Bielick, & Chapman, 2005).

Obtaining a true population estimate of the number of homeschoolers today is quite challenging. Homeschooling is often very individualistic in nature, and in some instances homeschooling families may not even claim to be “homeschoolers,” often due to fear of what others may think about the practice of homeschooling, or their personal definitions of how they are educating their children may not be considered “homeschooling” (Collom, 2005; Isenberg,

2007). Nevertheless, as seen in Figure 1, generally accepted estimates placed the number of homeschoolers at 850,000 in 1999, rising to 1.1 million in 2003 (Bielick, Chandler, & Broughman, 2001; Princiotta, et al., 2005). By 2007, the number of homeschoolers nationwide was estimated to be 1.5 million (Bielick, 2008). The number of homeschoolers was predicted to reach three million by 2010, comprising a total of 3% of the overall U.S. school attending population (Ray & Eagleson, 2008). Conversely, others have mentioned the rate of growth is beginning to slow down in the early 21st century, leaving experts to speculate whether or not the growth of the homeschooling movement will level off in the future (Ray, 2004b; Lines, 2001). Evidence of this “leveling off” can now be seen with the present number of homeschoolers estimated at almost 2 million in 2011 (NHERI, 2012).

Figure 1. Estimated U.S. Population of Homeschoolers 1999-2012

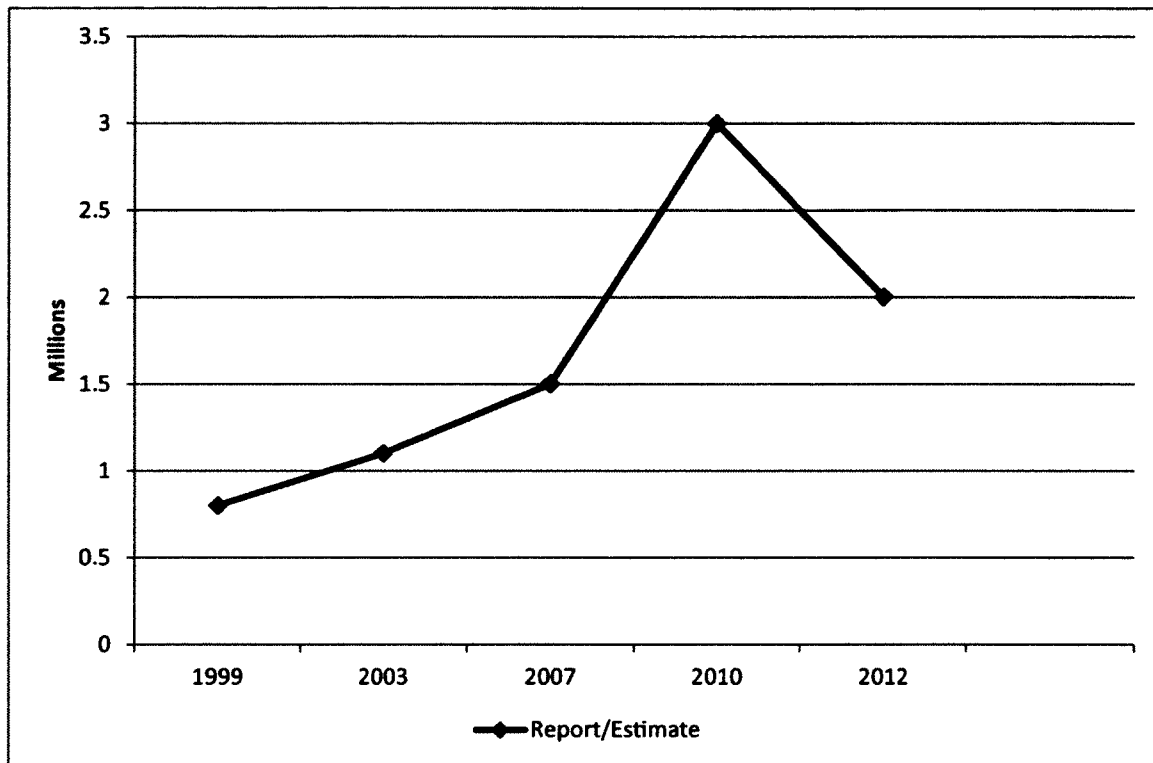


Figure 1. The above chart links estimates of the total number of U.S. homeschooled students from 1999 to 2012. The 1999 estimate is from Lines (2001). The 2003 estimate is from Bielick, Chandler and Broughman (2005). The 2007 estimate is from Bielick (2008). The 2010 estimate is a projection from Ray & Eagleson (2008) and the 2012 estimate is from the National Home Education Research Institute website (NHERI, 2012).

Pre-college Preparation of Homeschoolers

Previous research (American Council on Education, 2003) suggests that predictors of college persistence may include a student's background characteristics, a student's external commitments, institutional influences, or a combination thereof. Pre-college experiences, often combined with college preparation and college readiness (Reid & Moore, 2008), have been linked to college persistence as well as math and writing proficiency (Knudson, Zitzer-Comfort, & Alexander, 2008). Cohen (2008) refers to a misalignment of K-12 and higher education systems resulting in miscommunication regarding the knowledge and skills necessary for

students to advance in college as contributing to academic unpreparedness, suggesting a greater need for critical-thinking and communication skills. Still other research suggests a link between non-cognitive factors (i.e., attitudes, skills, and behaviors) and persistence (Duggan & Pickering, 2008; Duggan & Sorey, 2018b; Pickering, Calliotte, & McAuliffe, 1992).

Much, if not all, of this research targets public high school experiences, but public-schooled students are not the only students attending college. What happens to those students who were home-schooled rather than attended public school? How well prepared are *these* students when they reach college? Little research has explored college preparation and pre-college experiences of community college students in general, but even less explores college preparation and characteristics among students who have been home-schooled and now attend community colleges with students who were public and private-schooled (Duggan, 2010b). Duggan stated that homeschooled students were found to have rated themselves highly in their own opinion of college preparedness (Duggan, 2010b). Since pre-college preparation is linked to college persistence, increasing our knowledge of the homeschooled student's background will allow community colleges to better assist these students during their first-year transition. The very flexibility of pedagogy and curriculum that makes homeschooling so attractive, however, also makes describing a homeschooler's pre-college experiences sometimes difficult.

Approaches

Despite the uniqueness of the homeschool experience, some approaches have become common. Homeschoolers seldom follow one approach entirely; often opting to choose what best fits their family, and thereby crafting their own approach to education. Unfortunately, this means each homeschooler brings a unique set of pre-college experiences, based on the approach chosen by his or her family. The Home School Legal Defense Association provides a variety of popular

approaches for families to consider when planning the home instruction of their children (Homeschool.com, 2010; HSLDA, 2009, Shepherd-Knapp, 2006). These approaches range from the classical approach (Miller, 2005) to unit studies (Shepherd-Knapp, 2006). Other approaches are more structured and were developed by popular educational theorists such as the Calvert School (Calvert School, 2009), the Waldorf philosophy (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 2009), the Charlotte Mason approach (Camrose Academy, 2009), and the Montessori approach (Montessori International school, 2009). In addition, some approaches to homeschooling lack any set structure, such as “de-schooling” (Dodd, 2002; King, 2004) and “un-schooling” (Morrison, 2007). Many descriptions of homeschooling curriculum approaches are found on the internet at homeschooling-related websites (HSLDA, 2010; Pederson, 2008; Sheppard-Knapp, 2006; Shoemaker, 2009). The most popular approaches to homeschooling follow.

The Calvert school. The Calvert school claims to inspire both children and their parent-teachers to reach their full learning and instruction potential (Calvert School, 2009). It is an approach taught world-wide, and to many, it is a time tested curriculum. The most unique aspect of the Calvert School approach is that students learn from proprietary texts developed to cover topics such as reading, writing, science, math, and history, thus assuring an equally comprehensive education when compared to that of public or private school learning. In addition, the Calvert school (2009) also provides special support services such as their placement process, counseling and advising services when students or parents need college placement support or instructional advice (HomeSchoolReviews.com, 2010). The goal of the Calvert School approach is to teach students similar information to that learned in public schools, but at an individualized pace of learning.

Charlotte Mason approach. The Camrose Academy is the chief proponent of the Charlotte Mason approach (Camrose Academy, 2009). Developed in the latter 1800's, this approach espouses using the gentleness and respect of each individual to teach, instead of a harsh, fearful, disciplinary approach used by many public schools at the time. Selected literature is referred to as "living books," which focused on the natural environment and covered a variety of topics from other subjects such as science and history. As Charlotte Mason related these stories, she asked the children to read and narrate the story back to her, which enhanced their attention to the lessons being explored and making it their own tale. The Charlotte Mason approach also includes a focus on the fine arts such as music, sculpture, and painting. The central philosophy of the Charlotte Mason technique is the interconnectedness of "God, Man, and the universe" (Camrose Academy website, 2009), and children are encouraged to learn using various artistic and humanistic approaches.

The classical approach. Homeschoolers educated using the Classical method follow a prescribed curriculum that dates back to the Middle Ages (Miller, 2005). This approach espouses five tools of learning: reason, record, research, relate, and rhetoric. Younger children begin with the preparing stage, where they learn basic reading, writing, and arithmetic. The grammar stage is next, which emphasizes compositions and collections, and the dialectic stage, where serious reading, study, and research take place. The goal of this approach is to teach the students how to learn for themselves (Miller).

De-schooling. Families often choose the de-schooling approach in reaction to having a student leave the public school system after experiencing some problems within it (King, 2004). De-schooling is viewed as period of redirecting learning or work so that the student learns through experiences and interaction with other people in a new, non-school-like environment

(Dodd, 2002). Methods of de-schooling may include watching movies or reading books together which focus on alternative approaches to learning besides school, taking up hobbies such as crafts, or recreational sports to encourage other interests (Dodd; King). Some experts believe de-schooling is a flawed approach because it does not prioritize learning concepts in a predetermined manner or schedule, leading to incomplete preparation for other life goals such as college or work (Dodd). Advocates of de-schooling believe it gives the children an opportunity to recover from situations that have affected them within the school system and explore what truly interests them to rebuild their self-esteem (Dodd; King).

Montessori approach. Although privately operated Montessori schools exist throughout the United States and in several countries, many homeschooling families incorporate the materials and practices of the Montessori approach in their children's home instruction (HSLDA, 2009; Homeschool.com, 2009; Shepherd-Knapp, 2006). Originally developed in the early 1900's by Dr. Maria Montessori, this educational practice encourages children to develop "creativity, problem solving, critical thinking and time-management skills to contribute to society and the environment as fulfilled individuals" (International Montessori Index, 2009). The Montessori teacher essentially acts as a guide to children and conducts "errorless" learning with them, which allows children to learn at their own pace in order to develop a natural love of learning (Homeschool.com, 2009; Montessori International School, 2009).

Unit studies. The unit studies approach blends all school subjects into one theme. For example, a parent would use child's love of animals to teach him or her biology, math, reading, and other studies in a structured format centering on his or her love of animals. Similar to the "school-at-home" approach, booklets or packets of materials containing lessons may be purchased "a la carte" or together in a set grade-level package according to a theme of interest of

their child (Hernandez, 2009). The goal of this approach is to enhance a love of learning using the child's interests as motivation (Hernandez).

Un-schooling. Un-schooling was originally introduced by John Holt (1964/1982) and others who argued that education should be "child centered" and guided by the personal motivations of the children (Lyman, 1998; Morrison, 2007). Families choosing this method focus on the interests of their child to guide and instruct them in not just basic educational topics, but also various tangents and themes of personal interest (Morrison). For example, a child with an interest in music may study various instruments, learn the history of the instrument, go to concerts, learn music theory, learn music reading, and thus also learn to read so that he or she can pursue works concentrating on the topic of music. There is no set method or schedule to his or her learning (Dodd, 2002; Morrison). As interests change, knowledge about various topics related to them is explored and encouraged. Learning itself becomes enjoyable to the student, rather than "forced" upon them (Morrison).

Waldorf method. Originally developed by Freidrich Froebel in the early 1800's (and with Rudolph Steiner later in the early 1900's), the Waldorf educational method is a teacher-centered approach which helps the teacher in preparing and instructing the child to learn and develop in their own individual style (Waldorffamilynetwork.com, 2003). Using "anthroposophy," or the study of human nature, the Waldorf approach is unique because it teaches certain subjects and concentrations at predetermined stages related to the development of the child (Waldorffamilynetwork.com, 2003). Childhood (ages birth to 18) is divided into 3 stages. Each seven-year age range focuses holistically on three different aspects of the child: the head, the heart, and the hands, blending physical work with artistic expression and knowledge of classic educational material (Association of Waldorf Schools of North America, 2008;

Waldorffamilynetwork.com, 2003). The goal of the Waldorf approach is to ensure learning is naturally optimized as the child matures (McCloud-McDonald, 2008; Waldorffamilynetwork.com, 2003; Research Institute for Waldorf Education, 2006).

Summary and Critique

Community college students who have been homeschooled come from a plethora of educational approaches, thus impacting their preparation for college. Because homeschooling is varied and individualistic in nature, classifying the various creative educational methods used in homeschooling is often difficult (McReynolds, 2007; Ray, 2004b; Shepherd-Knapp, 2006). Most families use only the parts of each educational approach that are useful to them and often blend a number of approaches to create their own eclectic, instructional approach for their child or children (Ray, 2004b, 2009). This individualized approach to homeschool curricula directly impacts the information and skills the students initially have once they initially attend college (Duggan, 2010b; Ray, 2004a). As a result, some homeschooled students may be better prepared for college than others due to their homeschool curriculum and extra-curricular activities. Recent studies suggest that a large percentage of homeschooled students are very prepared for the college experience (Barwegen, Falciano, Reamer, Putnam, & Stair, 2004; Collom, 2005; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Mason, 2004; Ray 2004a) and also have great confidence concerning their preparation for college (Duggan, 2010b). Missing from this research, however, is an exploration of the transitional challenges that homeschoolers may face while attending community colleges.

Research on social precollege preparation of homeschoolers is not as abundant; however, research suggests participation in field trips, community service, recreational sports, civic groups, and homeschooling associations provides homeschoolers with ample opportunities to socialize with peers and other community members (Medlin, 2000; Ray, 2009). Because

academic and social pre-college experiences of homeschoolers differ from those of public and private schooled students, pre-college preparation and college selection are also unique experiences for homeschoolers (Duggan, 2010a, 2010b). Research posits that homeschooled students are typically very concerned about their colleges' acceptance of homeschooling as adequate preparation (Duggan, 2010a, Jones & Glockener, 2004b; Mason, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a), the quality of their chosen educational institution (Ray, 2004a), and the access to support available to him or her once admitted to the college (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Ray, 2004a).

Homeschoolers and Four-Year Colleges

The literature concerning the college experiences of homeschoolers reveals the rising numbers of homeschooler college applicants (Cogan, 2010; Cox, 2003; Ray, 2004a). It also explores some transitional experiences of four-year college homeschooled students (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007). The challenges facing the homeschoolers in college are also shared in this section (Callaway, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a).

Population of homeschooled college applicants. Ray (2004a; 2004b) suggests homeschooled adults are more likely to have attended at least some college than the rest of the population of the same age. Cox (2003) estimated that 30,000 homeschoolers enter higher education annually. Callaway (2004) also suggested approximately 400,000 homeschooled applicants will enter colleges and universities by 2014. Although both estimates confirm the growth of homeschoolers entering higher education, Callaway (2004) states that these figures are only rough estimates because some colleges do not record the numbers of homeschooled students applying to their institution. Also, some homeschooled applicants will not officially

admit to having been homeschooled because state and federal guidelines occasionally make it more difficult for homeschoolers to receive financial aid for college (Callaway, 2004).

Homeschoolers' college transitional experience. Studies suggest homeschoolers view their first-year transition to college to be no different than that of their public- and private-schooled counterparts (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Lattibeaudiere, 2000). Lattibeaudiere (2000) conducted interviews and administered the Student Adaption to College Questionnaire (SACQ) to freshmen homeschoolers attending a Mid-Atlantic state university, finding the skills these students learned during homeschooling had prepared them well for college life. They scored, on average, in the 88th percentile on the college adjustment measure of the SACQ prior to admission to college, compared to the 50th percentile scores achieved on average by traditionally-educated students. Lattibeaudiere (2000) also found that homeschooled students who attended religiously affiliated colleges were better adjusted to college life than those attending public colleges, and the longer the students were homeschooled, the better they scored in the adjustment to college life measurement. In another study at a mid-sized, Mid-western research university, homeschooled students reported similar experiences to traditionally educated students transitioning in their first year of college (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007). Both studies, however, called for additional research on the transitional experiences of homeschooled college students, particularly in a variety of different college settings (such as a community college) (Bolle, et al., 2007; Lattibeaudiere, 2000).

Challenges Facing the Homeschooler in College

Much research has addressed the traditional-age student's transition to four-year (Astin, 1984, 1996; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Shanley & Johnston, 2008; Tinto, 1993, 1997; Tobolowski, 2008; Scanlon, Rowling, & Weber, 2007) and two-year institutions (Haggan, 2000; Tinto,

Russel, and Kadel, 1996; Watson, 2000), but scant research disaggregates the homeschooler (Cox, 2003). The first year of college is arguably the most difficult adjustment period for new college students due to the separation from one's childhood home to attend the new college environment (Hicks & Heastie, 2008). Because most community colleges are generally not residential in nature and students have the option to remain home while attending, the difficulties in transition for many students shift to challenges that are academic rather than environmental in nature (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010). For example, incoming community college students are more likely to require developmental coursework and take additional time to complete their degree because of such requirements (Karp, et al., 2010).

Recent studies on homeschoolers entering college have focused on their admissions experiences (Callaway, 2004; Mason, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a) and academic performance (Jenkins, 1998; Jones & Gloeckner, 2007a; Ray, 2004a), often comparing homeschooled students to their more traditionally educated counterparts once in college. Researchers and advocates suggest homeschooler's performance in college appears to be one of the best indicators of the quality of education received through homeschooling (Cox, 2003; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004a). However, research also suggests several unique challenges continuing to hinder student success with college admission and transition: lack of available guidance counseling (Duggan, 2010a; Mason, 2004), lack of transcript records (Callaway, 2004; "Develop process to evaluate homeschoolers applications," 2007; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a), unfamiliarity with structured educational environments (Bolle, Wessel & Mulvihill, 2007), and lack of socialization experiences with same-age peers (Bolle, et al., 2007; Medlin, 2000).

Lack of available guidance counseling. Public and private schools often provide guidance counselors to assist students in preparing for college and life after high school

graduation (Alexitch, Kobussen, & Stookey, 2004) These counselors provide pre-college testing and analysis, career counseling, and college placement counseling to help students narrow their career choices and select a college that meets their needs (Alexitch, et al., 2004). Rather than scheduling a meeting with a school counselor to gather such information, homeschooled students usually must obtain information about college admissions from a variety of alternative sources, including help from their parents (Farris & Woodruff, 1999; Klein, 2005), community libraries (Willingham, 2008), homeschooling associations (“Market Institution to Homeschoolers,” 2007), internet searches (Duggan, 2010a; Ray, 2004b), and by contacting and/or interviewing college admissions counselors (Mason, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a).

Lack of transcripts. Some homeschool associations and curriculum providers offer transcripts of secondary school work completed, but these documents are not as widely accepted as public and private high school transcripts (Callaway, 2004). Students attending public and private high schools usually receive a transcript summarizing their work completed in high school, and they are an essential component of the college admissions application (AACC, 2012; Mason, 2004; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). This lack of transcripts forces homeschoolers to use other means to gain admission to colleges, including recommendation letters, CLEP tests, ACT test, and SAT test scores, (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Lyman, 1998; Ray & Eagleson, 2008; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). Most colleges require both a transcript and test score. Homeschoolers often attend community colleges to create a college transcript that four-year colleges can then readily analyze for admission (Mason, 2004; Callaway, 2004). Community colleges are best known for being “open door” institutions that will test all applicants for college level or developmental placement in English and math courses, as well as offer them college courses for transfer or technical education (AACC).

Unfamiliarity with structured educational environments. Once admitted to a community college, homeschoolers enter a campus setting consisting of buildings, classrooms, classmates, instructors, and set schedules of assignments and projects (AACC, 2012; Cohen & Brawer, 2003). To succeed, all new college students must adapt to this new environment no matter how it differs from their previous educational environment (Shanley & Johnson, 2008; Tinto, 1993). According to Ray (2004a), homeschoolers often have little contact with state-supported educational environments until they attend college. Despite this unfamiliarity, however, research confirms that, overall, homeschoolers succeed academically in college (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Cox, 2003; Ray, 2004a) because they have already acquired personal learning skills such as how to search for information, and are self-motivated students (Ray, 2004b, 2009) unlike public school students, some whom are reportedly not as well practiced in learning on their own (Wingate, 2007).

Lack of peer socialization experiences. Homeschooled students normally have had less exposure to daily interaction with peers of their same age (Medlin, 2000). Some researchers critique the homeschooling movement for not exposing students to opportunities with extended peer influence or a “peer group effect” (Lubienski, 2000; Medlin, 2000), suggesting adolescents need to spend extended amounts of time with one another to learn how to appropriately interact with others. Advocates of the homeschooling movement refute this claim by stating that homeschoolers are instead exposed to a broader variety of social experiences with interactions between those who are older and younger, or have different backgrounds from the student, making them more confident in their encounters with various people once in college (Medlin; Ray, 2000, 2004a; Romanowski, 2006).

Homeschoolers and Community Colleges

Although some claim that homeschoolers will become more common in community colleges in the near future (Cox, 2003; Ray, 2004b), there also appears to be a larger, mainstream population migration to community colleges because of their lower tuition rates, easier transferability between community college and four-year college courses, and the broad variety of community college degrees and programs available to students (AACC, 2012; Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Mullin & Honeyman, 2008). Approximately 12.4 million students currently attend community colleges in the U.S., and this number is steadily increasing (AACC). Community college leaders need information on growing segments of their student population (such as homeschoolers) to design and create the most effective student support services for their growing institutions.

Summary and Critique

Research focusing on the college transition of homeschoolers is scant, often including anecdotal literature, which leads to skepticism and hearsay. The few existing empirical studies indicate that homeschooled college applicants may transition as well as their public and private schooled counterparts in the first year of college, but further observation of this first year transition in community colleges is needed to understand the process for homeschooled students. The community college environment poses challenges for new students regardless of background, and many institutions pride themselves on providing competent student support services to assist students in overcoming their challenges to college retention and success (AACC, 2012). There is still more information to learn about how homeschooled students overcome the inherent challenges and use the strengths gained from homeschooling to make such an effective academic impact in higher education, particularly at community colleges.

Theoretical Framework: Student Transition to the Community College

This study follows a lineage of research using Tinto's reconceptualization of Van Genneep's *Rites of Passage* descriptions to explain homeschooled students' transition to a higher educational setting (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Lattibeaudiere, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Tinto compares the new college student's experiences with Van Genneep's descriptions of late adolescent members leaving a tribe to become an adult. Both experience a transition as they make this life change (Tinto).

Rites of Passage

Tinto (1993) uses Dutch anthropologist Arnold Van Genneep's (1909/1960) *Rites of Passage* descriptions as the basis for explaining college freshman student transitions. Comparing Van Genneep's observations of tribal adolescent children leaving the tribe for a time to learn to be an adult, Tinto saw similarities to the modern American high school graduate leaving home for the first time to attend college. Both theorists believed that young adults go through three particular stages as they make the transition to their new identity of tribal adult/ college student: *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation*. Each stage is marked by a difference in the young adult's perception of the new environment (Van Genneep).

Separation. Just as the young tribal member leaves home to be tested as an independent adult, the adolescent also leaves home after graduating from secondary school and deciding which college to attend. This "leaving stage" is the *separation* point in one's transition. At this point, the young adults usually acutely miss the old associations of home and childhood as they meet the challenges of independent adulthood and caring for oneself. Here the individual barriers or challenges of the college environment or wilderness become very apparent to the young adult (Liu & Liu, 1999). Kelly, Kendrick, Newgent, & Lucas (2007) examined student departure over the last century and revealed a 45% national rate of departure for first time college students.

Apparently, almost half of all college students do not successfully make it through the separation stage; they leave college and return home to attempt other life opportunities (Kelly, et al., 2007). Both explanations of Tinto's description of college transition and Van Gennep's tribal initiation seem drastically different, but in each case, the young adult's feelings were observed to be quite the same as he or she progressed through his or her life changes (Van Gennep, 1909/1960, as cited in Tinto, 1993).

Transition. After some time in the new environment, the *transition* stage becomes evident as the young adults make new acquaintances, learn to fend for themselves, and also learn what is acceptable and unacceptable in their new role and environment. This stage is marked by a lessening of feelings for past acquaintances as the young adult becomes preoccupied with present challenges and encounters with those in the new environment (Tinto, 1993). Tinto also validated his transition theory as applicable to the community college in more recent studies (Tinto, 1997; Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). In them, he asserted that feeling that one can "belong" in the new setting is paramount to their continuance in it (Engstrom & Tinto). Communication and connection to those in the society to which they are adjusting is important at this stage. Because of this, identity factors such as race, gender, and educational background may also play a role in the level of belongingness the student feels at this stage (Liu & Liu, 1999).

Incorporation. The *incorporation* stage is reached when the young adults in the new environments have mastered most of the challenges of the new environment, and those who are successful have made a niche for themselves in this new society as an adult. Key to this stage is whether or not they adopt the values and beliefs of the new environment and accept their role in it (Tinto, 1993). Students attending smaller, more specialized colleges seem to have a better attainment of the incorporation stage of transition than those attending larger colleges

(Lattibeaudiere, 2000). According to Tinto (1997), all colleges have a responsibility to provide a variety of support methods to their students so that they successfully reach this stage. It is during the *incorporation* stage that many young adults ultimately graduate and may choose to either return home or relocate (Tinto, 1993).

Community College Transition

Although a majority of community college students do not leave home when they attend the community college (AACC, 2012; Cohen & Brawer, 2003), many students view community colleges as challenging academic settings to which they must adapt (Karp, Hughes, & O’Gara, 2008). The separation stage, however, may not be as evident for community college students as it is for those attending four-year colleges (Tinto, 1993). Although community college students may still live at home with their families, their daily academic environment has changed. Their parents, for example, are no longer present to guide them as much as they had been when they homeschooled or attended high school. Traditionally educated students often have friends and acquaintances from their former high school now attending the same community college with them, but not so with the homeschooled student, who may have been alone for most of his or her homeschooling. This isolation potentially affects homeschooled students’ perspectives of group work, collaborative learning, and peer influence, possibly creating greater challenges to his or her transition to the structured educational setting of the community college. These differences in pre-college preparation from those of more traditionally educated students make it appropriate to examine homeschooler’s experiences using Tinto’s college transition theory, as inexperience with the college environment and other classmates may create a unique transitional experience for the homeschooler. Tinto, Russo, and Kadel (1996) also confirmed the concept that community colleges offer circumstances similar to those of the four-year institution in terms of transition. Nevertheless, as more homeschooled students transition to the community college,

this study will assist community college admissions personnel and college leaders to understand homeschoolers' transition experiences and better serve this population of students.

Summary and Critique

Much research has already explored the traditional student's transition from the secondary school to the college environment (Astin, 1984, 1996; Hicks & Heastie, 2008; Shanley & Johnston, 2008; Tinto, 1993). How homeschooled students transition to the community college, however, has not been explored in detail. The great variety of homeschooling instructional approaches prepare students for college academics, and research indicates that the majority of homeschooled students are well prepared for college entrance when they finish their homeschooling and graduate (Duggan, 2010b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004b). Research does not yet clarify whether or not homeschooled students' challenges actually differ from public schooled students in college, but it is clear that the goal of many homeschoolers is to attend college after their secondary education is completed. Ray (2004b) purports the majority of homeschooled adults (50.2 %) have had at least some experience with college, and their college graduation attainment (11.8%) is higher than other secondary school graduates (7.6%). The results are similar for two year college graduation attainment (8.7% for homeschoolers versus 4.1% for other secondary school graduates). While research explores the transition of four-year college homeschooled students (Bolle, et al., 2007), these findings cannot be fully generalized to community college settings because the two types of higher education institutional environments are so unique from one another, primarily because of different admissions standards and residential options (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Understanding how homeschooled students transition to the community college aids college administrators in developing programs and services to recruit and retain homeschoolers who are attending community colleges in growing

numbers. This study thus examined and identified the unique transitional experiences and student support needs of homeschoolers for those interested in how community colleges may better serve the homeschooler's needs at this stage of their education.

Conclusion

The educational background of homeschooled college students includes a variety of alternate high school curriculum approaches about which there is little research. Some approaches may be more effective in preparing homeschoolers for college than other approaches, but research has not yet explored the differences between homeschooling approaches to identify the effectiveness of the various approaches. Despite the lack of a structured educational experience, homeschoolers still perform as well as other types of secondary school graduates entering colleges (Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004b). Homeschooled students still may have unique challenges as they enter the college environment, and it is important for colleges with larger numbers of homeschooled students to identify these challenges and attempt to address them. Because homeschooled students differ from traditionally educated students in terms of pre-college preparation, admissions challenges, socialization, and attitudes toward academic learning, their transitional experiences should be examined in greater detail. This study used Tinto's college transition theory as well as qualitative research methods to examine the homeschoolers' experiences during the first year at a community college (Tinto, 1993). The following chapter presents the methodology of this study.

CHAPTER III

METHOD

This chapter describes the methodology used to answer three research questions exploring the transition experiences of homeschooled students during their enrollment at a community college. The setting, participants, data collection methods, and information analysis procedures are each described in detail. The methodology was designed to examine and document the experiences of three simultaneous cases of first year community college students who were previously homeschooled. The study used qualitative techniques such as interviews of the students at set intervals, periodic observations of the students' interactions in classrooms or other settings at the community college, and journals kept by students during the academic year to gather and document each student's perspectives of their overall community college experiences. A focus group meeting concluded the data collection and provided closure for the participants. This allowed the researcher to analyze the collective impressions of the participants' experiences at Mid Atlantic Community College.

Research Design

This qualitative study employed a multiple case study approach to explore the transition of three previously homeschooled students during an academic year of attendance at the community college, treating the students as distinct "bounded systems" across a set period of time, namely, the academic year of study (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994). Though the community college itself may be considered a single case, the focus of this study was not to examine the culture of the college itself, but the individual homeschooled students' transition to the community college culture. Case studies have long been used in a variety of disciplines to develop scientific examinations of situations where very little research existed (Creswell, 2007;

Miles & Huberman, 1994; Stake, 2006). A thorough, qualitative study of the first year experiences of homeschooled students provided an in-depth examination, which formed the basis for recommendations for other kinds of research on this topic. In this study, the transitional experiences were recorded and described in detail for future researchers to contemplate (Creswell; Miles & Huberman; Patton, 2002).

Research Questions

This multiple case study explored the following research questions:

1. What challenges do homeschooled students face during their enrollment at the community college?

This question was addressed through analysis of journal entries, interviews, and observations. The journals consisted of student entries detailing the challenges they perceived while attending the community college. The interviews allowed the researcher to directly ask the students about those challenges as they occurred. Observations allowed the researcher to observe and record the way the student navigated challenges encountered in his or her daily experiences.

2. How do homeschooled students experience Tinto's (1993) three stages of *separation*, *transition*, and *incorporation* during their enrollment at a community college?

As the interviews progressed throughout the year, the questions were structured to record the thoughts and feelings of each student as he or she moved through the stages of separation, transition, and incorporation during the academic year. Since the students were not always physically separated from the home environment, the researcher looked for ways in which the community college environment felt “new” to them and how this feeling produced a transitional affect in the students.

3. What programs or services at the community college specifically aided or hindered the transitional process for the homeschooled students?

All data collection methods in this study were designed to identify a variety of challenges encountered by the student throughout the year. Challenges the students perceived within community college services, offices, or courses revealed possible overall effects on homeschooled students, particularly when the participants reported the same situations. With each method of data collection, the researcher asked the students if their homeschooling experiences were in any way related to the challenges they may have experienced.

Context of the Study

This study took place at a Mid Atlantic regional public community college. Themes which emerged from this context included topics such as technology use, the acceptance of homeschoolers within the academic organization, the acceptance of homeschoolers among the student body attending the community college, and the impact of attending the community college on the homeschoolers themselves. To capture the greatest transitional experiences possible, the researcher limited the cases of this study to students who were homeschooled for at least four years, implying they had completed the equivalent of secondary school as a homeschooler. This was to ensure the adequacy of the pre-college preparation of the homeschooled student for the study, as some homeschoolers had taken courses at the community college to complement their homeschooling requirements for secondary school. The longer the student had been homeschooled, the more noteworthy the case was for this study.

Setting

Mid Atlantic Community College is a mid-sized, public community college annually serving approximately 10,000 students and employing just over 300 faculty members. It consists of a 100-acre-plus campus and one off-campus site in a nearby town where most of the area

residents reside. The Mid Atlantic Community College offers transfer degrees for students to accomplish a two year associate degree that leads to obtaining a bachelor's degree at a four-year college. The Mid Atlantic Community College also offers occupational and technical degrees where students learn occupational skills that lead to employment opportunities.

Selection of Participants

Upon gaining approval from all relevant institutional review boards for research concerning human subjects (see Appendices A, B, and C), the researcher sent a letter to all college applicants who had indicated that they were homeschooled and had also registered for MACC classes for the fall 2010 semester (see Appendix D). This letter (see Appendix D) invited students to become part of a study for the duration of the fall and spring semesters, and it requested the students to complete a separate, attached response form concerning their schedule at MACC, as well as their homeschooling experiences. The researcher also explained that, in exchange for this information, those who were selected for the study would receive a series of \$20.00 gift cards from Walmart for each interview in which they participated, for the journal submissions at the end of each semester, and for participation in the focus group at the end of the study. The researcher assured each participant that his or her identity would remain confidential throughout the study. Those not selected for the study received a denial letter (Appendix E) thanking them for their interest in the study. The study did not directly interfere with their community college experiences: instead, it focused on observing and recording their experiences at the community college for two semesters--fall 2010 and spring 2011. Those students selected began the study by meeting with the researcher to discuss it, receive a journal, schedule interview and observation meetings, and return a signed informed consent form to the researcher (see Appendix F).

The number of participants in the study was originally limited to five students. However, the researcher proceeded with the study when three students agreed to participate. Before beginning, each student verified he or she was homeschooled for at least four years, or the duration of their high school education. Three students sufficed for the depth of inquiry into each participant's experiences, yet provided ample variety of background and perspective of the community college experiences (Creswell, 2007). Because fewer than five students agreed to the study, it was limited only to those who had responded positively to the invitation. Other sampling methods did not apply. Each student who responded positively to the letter from the researcher (Appendix D) received a phone call and/or email from the researcher indicating his or her acceptance as a participant, or was sent a denial letter (see Appendix E). Once accepted, the researcher then scheduled them for an initial meeting to discuss the study and obtain their informed consent (Appendix F). For those accepted, the study consisted of individual interviews, individual observations, and journal analyses at set intervals (see Appendix N for timetable) coordinated by the researcher throughout both semesters, and concluded with a focus group meeting to provide closure (Appendix M). The selected participants were not informed of the identity of the other students in the study until the focus group was held in May 2011. This was to ensure natural interaction between the students during the academic year, minimizing any plausible participant manipulation of the study.

Data Collection

Two events impacted both the design of this study as well as data collection, requiring an alteration of the plans. The first occurred as IRB approval was obtained in late September of 2010. The original timeline included four interviews, four observations, two journal reviews, and one focus group interview. The actual study included just three observations because the

researcher decided to account for the “lost” September month of the study by eliminating one observation. The timing between the interviews was affected as well because the second interview occurred just two weeks after the first one to make up for lost time in the semester. However, by the end of the first semester, all events in the timeline for the study matched the originally designed pace. The spring semester methodology was followed as originally planned.

The second event occurred just after IRB approval was awarded in late September 2010. The community college research officer provided the researcher with a list of home schooled students attending MACC who were supposed to be over 18 years old. However, as the invitations to the study were answered, the researcher learned that some respondents were under age 18. The list also contained the names of homeschooled students who had already attended MACC for more than one semester. The researcher eliminated an under-age student from the study, accepted the two useable participants, and received one rejection of the invitation. That reply mentioned one student’s concerns over the stigma of being homeschooled (also an interesting finding). The researcher continued with the study using the two qualifying participants. It was only after the first interview with these participants that the researcher discovered the fall 2010 semester was not their first one. Then, the researcher’s work supervisor discovered a third potentially qualifying participant during a scholarship award dinner and invited him to speak with the researcher. He, too, was in his second year. This influenced the researcher, with his chair’s approval, to shift the focus of the planned study to previously homeschooled students who were in their second year at the institution, requesting them to reflect upon the last year of adjustment as well as current experiences. This change broadened the range of experiences shared in the interviews to include information pertaining to all three stages of Tinto’s theory of college student transition, rather than focusing primarily on the first

and second stages. The broader range of responses required this study's focus to shift from the impressions of homeschooled students in their first year of college to provide more pertinent information concerning the long range effects of both homeschooling and the community college education upon the lives of these students. This information is perhaps more useful to college practitioners and those invested in the creation of better programs and services for the target homeschooled community college student population, which evidently is growing in size, nationally.

Interviews. Appendices H, I, J, and K contain the interview protocol for this study, loosely based on the official instrument that Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvihill (2007) used with homeschoolers in a university setting. This instrument and permission to use it were provided to the researcher in March 2009. The researcher conducted the interviews in a classroom, his office, or meeting room at the community college at a time convenient for the participants. Before the first interview, the student provided the researcher with a pseudonym that was to be used for the duration of the study to conceal his or her identity. The researcher conducted each one-and-a half hour interview alone with the student. Whereas Bolle, et al. (2007) used an interview protocol with students in single individual interview settings, the current researcher interviewed the students on four occasions throughout the academic year using the questions based upon the transitional effect they had experienced at given times in the academic year (see Appendix N for timeline). This was to obtain a stronger, richer emotional response with more spontaneity (Creswell, 2007). Four separate interviews were scheduled: (1) in October 2010 after the start of classes to ensure student success at the start of the semester with the participants; (2) in November 2010; (3) in January 2011 after the end of the first semester of the study; and (4) in March 2011 after the middle of the second semester of the study.

To encourage individualized impressions, feelings, and thoughts about the college transition experience, the questions in the interview protocol were open-ended (Creswell, 2007). The questions were divided into four different interviews with approximately 10 to 20 questions asked in each interview. Each interview explored the student's transitional experiences of separation, transition, incorporation (Tinto, 1993), the role of the community college in the transitional process, personal reflections, and a conclusion giving the homeschooled student an opportunity to share any thoughts or experiences not covered in the previous questions. The researcher changed and expanded the interview protocol obtained from Bolle, et al. (2007) to frame the questions to a community college environment rather than a university setting. Each student was asked to answer the same questions in the protocol at the same point in the year. This was to allow the students time to truly experience and reflect on their time at the community college, and answer in a manner consistent with their current transitional stage (Tinto, 1993). The researcher was then able to compare and contrast the responses in data analysis with this structure in place. As an incentive to the participants, the researcher issued them \$20.00 Walmart gift cards at the conclusion of each interview.

Observations. The researcher observed the students on campus during their classes and during any free time between, before, or after classes. Observations lasted the duration of one class while the student was on campus, beginning with meeting the student upon arrival to campus and ending with leaving the student at the end of his or her classes, other appointments, and tasks on campus. The range of time covered in a typical observation day lasted from as little as two hours to as much as four hours. Observations explored the student's experiences including, but not limited to, those within and between courses taken, study sessions, tutoring, meals eaten, clubs attended, tasks accomplished, and friends associated with while on campus.

During this time, the researcher accompanied the student and took notes using a checklist (See Appendix G) to record the activities of the participant in their classroom and campus environment. Also during observations, the researcher also used an electronic recording pen to record conversations, descriptions and draw images of the settings quickly and unobtrusively. Observations of each participant occurred once in the first semester (in October or November), and twice in the second semester (February and April). Though the students had different schedules and meeting places at the community college, the researcher used the same checklist and looked for both similar and unique items with every observation. The checklist was structured to capture set and written information pertaining to the environment, the conditions of those surrounding the student, the student's appearance and condition, and the interaction of these elements over time within the setting (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). The researcher used as many of these checklist pages as necessary during the observations (Creswell; Patton). The intent of the observation sheet was to capture the essence of the student's experiences in the setting so that it may be described using, rich, thick, extensive detail (Creswell; Miles & Huberman). The greater the detail, the more accurately the study could be explored for contemplation of this topic.

Journals. A document review of the students' journals provided an additional method of data collection which added to the credibility of the study (Creswell, 2007). The researcher issued blank composition books to be used by each participant in journaling his or her experiences for the fall semester of the academic year. Students also had the option to journal using a password-protected word processing file. The researcher asked each participant to record experiences at least twice per week, and more often as desired. The researcher then encouraged students to share as little as a paragraph to as much as a few pages per entry, depending upon the

student's preference. Twenty dollar Walmart gift cards were issued to each student as an incentive for journal submission at the end of each semester. Journals were physically collected in December for analysis, and new composition books were issued, allowing students to continue to journal even before they began the spring semester. This allowed the researcher to analyze the documents to better understand the student's transitional experiences from the first semester while the study continued. The researcher collected the second journals at the focus group meeting in May. The intent of having the students write entries in journals was to collect information and expressions regarding their experiences in ways not covered by the other data collection methods (Creswell, 2007).

Focus group. In May 2011, the researcher facilitated a focus group with the students participating in this study. It was held in a meeting room at the community college at a mutually convenient time for all participants in the study. The final meeting concluded data collection and was designed to provide closure for the participants. The researcher led the focus group and used a focus group protocol (see Appendix M). The focus group began with a brief introduction of the various members who participated in the study, and the researcher explained the rules and purpose of the session. A catered lunch was provided at the start of the group to help make the participants feel more comfortable and relaxed. The journals for spring semester were collected, and the questions began once everyone was properly oriented and attentive. As the students answered, the researcher recorded the conversation using a portable tape recorder and took notes while listening to the responses. The focus group questions were open-ended and brief, to allow all participants to individually express their thoughts, feelings, and perspectives of the various aspects of their academic year at Mid Atlantic Community College, and their participation in the study. Walmart gift cards valued at \$20.00 for the focus group and \$20.00 for the journal

submission were issued at the conclusion of the group as a final thank you for participation. The recorded information was analyzed and assimilated into the results of the study.

Data Analysis

During the data collection period, the researcher used typical methods of qualitative analysis such as “memoing” and analysis of the information as data collection occurs. Research of themes and topics occurred as they were revealed in the data analysis methods from the students’ individual and collective responses (Creswell, 2007; Miles & Huberman, 1994; Patton, 2002). Upon conclusion of data collection (interviews, observations, journals, and focus groups), the researcher separated the data collection materials for each case and analyzed the information. Reviewing this material several times to obtain an understanding of the themes that emerged from the data, the researcher studied those themes and coded the data accordingly. When the information from all of the cases was individually analyzed, the researcher then grouped the data chronologically by interview interval, observation interval, and journals, then he began studying the total experiences of each group to determine if any themes emerged which provided general information about the overall experiences of the students. As results of the study were compiled, the researcher devoted a chapter to each student’s case (i.e. “within-case theme analysis”), telling the story of the year of experiences that student had at the community college. This was followed by a discussion of the aggregate experiences (i.e. “cross-case analysis”) of the combined cases at the community college in the 7th chapter (Creswell, 2007).

Limitations

Because this study focused on a limited number of homeschooled students at a Mid-Atlantic region community college, the results of this study should not be generalized to homeschooled students in community colleges beyond the regional scope of this study. The

results contributed to further research in the form of information that provided a basis for a future contemplation about community college students who were homeschooled, but such information should be verified through replication in other localities. Qualitative analysis provided individualized, very detailed information of students' thoughts, feelings, and other impressions of their academic year at the community college. Such information could lead to other studies pertaining to explorations of homeschoolers' transitional and academic experiences at two-year colleges, four-year colleges, and eventually homeschoolers attempting graduate studies.

Role of the Researcher

The researcher took primary responsibility for inviting the participants into the study and coordinating data collection methods. The researcher conducted periodic, short interviews with each participant throughout the year and observed first-hand the classroom and other observations of the participants without causing interference of those experiences. The researcher led the focus group interview. After each interview and at the end of each semester when journals were submitted, the researcher issued incentives of \$20.00 Walmart gift cards to each of the participants and thanked them for their role in the study. Finally, the researcher analyzed and wrote the results and discussion sections using the data collected from the interviews, observations, journals, and focus group.

The researcher is employed at the community college as a student activities counselor, a position that includes academic advising, coordination of special events, clubs, sports, community service activities, investigating student disciplinary situations, making student identification cards, and publishing a student planner/handbook for the community college. Because of this responsibility, the students invariably encountered the researcher in at least a few occasions outside of the study, and the researcher informed the students from the first interview

(and as often as necessary) that they were to be treated fairly and equitably (i.e. gained no special advantages or disadvantages) with other MACC students in the context of student activities or other community college roles of the researcher because of their participation in the study.

To remain as objective as possible during the study, the researcher kept a journal to record thoughts, feelings, impressions, and ideas concerning his experiences during the study. Creswell (2007) suggested a researchers' journal as a viable data collection method when interactions occurred between participants that may not have been accounted for in a protocol, such as encounters with the participants in club meetings, sports team practices, or academic advising. The researcher kept a journal of work conducted on this dissertation proposal, and he continued writing entries in it until the study was concluded. The journal exists as a Microsoft Word file stored on a password-protected flash drive with other records related to the study.

Ethical Protection of Participants

Although there were no known negative affects to the students participating in this study, confidentiality of each participant was vital to ensure their protection from any possible negative implications from the study. To ensure their confidentiality, each participant was tasked at the beginning with creating a pseudonym for themselves which the researcher used for the entire study. The confidentiality of all students was also kept by scheduling interviews and observations with enough time in between data collection occurrences with the other students to prevent physical encounters (e.g. one arriving as another leaves the researcher's office), and this confidentiality was only compromised when the participants were introduced to one another during the focus group meeting in May 2011, at the end of the academic year being studied.

All documents, including journals, notes, memos, and letters were kept by the researcher in one of two forms: (1) a notebook, locked in a file cabinet to which only the researcher has

access in his home, and (2) a portable, password-protected, data storage device kept on the researcher's person during the study and stored in the same cabinet with the other documents after the study for a duration of no less than ten years. The documents and device will then be erased or shredded when the researcher deems there is no potential need for keeping the material.

Coercion is an aspect which was not condoned in this study, as it potentially could have affected the scientific value of the results, as well as violate the ethics of the study. The researcher was the only individual responsibly bound to the completion of the study. The students were free to decide for themselves whether or not they should participate. In all interactions with the researcher, students were informed that they could leave the study at any time with no penalty or negative implications. Students needed only to inform the researcher that they wished to end their participation in the study. The researcher behaved responsibly and ethically with all students in all interactions for the duration of the study and henceforth after completion of the study.

Conclusion

The research design for this study included conducting interviews, observations, journal analysis, and a focus group. Three students participated in the study, and these data collection methods were ethically conducted by the researcher, with the students' confidentiality and voluntary participation being of utmost importance. The purpose of this study was to explore and document the experiences of previously homeschooled students attending the community college. The following chapters focus on the participants' academic year experiences, the results of the study, a discussion, and the conclusion of the study.

CHAPTER IV

MARGARET

Walking along the halls of Mid Atlantic Community College, "Margaret Rose" (nicknamed for a princess of British royalty whom she admired) appears no different from any other student attending classes there. She carries her books in a grey backpack, wears blue jeans, sneakers, and a dark green sweatshirt in a casual style as do many other students on a cold, grey March day. Although she is now 28 years old, her small lithe frame, long wavy black hair that falls to the middle of her back, and youthful face match the look of other students ten years younger. Margaret is a self-described "late bloomer," but she seems very pleased to be here, as indicated by her relaxed, upbeat attitude. She is majoring in the Medical Administrative Support Specialization, and she is in her final year of classes before graduation.

Once on campus, she seeks out her quiet classroom an hour before class begins, knowing it is empty at the class time preceding hers. Turning on the fluorescent lights, she finds her seat in the first row, center aisle of the room filled with desks. She unpacks her text and notebook and begins to pour over the pages, recalling the information she read and heard since the last lecture. She whispers softly to herself, occasionally clearing her throat, as she reviews the various points of what she feels would be discussed tonight. She prepares in solitude for almost a half hour when, one by one, other students enter, take their usual seats, and begin to make their own preparations. Since she and her classmates have taken other courses together, Margaret is familiar with their names and greets each one happily as they enter. Most return greetings to her cheerfully, and some even ask her if she understood the text material for tonight. Margaret points out a few items she thought were clear and those that were a bit unclear to her. The commotion in the room builds slowly from a meditative silence to soft chatting in multiple

directions combined with the steady rustling of papers. One student rushes in excitedly and drops her things haphazardly on a desk, then rushes out to the restroom before class starts. She reenters moments later, appearing relieved that class has not begun yet. The noises of the eventually full classroom crescendo just as the instructor enters and begins to take charge with, "Hello class! How is everyone tonight?" At that point, Margaret switches on a small recorder at the corner of her desk.

Margaret Rose was completing her last semester at Mid Atlantic Community College when this vignette was written. Although it is evident to many around her that she is quite comfortable in her college classes, few know that she was once a homeschooled student. What is also unknown to those around her in the community college is her initial fear of school and other classmates - the original reason behind her homeschooling education. Her experiences at the community college helped Margaret to resolve many of those issues.

Family

Born in 1982, Margaret Rose grew up in a quiet neighborhood in a rural city located by a large, winding river that characterizes the region. Both parents worked many years at a nearby hospital and were looking forward to their eventual retirement. They had two daughters: Margaret and her sister who was a year older. Their parents started college funds at a local bank for both daughters soon after they were born. Margaret was always close to her mother.

Margaret was a very happy child, but at age 6, she was diagnosed with a rare condition known as "Tourette Syndrome," commonly abbreviated as "TS," which caused her to make small noises similar to clearing one's throat often, called "tics," that she could not control. The tics were most evident whenever Margaret spoke or felt stressed. As she grew older, sometimes they would cease when she was calm or busy thinking about something. The doctor told her

parents she had a mild form of the condition and said that she would grow out of it eventually. They also learned that Margaret had Attention Deficit/ Hyperactivity Disorder or AD/HD. Only Margaret's speech was affected by TS. However, having AD/HD made learning some subjects, such as math, very difficult for Margaret. She was often easily distracted and had difficulty concentrating on the tasks to solve advanced problems requiring multiple steps. Still, despite both these conditions, Margaret was a friendly, outgoing child. She did well in elementary school, and her parents often allowed her friends over to play and visit with her.

Other members of her family included her maternal grandparents. Her grandfather was a healthy man all his life until recently. Her grandmother was a teacher in a nearby school system who would later challenge Margaret's parents over their decision to homeschool her. Margaret's family lived happily in a close neighborhood with other neighbors nearby whom they knew and respected. It was her next door neighbor, a college professor, who would eventually help Margaret.

Margaret's family also attended a local Catholic church. They usually attended weekly mass, everyone except for her father. For reasons she did not quite understand, he remained aloof about attending church. He is, however, a very caring man who worked hard as a lead nurse at the hospital, and Margaret loves him especially for his patience and great sense of humor.

Public School Experiences

Margaret fared well in elementary school and received good grades in her class work despite the occasional learning or social difficulties associated with AD/HD and TS. Her experiences in a public elementary school went without incident until she entered the middle school years. Students then started noticing the girl who made small noises in class and wondered why she acted so differently from them. Every day, it seemed, her classmates sensed

her unique mannerisms and often teased her or called her names. Some would even push or threaten her in the hallways. These incidents would often occur without much response from her teachers despite her pleading with them for help. They were not sure what to think of Margaret, her “tics,” or her being easily distracted in class. Margaret just wanted to be left alone. She wanted to be treated similarly to everyone else, but the teasing and name-calling persisted, irritating and upsetting her as her grades fell dramatically. Always an introverted person, Margaret was not one to retaliate when teased. She internalized so much of the negative experiences that she became very fearful of school and what her classmates thought of her. She also wondered why the teachers would not help her when she was teased. She put it this way:

I remember in first grade, teachers would say, “That’s not nice, stop doing that.” But when I got older, teachers would stop saying that. They needed to take control. It seemed like the kids were running the school, and the adults... they need to take that authority and control back and say, “This is not allowed! You’re in my class; you’re in my school. If you mess around, then there will be consequences.”

Margaret’s parents were also concerned about the situation. They made appointments with the school principal, and, later, the superintendent concerning the bullying issues - all to no avail. The teachers and administrators dismissed the problems, accusing her of using TS and AD/HD to gain attention, suggesting there was no problem to address with the teachers and other students. Margaret felt no one supported or wanted to help her solve her problems with the other students. The sole exception was a guidance counselor who invited Margaret to visit her in her office whenever she felt bullied or threatened. Margaret accepted that offer many times. Toward the end of her eighth grade year, Margaret’s parents agreed to allow her to participate in a

home-bound method of schooling sponsored by the middle school, allowing a teacher to visit her at home occasionally and review lessons with her. This lasted until the end of her eighth grade. In the summer before starting high school, Margaret's parents decided to enroll her in a distance learning homeschooling curriculum through "the Cambridge Academy" to complete her high school education.

Homeschooling Experiences

Margaret was pleased with her homeschooling experiences through the Cambridge Academy. The Cambridge Academy eventually awarded Margaret with an accredited high school degree that would be accepted by the community colleges when she was ready to apply to them. She explained:

That's one of the reasons we chose to go that way because it would be easier for me to get into colleges and in other programs, because it's easier to get into them with a degree. What they did was, the school (the Cambridge Academy) sent me all the books and all the assignments for that year. So I did all the assignments and I would turn them in. They would have the teacher grade them and send them back to me...with comments, if needed.

While studying the lessons the Cambridge Academy provided her at home, Margaret felt the pressures of public school and unfriendly classmates subside, and instead she relaxed and concentrated on her lessons, learning at her own pace. For her, this was very liberating. Margaret soon discovered she could accomplish all her lessons for the day within a mere few hours, surprising her mother immensely. Margaret described this:

My mom once got really mad, because I would only spend like two hours a day on the school work and she said, "She'll never finish." She called up a counselor

(at the Cambridge Academy) and the counselor said, “you have to remember that she’s going at her own pace and learning everything she needs to learn in two hours ...it’s great”...It was really weird going from 8 hours a day to getting everything done in two hours, because you don't have the lectures, and teachers are not slowing down for the slowest learner. You can pretty much keep up a normal pace. So, you do not have to slow down.

Margaret’s mother was still concerned. She imposed study hours each day to ensure Margaret was learning the material well enough to pass upcoming tests. These special hours were reserved especially for the material she could not learn as quickly, such as mathematics. Margaret’s grandmother added some pressure to the situation because she disagreed with the homeschooling approach. She worked as a teacher in the public school setting and firmly believed in the public school methods. She was unaware of Margaret’s painful school experiences with cruel classmates but believed the homeschooling decision could be detrimental to both her social development and academic preparation. However, Margaret’s parents decided to wait and see how well she performed in the Cambridge Academy’s curriculum before making any alternate decisions.

Margaret’s favorite subjects were English and science; her least favorite subject was mathematics. Whenever she finished assignments to be graded, she would mail them to the teachers at Cambridge Academy in Florida. Because it took so much time to send, have the assignments reviewed, graded, and then eventually receive them back in the mail, Margaret and her parents often waited weeks to learn what grades she earned. Waiting for those results was sometimes excruciating. Her grades, however, did rise from failing at the end of her public school experiences to A’s and B’s while homeschooling. Whenever she encountered problems

learning the material, she could call an assigned teacher in Florida during the day to talk about specific coursework, such as math. Tests also had to be sent to the Cambridge Academy in the mail in similar fashion, but Margaret needed to have a proctor to oversee her testing. To address those instances, her neighbor, who was a college professor, offered to be her proctor. Margaret described her as follows:

My neighbor, who I grew up with... was like my “second mom.” She looked after me many times while my parents were at work. She was my proctor. She just said, “As long as you don’t go on the computer, or ask other people, you can use your notes and books if you want. That’s fine.”

Along with the required mathematics, English, history, and science courses, Margaret also had to complete a few elective courses for each year of homeschooling. These she could choose for herself, depending upon her interests. To complete one fine-arts elective, she and her mother decided upon theater and drama. They went together on field trips to watch theatrical presentations, and Margaret would then write a review describing her impressions of them. To fulfill a physical education elective, Margaret chose yoga as a topic. She studied yoga books detailing its history, the benefits of practicing yoga, and the more popular yoga positions. She researched various local places where yoga was taught and visited some of them, comparing and contrasting their different styles. Finally, she created a photo journal of herself modeling the various yoga positions and poses to submit for grading. Margaret believed that exploring electives she wanted to learn more about was an excellent way for her to both enjoy learning and balance the fun topics with studying the other courses that she had to complete for each year of the Cambridge Academy’s curriculum.

In contrast to her peers in public schooling who followed a set schedule of work days and holidays, Margaret usually studied some of her lessons every day. Her parents encouraged her to study and complete lessons during supposed “off times,” such as weekends, in the summer, on vacations, and even on some holidays. Margaret complained:

That's how it was ...my parents would say, like, “Okay, it's Christmas...you can open your presents and then go do your homework!” I'm like, “Really? No day off?” Another time, I'd be sick in bed, and my mom would say, “Well since you're stuck in bed and you have nothing to do, do homework!”

Homeschooling still suited Margaret's needs. Sometimes, to keep her lessons interesting, she and her family would take field trips to places related to what she was studying. If she was studying history, they would visit a former president's home. Some science lessons were learned by visiting caverns. Her parents encouraged a constant daily schedule of studying and taking tests merely to offset the great flexibility she had in determining how much work she would accomplish each day. Margaret loves to read. She often read ahead of her classmates' place in a story when she was in public school. As a homeschooler, there was nothing to delay her in reading books at her own pace. Margaret admits she sometimes procrastinated with other lessons, putting them off until the next day or for a more opportunistic time. She also says AD/HD affected the amount of time she would spend studying. Sometimes she could concentrate well because she was alone and interested in a lesson. Other times, she would find it difficult to accomplish anything because she would be distracted by events or conditions occurring around her, even at home. Margaret described what she learned while homeschooling:

Since it was flexible, I was learning about time management. I could do whatever I wanted, whenever I wanted. Sometimes I could take the day off, or sometimes I

had to have a really rigid schedule and stick to it. That's because of the learning disability that I have... I have AD/HD. So I was learning to create schedules and stick to them so that I could succeed.... I could learn to work as far ahead as I wanted to get done early. Or, you know, take my time. If I have a break, I could say, "Okay, well, I can relax some, too."

When she was finished with homework, Margaret filled her spare time by reading novels, playing in the yard, babysitting children in the neighborhood, and playing video games on the family computer. The babysitting job she took with neighbors meant she had to watch over two smaller girls and help them with their homework occasionally. She saved her money and earned enough within a few years to buy a used car when she was old enough to drive and earned a license. Although she was comfortable interacting with people of various ages younger or older, she did not have much interaction with those her own age as a homeschooler.

She did keep in touch with one girl her own age, a fellow classmate from public school who moved to Florida and entered public school there, just as Margaret began homeschooling. Whenever they talked on the phone, they would often compare their education experiences. Her friend would ask her if she missed going to high school, and Margaret replied she liked doing her schooling at home. Her friend looked forward to attending her high school prom event, and asked Margaret if she missed going to prom, to which she replied, "I don't like dances anyway. It's just a glorified night out...there will be other chances to go out all dressed up and have fun." Margaret's sister stayed in public school through graduation, and she attended the prom. When they talked about it, Margaret's sister told her it was not as much fun as she had originally thought, so Margaret decided she was not really missing any special high school experiences by homeschooling.

The sole exception for her was graduation. She and her sister both graduated high school at the same time, but her sister was able to participate in the graduation ceremony and receive her diploma. Although Margaret was sent a cap & gown from the Cambridge Academy when she completed 12th grade and earned a place in Who's Who Among America's High School Students, Margaret did not feel her own completion was as official as graduating from public school had been for her sister. She hoped that graduating from college would resolve this personal dissatisfaction.

Although Margaret was comfortable being alone most of the time, she would sometimes seek out a friend with whom to chat after she arrived home from public school, or she would enjoy going out to a variety of public settings, such as a library, a park, a football game, or restaurant. Margaret still feared being insulted or bullied as she had experienced in public school, yet she felt she could still stay attuned to what her peers were doing by going out occasionally. She felt she could find the social interaction she wanted at any time, it just took a little more effort for her, primarily because of her past experiences. When she divulged that she was homeschooled, some of her peers occasionally responded negatively. She recalled when she was a teenager that other teens would sneer and retort, "Homeschooling?" as if it were something criminal in their opinion. Margaret had the impression that they may have thought she belonged to a cult. When questioned about homeschooling, she would explain that homeschooling was not necessarily religious. Homeschooling, she would say, allowed her to "be herself," and "study at her own pace" regardless of any outside influences. It was, for her, the best decision she and her parents had ever made. That pride in their decision was further validated by her grandmother's remarks after Margaret had homeschooled for approximately a year. Her grandmother was a staunch supporter of public school, and originally did not agree with her parents about the

homeschooling approach for Margaret. However, she eventually saw both Margaret's grades and demeanor improve dramatically while homeschooling, and eventually exclaimed to them, "Well, I was wrong about homeschooling. You are doing great! Keep it up!"

Community College Experiences

Separation Stage

While she progressed through homeschooling, Margaret and her parents discussed her plans for college. Preparing her and her sister for college was very important to Margaret's parents. They searched carefully for a reputable homeschool curriculum for Margaret's high school courses. They had also saved money specifically for college through a special fund created for her when she was born. As she approached graduation, a counselor from the Cambridge Academy suggested she might enroll in a community college to earn some credits toward her diploma and experience college classes for the first time. Margaret wanted to take a chemistry and math course in preparation for a medical program. She enjoyed both English and science as school subjects, and both parents worked in a hospital. She believed that a medical program would be an ideal major for her to study. She knew she was not ready to pursue a nursing curriculum because it seemed too intense to her, but the medical laboratory career field seemed very interesting because she could be in a hospital setting similar to that of her parents, work mainly alone, and work at her own pace. It sounded similar in nature to her homeschooling experiences. She decided to enroll at Mid Atlantic Community College because it was less expensive to attend than other colleges, the campus was located minutes away from her home (so she could still live with her family), and the size of classes were smaller and appeared less intimidating than four-year college classes seemed to her. Her mother had also attended a community college to earn her nursing degree, and she encouraged Margaret to try it as well. Still, she very much feared the prospect of insensitive classmates and teachers in college. Would

they tease and mistreat her the same way as people had when she attended middle school? She and her parents were concerned that she might have difficulty relating to her peers, because she had TS and AD/HD. She had spent the last four years studying alone to recover from and avoid negative reactions from others her age. How would the community college professors react to these learning conditions that she brought to the classroom? These were some of the questions that worried her and her parents when she initially enrolled in the community college.

The counseling center at Mid Atlantic Community College serves as an academic advising headquarters for all college students during periods when course registration is at its peak. When Margaret and her parents arrived there, they were introduced to “Ms. Smith,” a professional academic counselor who specializes in serving students with disabilities at Mid-Atlantic Community College. Margaret enjoyed working with Ms. Smith because she recognized her special medical conditions, yet Ms. Smith also respected and treated Margaret as an intelligent young adult quite capable of making her own decisions. Ms. Smith helped Margaret apply to the community college, reviewed her medical records concerning TS and AD/HD to ensure she qualified for the college’s disability services, and then accompanied her to the admissions office so that her high school diploma from the Cambridge Academy could be reviewed. It was accepted and categorized in her community college student record as an “in-state, homeschooling” diploma. Ms. Smith also informed Margaret that, as with all other students entering Mid Atlantic Community College, she would have to complete placement tests to determine her ability in math and English for entry into any curriculum. If she were to need additional remedial instruction, it would be indicated in the test results, and additional coursework could be provided at Mid Atlantic Community College. Margaret completed the English and Math placement tests at the counseling center’s testing area, and her scores indicated

that she could take a college-level English class and a developmental algebra course. These results were similar to those of many other public high school graduates on the placement test. Margaret could now register for classes with Ms. Smith's assistance.

Margaret chose two courses (developmental chemistry and beginning algebra) at MACC to complete her high-school-level curriculum requirements while homeschooling. Her parents suggested she take a pre-algebra course instead and asked her if she was ready to take the beginning algebra course, but they let her make the final decision on algebra. The courses began in the winter of the year 2000. Margaret arrived at the class and sat at the edge of the classroom. She informed the instructor of her having TS and was impressed to learn how well-informed and accepting he was concerning the condition, as opposed to her middle school teachers' reactions. She kept a low profile and did not initially speak much in class. Most of her classmates were older and seemed mature and kind. Eventually she was able to open up and be friendly with them as the semester progressed. Although it was a "breath of fresh air" to her to be in a more mature environment, Margaret did not pass either of the two courses that first semester. She described her initial impressions of MACC:

It's kind of weird getting back into the swing of things... like attending classes and all...It's a lot better than junior high was for me, it's just...it was really a transition actually, because everyone is grown up and they're not into all these little cliques and groups. They are more focused on studying, getting a degree, getting good grades, and the education they want.

She did, however, learn much about the way courses were taught at Mid Atlantic Community College and how they were designed as instructor-led courses. She was accustomed to a more relaxed, flexible style of homeschooling, and this made the more deliberate pace of the

courses difficult for her to keep up with, initially. Margaret also realized she would have to adopt some better study habits in order to accommodate for her AD/HD challenges.

Experiences at home. At home, her parents and sister were concerned about how she would react to being in college and would often ask her how the classes were going, and she would tell them it was a concern for her too, but the community college is a much better place: “It’s like, ‘déjà vu’ and... you know...a fresh start...It was very odd, but at the same time, it felt very good.” They encouraged her to keep learning and allowed her to make her own decisions about homework, yet they were not as insistent about her studying as they were when she was homeschooling. It was at approximately this time that her sister had given birth to Margaret’s nephew, so the family dynamic had also changed somewhat. Everyone warmly welcomed the new baby boy into the family. Margaret’s parents were busier with the new baby, and now checked on Margaret somewhat less. Margaret was older and now assumed more responsibility for her own work. Her parents did not have to worry about her as much as they had in the past.

Work experiences. Margaret also found a part-time job at a lively, upscale, family restaurant when she first became a community college student. She needed to make an income to pay for her car expenses. She was assigned to hosting and bussing tables at the restaurant and worked two or three nights per week, mostly on the weekends. The managers were flexible with Margaret’s college scheduling needs. If she had a test or assignment for which to prepare, she would tell her manager. He would allow her to take time off and accommodate for the missed hours later. It was a fun place to work, and Margaret believed the job helped her to become more outgoing and comfortable around a variety of people. Occasionally, the restaurant staff would help community organizations, such as the town police, with fundraisers. On one of those occasions, the police officers filled in for the regular staff for a day to raise money for a cause.

Margaret was tasked with providing them training in greeting customers and taking care of the tables properly. She truly enjoyed this opportunity. The managers offered special events to the staff to make work more interesting for the employees and also the customers. Once, a few days leading up to Halloween, the restaurant staff members participated in their own costume contest. Margaret served her assigned tables while dressed as a doctor, wearing green “scrubs” and a stethoscope which she borrowed from her parents. She was thoroughly amused by this contest because it was an “exercise in making the workplace humorous.” She typically worked during the busiest times at the restaurant. Often the managers would assign her to Sunday afternoons, and she would serve customers coming in after church. On these occasions, she sometimes regretted having to forego attending church herself to prepare for work.

While at work, she compared the attitudes of other college students who also worked there but attended the two larger universities in the area. Her observations provided an interesting perspective concerning college student social activities:

I’ve noticed a big difference between MACC students and students from [other universities nearby]. I work with a lot of [students from both universities] and they mostly talk about partying, getting drunk or smoking pot. Most MACC students talk about going to work, raising kids and doing homework. Many of those MACC students are college age too. Granted, I’ve overheard some of my fellow students talk about partying/drinking/smoking, but by and large most are more responsible. They view going to college as a way to better themselves rather than an escape from mom and dad and a chance to party, as I’ve seen many [of the university] students do. It kind of makes you wonder why that is, and if it is true for other community colleges as well. It also makes me wonder whether the

working/family/studying students do better academically than the partying/drinking/smoking ones.

The community college seemed very different from the four year colleges, in Margaret's opinion. She often remarked that she was impressed with the maturity of the MACC students, and pleased that the instructors at Mid Atlantic Community College treated their students as though they were adults, allowing them to ask questions at any time or call them by their first names during class.

Transition Stage

Margaret was not academically successful with her first semester courses. She was, however, successful in making new friends and becoming acquainted with the community college setting. She successfully completed a drawing class the following semester and took a full time course load of 12 credits for the first time, in the first semester of her second year at the community college. While she passed three of the four courses taken that semester, she still struggled with AD/HD, finding it difficult to concentrate when other classmates left the classroom during a lecture or when other activities occurred in class while she took notes and listened to the instructor. She was, however, very relieved and happy to notice instructors taking charge of their classes, firmly holding the class to high expectations of good behavior while being free enough to teach the material without feeling forced to address sets of guidelines. She said, "It's very reassuring to know that in community college that the teachers are in charge and you can rely on them to do what needs to be done to keep the classes in order."

Study skills. Learning more advanced study skills techniques gradually improved her grades. Margaret's mother, a certified hypnotherapist at the hospital, taught her to use some basic self-hypnosis techniques to focus her preparations for exams and improve her test-taking skills to

overcome distractions. Before taking a test, she would take a moment to relax, count to five slowly, and with every number, she would tell herself, "I will take my time on this test." She would repeat other phrases, such as, "I will do my best to answer each question carefully," and, "I will read each question carefully before answering." These affirmations helped her focus enough to perform her best work on the test. She would even share this tip with a classmate with whom she partnered later on in her education. Margaret also learned to use a tape recorder in class, allowing her to pay close attention to the teacher's lecture. She could then take notes later by listening to the recording, giving her two opportunities to absorb the information. This method worked very well for her, and henceforth, she recorded every class lecture.

College major. Margaret's grades improved with each semester attempted, and she continued to take courses related to a medical career field, following curriculum suggestions each semester from Ms. Smith which she usually recommended for students attempting a nursing program. Although Margaret actually did not declare a major officially until just before graduation, she purposefully pursued courses important to a medically related program. Margaret wanted to be sure she was able to successfully complete a major before she declared one with the community college. Because MACC did not offer a medical laboratory technician degree, Margaret transferred to another community college for a short time to pursue that program. She admitted, "It didn't work out because all the courses were online, the teacher lectured from a different location, and it was too difficult to do with my learning disability." She stayed with the other community college for three semesters, completed most of the coursework successfully, but failed some key courses in the program as well. Still, Margaret's academic confidence improved. She enrolled in both human anatomy courses simultaneously one semester and succeeded in passing both classes. She credits her success to her previous familiarity with many

of the anatomy terms due to her parent's extensive nursing careers. Still, Margaret knew she had to make important decisions about her own career soon:

Originally, I wanted to go into forensic anthropology, but my parents said, "You are going to be in school until you are 80!" So, I said, "Okay, well how about med lab?" I tried that, but it didn't work out.... So I thought, "Okay, I'll go in to medical administration." That way, I can work at a local hospital and get experience. The local hospitals will actually... if you agree to work year-for-year, they'll pay for everything ...they'll pay for your tuition, your books... for everything. My dad worked at a local hospital. He just recently retired, and he told me about this plan. So that way, if I want to go back to school for something else... like Med lab or anything else, that way I could do it and still not have to worry about expenses.

In the winter of 2009, Margaret returned to Mid Atlantic Community College and focused on the Medical Administrative Support Specialization degree. This time, she was ready to do her best academic work.

Incorporation Stage

Although it was discouraging for Margaret to have had difficulties completing the medical laboratory technician program at the other community college, she believed that leaving it presented a better opportunity for her. With her father's encouragement, she attempted the Medical Administrative Support Specialization at Mid Atlantic Community College. Margaret met with Ms. Smith again and enrolled in four courses designated for that curriculum. She also initially tested out of a typing course prior to the start of the semester, having learned typing as a homeschooler. In the first semester pursuing this curriculum, she passed the required math

course that was the same level of difficulty as algebra. She learned that, in this particular curriculum, she could opt to take administration skills classes as lecture courses in the evenings or independently accomplish them as distance education courses. She favored the lecture courses. The evening courses were taught by professionals who normally worked in a hospital or doctor's office during the day and taught at MACC at night. At this time, many of the students in these courses were older, more non-traditional students who were retraining for another career after being laid off from nearby automotive or textile factories. These classmates were very focused on accomplishing the degree to improve their lives and work in a more stable, medically-related career. The medical administrative support specialization was designed to cover more advanced topics as they progressed with each semester. Margaret soon learned the students with whom she entered the program would also become a cohort of consistent classmates. She would attend all of the medical administration classes regularly with them for the following two years, until graduation.

From her return to MACC in 2009 until her graduation in 2011, Margaret appeared both comfortable and focused in her role as a community college student. Using the study skills that she learned from her parents and from earlier homeschool and college experiences helped her to consistently earn excellent grades in every class. Her grade point average improved gradually from 2.80 to 3.5 on a 4-point scale and remained at that level until her graduation. She said she preferred lecture courses over distance education courses because she could pay attention to the instructor and follow their directions to stay on task with their class assignments. Distance education courses felt similar to homeschooling, except the college level courses included strict deadlines that Margaret needed to acknowledge.

The following continues the opening vignette, providing a glimpse of Margaret participating in classes near the end of her community college experience:

The instructor begins the night class lecture on the coding of medical conditions for medical insurance records. She stresses to the class that there is little room for error and they must pay careful attention, as such records determine whether or not a patient's medical insurance will cover the payments for their visit and treatment. She informally quizzes the students occasionally, repeatedly asking, "What code would you assign to this condition?" Margaret often raises her hand first and replies correctly, receiving a reply of "well done" from the instructor. The instructor moves on to a different topic.

As the night progresses, Margaret pays careful attention to the instructor's lesson. She answers many of the questions raised by the instructor, and sometimes asks questions related to advanced situations that had seemed to puzzle her and her classmates earlier. A few of the other students also answer questions or make comments, but none as often as Margaret. It seems that her efforts in preparing carefully for each class naturally make her a sort of unofficial class leader. When the class ends, the instructor gives the students a reading assignment to accomplish for next time, and a set of problems to accomplish from the textbook. After copying the assignments down, Margaret packs up her materials, and waits for a few other students to assemble their belongings.

They walk out together with the instructor, chatting and laughing as they reach their cars in the well-lit parking lot; pools of yellow light illuminating the shiny vehicles against the cold darkness of early March. The students say farewell to one another and enter their cars. One by one, the engines rev up, headlights shine, and the cars leave until there is no one remaining in the MACC parking lot that evening.

Non-academic experiences near college completion. Margaret and her family experienced certain events that were not part of her college experiences that she thought about often during her last year of community college. Margaret's personal time was consumed not just with homework and reviewing notes, but also working weekend shifts at the restaurant, chatting with co-workers and customers. She had grown very comfortable meeting and serving a variety of people at the restaurant, an attribute she knew would be useful to mention when she would apply for work at a hospital or doctor's office in the near future.

In the fall, a tragic event occurred within her family: her grandfather passed away in October of her last year in college. Her grandfather was diagnosed with cancer in the spring of 2010, and his health rapidly deteriorated thereafter. This affected everyone in her family. During this time, Margaret and her family often visited her grandfather in the hospital. Shortly before he died, her mother went to visit him, and told him that Margaret was recently invited to join MACC's chapter of Phi Theta Kappa, the honor society. She was doing well in her classes. He replied that he loved and was always very proud of Margaret. This comment resonated with Margaret, comforting her. She was glad her grandfather was impressed by her accomplishments at MACC. Margaret valued being a part of academic associations because she shared her family's belief in their importance.

Another experience in Margaret's last year of college demonstrated how her self-confidence improved. One day, Margaret noticed flyers on the bulletin boards at MACC advertising a Halloween costume contest sponsored by the student government association and student activities office. She shared this advertisement with her mother, and they shopped online for a costume. Margaret selected a 1920's flapper dress that fit her slender frame. She added a few more humorous accessories such as a cigar, stuffed money bags, and lots of monopoly

money to share to imitate the character of “Bonnie” from “Bonnie and Clyde,” famous criminals from that era. She arrived at the MACC student lounge stage in time to be judged, gave a humorous public interview, and was thrilled to win second place prize for funniest costume that day. The many students in the lounge were impressed with the contestants, but most were greatly amused with her impressions. She was awarded a \$15.00 Walmart gift card and some Halloween candy for a prize. Margaret explained her changes in attitude:

Before, I would like shy away from school events. I would never have gone to the Halloween party or costume contest if I was still in middle school, because they (the students) would laugh at me. Now, I don't care if they laugh at me, because I'm laughing at myself.

Margaret also accomplished some community service in her last year of college. Her mother occasionally attended a community service group at their church, called “Project Linus.” Margaret explained it is part of a national group which makes baby blankets. The blankets are then typically given to police, who keep them in their cars to give to families with babies when they answer house calls. The group also responds to major emergencies, providing blankets of all sizes to victims from such major devastating events as the 2011 tsunami in Japan. The Project Linus groups were recruiting more members to make blankets to send to Japan and other places affected by disasters (Project Linus, 2011). Margaret's mother and grandmother had once taught her to crochet when she was younger, making family projects together. Her mother now gently encouraged her to join the group whenever she had time. Margaret really enjoyed crocheting, and she made several additional small blankets for the group whenever she had spare time while finishing her college classes. She enjoyed the great sense of accomplishment and purpose of being involved in this effort.

Conclusion

Margaret graduated cum laude with an associate of arts degree in the Medical Administrative Support Specialization at Mid Atlantic Community College in May of 2011. Her parents, sister, and nephew proudly attended the ceremony. For someone who never had the opportunity to participate in a graduation ceremony, this event was particularly special. She was very proud of all the challenges she had overcome and all she had learned while studying at MACC. She was once an ostracized girl with unique conditions, whose self-esteem was damaged from extensive bullying in middle school. She later recovered from this abuse through homeschooling, and eventually regained her self-confidence at Mid Atlantic Community College. In her journal comments after graduation from the community college, she wrote this about her experiences:

Well, the semester is over, and I've graduated. Reintegrating myself into a public schooling setting was a bit difficult. High school is the time when teenagers start the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is also where they learn to interact more deeply with their peers. It's where they learn the subtle nuances of how to act and when and where they discover who they truly are. Since I was homeschooled during this time, I couldn't learn from experience with others; unlike my peers. I entered college socially withdrawn and somewhat behind my peer group. True, I was always mature for my age; but that didn't help me learn how to interact with people my own age. I was flying blind and had to play catch-up to be on equal footing with everyone else. That was the hardest part of starting college.

Having been a student for so much of her life, Margaret had this to say about how it felt to finally graduate:

It feels weird not having to worry about going back to school...and it's like, 'Wow! I don't have to do homework! I don't have to worry about this anymore.' Even when you're homeschooling, you had homework to do, tests to study for, and now... it's like, "Wow, what do I do now? I'm free! I have so much free time; I don't know what to do with it!" Sometimes, I almost miss it. It's weird.

Margaret plans to apply for full time or part time work at hospitals and doctor's offices in the near future. She may, in time, attempt another degree program at a four year college or community college. She also knows she wants to eventually move into a place close to her family, settle into her career, and to see where life takes her next.

CHAPTER V

HANNAH

The lecture hall at Mid Atlantic Community College (MACC) contains several black, elongated tables spaced neatly apart to form five rows large enough to accommodate 60 students. Today, the room rapidly fills with students as the 9:00 a.m. class time quickly approaches. Minutes before class begins, Hannah walks in from the rear entrance of the room, leading from the laboratory, along with three other classmates who are busily engaged in discussing a project due very soon for the nursing class. They form a small group of very attractive young female students who appear to be in their early 20's. Today, Hannah wears a turquoise T-shirt with a store logo imprinted on it, blue jeans, ankle length boots, and wears her wavy brown hair tied back into a bun. She is very calm, quiet, and appears to be focused on preparing her class materials in time for the lecture. Her friends continue chatting softly as they find their seats nearby, but Hannah finds a seat at her own table second from the rear of the class and settles into it, quietly unpacking her textbook and notebook from a grey backpack. Hannah smiles as another student comes up to her, takes the seat beside her, passes her some printed slide notes which she picked up at the front of the class and says, "Hi Hannah! Did you get the right answer on question four of the last quiz we had?" Hannah looks quizzically at her for a moment, and then replies she "had trouble answering that one, too." They softly discuss the nuances of the recent quiz as the instructor enters and strides toward a podium at the front of the large classroom. The podium features many electronic controls which allow her to display a computer presentation, reading materials, or play DVD's to the class. All eyes in the room turn toward the instructor, now standing ready with notes in one hand, facing the class and greeting them all with a smile, "Hello everyone. Today we are going to learn more about nutrition and

what our patients need to stay healthy and recover...” As she begins her lecture, she pushes a button on the podium, and the lights in the front part of the lecture hall grow dim as the screen behind her lowers and lights up with a stylish presentation featuring in bold, bright letters “Nutrition and the Human Body.” Meanwhile, at the back of the classroom, Hannah’s books remain closed and neatly stacked beside her on the table as she silently follows the lecture, focused firmly on remembering the material upon which she knows she will be tested in a few short days. As everyone follows along, many take notes. A few at the front occasionally raise their hands and ask questions. Hannah is one of many class members who remains silent and follows the lecture without comment.

“Hannah” is a nursing student at Mid Atlantic Community College (MACC). Although this is her first year officially accepted into in the nursing-specific courses, she had already attended MACC for four semesters while waiting for admission into the program. In that time, she completed several electives also required in the nursing curriculum. Hannah is a friendly student who is characteristically very calm and soft-spoken. Before attending MACC, she was homeschooled for 12 years. Her parents supervised her instruction, ensuring she was well prepared for college-level work. To those she knows well, Hannah would also admit that much of her homeschooling was self-conducted, and recounted that she was once told by an MACC instructor that she was the most serious student he had ever had. Hannah’s background reveals why she is so dedicated.

Family

Hannah was born in 1989, and although her family moved around to a few locations early in her lifetime, Hannah fondly remembers growing up on her parents’ farm. It is located on a rural county road an hour from Mid Atlantic Community College. Their home features a large

garden with a chicken pen and fenced-in field where two cows graze. An additional section will soon be built onto the house. Her father is an engineer working from home for a company in a nearby town, and her mother is a homemaker and former homeschool teacher for all four of her children. Hannah has three siblings: two brothers and one sister. Now 21, Hannah is the youngest member of the family. She recently moved away from her parents' home. One of her brothers is married, and Hannah sometimes spends time with them when they come together on holidays. They now live near her parents' home. In fact, many of Hannah's friends and family members live somewhat close to her parents' home, such as her aunts, uncles, cousins, and grandparents. Hannah's best friend is also a cousin. She calls or sees her often when she is not attending college or working. Neighbors of Hannah's parents' have shared that Hannah's family is a very intelligent, kind, sensible Christian family. Although her parents notice that their children are spending less time at home as they mature, all in Hannah's family share a deep appreciation for being together in their parents' home's natural setting.

Homeschooling

Hannah's parents decided to homeschool all of their children instead of sending them to public school. Hannah explained why they did so:

I think the main reason was my parents didn't really like what they were seeing at public and private schools. They just wanted to keep me away from bad influences...and they wanted to be an active part in my education.

Hannah experienced an eclectic style of homeschooling which combined a variety of approaches over the span of 12 years before attending Mid Atlantic Community College. She describes her homeschooling background succinctly:

I was homeschooled all the way up through graduation from high school. Mainly, I pretty much taught myself. My mom would...help me out more and but other than that, I was pretty much independent. We had a few...study groups, and we would get together with other families...and do unit studies...I was in school, up until lunch time, and then in the afternoons, generally, I was free. As far as academics and sports, I played soccer some and I did some ballet. I was involved with 4-H...We would go on field trips and we were involved with a number of homeschool groups at different points in time...we went to a cavern, a historic mill...

When her parents saw that Hannah was interested in a certain hobby or topic, they would cater to that interest by offering a trip to a special place related to her interest as an incentive to learn more material, or they would create lessons for her using themes of interest. Hannah enjoyed the flexibility that homeschooling offered her family. If they wanted to take a vacation or trip, they could enjoy it while not interfering with their studies or learning schedule. When she was younger, her mother would actively teach Hannah her lessons, but as she grew older, Hannah studied her lessons independently. Her parents ensured the lessons remained interesting and challenging for her. She said,

My parents were always really big on us taking things seriously, 'though I guess that could be the case for someone in public school too. I think [homeschooling] prepared me well. Except for the fact that I wasn't used to learning in a group setting, but that was never a big issue for me adjusting to that.

Hannah's parents often used real life examples in much of their children's education. One neighbor, a college professor at MACC, stated she once noticed (in passing) that the children (in

Hannah's family) were learning to take care of the chickens and rotate the pen so that a section of the yard would be fertilized evenly with chicken waste. Hannah and her siblings often worked together on many projects and chores. It was during one such occasion when Hannah discovered she wanted to be a nurse:

I know it sounds funny, but we had some cows, and at one point, one of them got a staph infection and I had to give ...one of the cows shots. And I really enjoyed that and...my mom said, "Maybe you ought to think about some sort of medical field?"

Hannah also admitted that although she felt that her homeschooling experiences were very positive, she regretted that it occasionally "put a strain on her relationship" as her parents tried to balance being both good teachers and good parents. She describes it this way: "I think it might have put some stress on my relationship with my parents because my mom... was my instructor" Hannah also stresses that this surfaced only in "a few little instances." These experiences revealed a very close, long-standing relationship Hannah has with her parents. This emotional bond would again be evident when she began the nursing program at MACC.

Hannah's mother was the one who typically helped her with her schooling, but her father also occasionally helped Hannah with advanced science and mathematics. In her homeschooling work, she found English and history to be easy to accomplish, but she had a little difficulty mastering subjects such as chemistry, advanced biology, and "higher levels of math" on her own. She usually studied at her own pace at a desk in her bedroom:

When I was homeschooling, I did most of my work in the morning...I didn't have to be a class at seven every morning. I could start whenever I wanted, and often I would finish...as early

as 12:00 p.m. or 1:00 in the afternoon and then I would have time to do other stuff...I really liked being able to teach myself. I just

liked the independence.

Work experiences. To earn an income, Hannah and her cousin had an opportunity to start cleaning some of their neighbors' homes, and by word of mouth, their small cleaning business grew to cover a number of locations. Hannah said she typically worked 10 to 15 hours per week. With money earned from cleaning homes, she was able to save enough to eventually purchase a used car when she was old enough to learn to drive. She also continued her cleaning service throughout her college experiences to earn money for expenses.

Community College Experiences

Separation Stage

At age 18, while she was still finishing the high school level of homeschooling, Hannah decided to apply to Mid Atlantic Community College and explore the requirements for admission to the nursing program. Although they would have supported any option Hannah chose, her parents advised her to attend the community college instead of a local university nursing program mainly because of the price difference. Her cousin, who is her best friend, applied to the nursing program at another college, and her initial experiences further encouraged Hannah to explore a nursing career.

Applying. First, Hannah met with the director of the nursing program who gave her a curriculum checklist which included electives Hannah could take immediately which would apply toward the nursing degree. Then, with her parent's help, Hannah completed the application for admission to MACC. After applying for the nursing program waiting list, Hannah took the mathematics placement test, and succeeded in passing the math requirement (i.e. demonstrated

sufficient knowledge of basic algebra) for entrance into the nursing program. For the Spring semester of 2008, Hannah enrolled in one course to see how difficult it would be to accomplish. She selected a geography class at an off-campus location a half hour closer to her home and enrolled using the online student access system from the college website.

Geography class. It was January 2008 when Hannah first attended the college level geography course. Arriving in class for the first time, Hannah stated that she felt “very self-conscious, being the youngest member of the class, and (noticing) that all the other students seemed to be more mature, in their early 20’s and older.” Hannah liked the instructor, who seemed very friendly and knowledgeable to her, and she remained very quiet, paid attention, and did not socialize with the other classmates:

I liked the instructor. I don't really remember... making particularly good friends in that class....Every class is different, I've noticed here. In some classes, you get close to your classmates. I don't think I really made any friends [in that class].

The greatest challenges Hannah faced in this course were two presentations: one solo presentation and another alongside a few classmates.

...that class was really nerve-wracking for me, because there was a presentation I had to do...by myself and a group presentation I had to do. I had never like done that before...it's funny that happened to be my first class and I had a presentation because I don't think since then, I've ever had to do one. I mean, it went okay. I was just like really nervous about it, you know,...getting up in front and talking.

Hannah ultimately succeeded in earning an A for this course. Her instructor told her she was the most serious student he had ever had in class. Her confidence in accomplishing college

level work was bolstered, and in the fall semester of 2007, she enrolled in two more classes (biology and computer literacy) with her older brother, who also attended MACC at that time. The instructor for the biology course also happened to be a neighbor. Hannah favored being at the smaller, more intimate off campus site where she knew some of the individuals attending classes or working there. She enjoyed having her older brother study alongside her, occasionally taking the same classes. The commute between home and campus was a factor in determining what classes she often selected. Although she selected some online and a few main campus courses, Hannah successfully completed all her classes in the semesters leading up to her entrance into the nursing curriculum.

Transition Stage

Study skills. Hannah noticed many differences between preparing for community college classes and her homeschool studies. For instance, the time of day she studied had changed. When homeschooling, she usually studied in the mornings, but she now studied mainly in the afternoons or evenings, after classes. Her method of studying also changed. In homeschooling, she would read the textbook and then complete the work problems until the lesson was finished. In college, she attended lectures, then read the textbook material once or twice, comparing the material with her notes from the class lecture, and she paid careful attention to any points discussed during class. She repeated this process with her text and notes until she felt confident that she knew the material well enough to be tested. In homeschooling, she could delay testing occasionally on her own terms. In college, however, the classes were instructor-driven, and she had to comply with meeting every requirement; class meeting times, projects, quizzes and tests. Hannah knew if she missed any of them, she would have to make special arrangements ahead of time or receive a zero grade for whatever item she missed. Hannah is a very punctual individual.

She takes pride in her accomplishments, and is not afraid to work hard to accomplish her goals. She does not wish to call attention to herself or stand out in class other than by doing her best academic work possible.

She does, however, enjoy some variety in her study settings. She prefers quiet places to study. In homeschooling, she rarely changed settings, usually working in her room at her own desk. In college, she might study in her room occasionally, but she will also meet with friends at a local coffee shop (admittedly one of her favorite ways to study). She finds comfort studying quietly beside a friend or two occasionally discussing an item together. Before she entered the nursing program, she once joined some friends in the student lounge on the main campus at MACC. It seemed too loud for her to concentrate there, because at that time there were video games, billiards, and table-tennis games being played there as many people chatted boisterously at other tables.

Leaving home. Upon admission into the nursing program, Hannah decided to move out of her parents' home and into an apartment in a town adjacent to Mid Atlantic Community College. In addition to drastically reducing her commute to 10 minutes, she felt she was now mature enough to move into her own place. This was not an easy move for either Hannah or her parents to accept. Her parents expressed great sadness that their youngest daughter was leaving them, and she felt great remorse for deciding to move away:

Well, when I first started going to Mid Atlantic...I still lived at home. I was... eased into college...last summer, I moved out of...my parents' house when I started nursing school. I didn't really like the town. I missed my parents, but I got over that pretty soon. I guess it's to be expected, you live with them your whole life, and then you move out...but it's...a lot more responsibility,...paying for rent

and bills and everything. Overall, I'm glad I did it. I think it's been worth it just because of the drive I have from where my parents live...So, just the time and gas I would have spent on that would have been insane. Also, I felt like it was time for me to move out. I'm 21 now so I just feel it is time for me to move out. (My parents) were sad, I think. I guess I was the last one to go. They didn't really express it too much because I don't think they wanted me to feel bad. But I could tell my mom was...having a hard time with it. You know, that "empty nest syndrome?" I would have almost rather had it [more humorous and less dramatic]. It would have made me feel not quite so bad.

Living in town. Although she missed living with her parents, living in an apartment with her roommates enabled her to focus on the many rigors of the nursing program. Eventually, she enjoyed living in the apartment:

I like to be outside. I find that very relaxing. Sometimes I'll go running, or go on a hike. I go on the bike path down by the river in town. I like to hang out with my boyfriend, watch movies, cook meals together and...just hang out with my other friends like my roommates.

Hannah met her boyfriend some time before she moved into town. He is a mechanic who helps her occasionally with her automobile maintenance. He would sometimes join her for family get-togethers during the holidays and usually spends his free time with Hannah, particularly on the weekends. Soon he had to adjust to Hannah's busy schedule as he learned she would not be able to spend as much time with him. Hannah was now about to experience one of the most difficult academic challenges she would face -- the first year of MACC's registered nursing program.

Nursing program. Hannah entered nursing program classes in the fall semester of 2010, along with approximately 60 other students. She opted to take six classes: Cardiopulmonary Resuscitation, Math for the Liberal Arts, Fundamentals of Nursing, Nursing Skills, Drug Dosage Calculations, and History of Western Civilization. The required nursing classes comprised 10 credits, and her semester totaled 16 credits. She wanted to take the few extra courses in history and math for liberal arts for eventual transfer to a nearby university. Hannah planned to continue on with her nursing studies and to earn a bachelors' degree in nursing once she found work that would help pay for her education. The cardiopulmonary resuscitation class was taught early in the semester during a weekend, and Hannah earned a final grade of B. This course was designed to prepare the nursing students for their clinical experiences because of the need for students to be certified in the skills of cardiopulmonary resuscitation in case of emergency.

After her brief time in the program, Hannah recognized, "there's a lot more pressure to do well, and at the same time the classes are a lot harder. So, my grades have not been as good this semester, just because the tests are a lot harder." Hannah completed each of her pre-clinical check-offs in the fall semester, and by the end of the semester, Hannah was very relieved to have passed them all. As the nursing students prepared for clinicals, they practiced learning various care techniques and skills on computer-operated mannequins which provided them with feedback on their performance with tasks such as administering medicines and giving injections. Hannah appreciated this practice and stated that it helped increase her confidence in nursing skills before clinical experiences began.

Thanksgiving break. Thanksgiving break provided Hannah with a week at her parent's house to relax. There she celebrated with a large family Thanksgiving gathering: "My cousins and my grandparents...everyone was there. We just had a big meal and went on a hike afterward

and watched a movie.” This brief time with family provided her an opportunity for some rest and relaxation before final exam week occurred in mid-December.

Spring registration. In early December, at their instructor’s urging, Hannah and her classmates enrolled in the spring 2011 nursing classes at midnight on the first evening of online registration. All of the nursing students admitted into the program were allowed to select courses to complete the first year of nursing and somewhat cater to their personal schedule. Hannah would have liked to select a course that would have granted her the opportunity to only attend classes twice a week, but that particular section was filled just moments before by other nursing students also registering online. Still, she was pleased to obtain the following courses: Principles of Psychology, Health Assessment, Essentials of Maternity/Newborn Nursery and Psychiatric Nursing. Hannah mentioned she felt compelled to follow the rigid procedures for enrolling in courses because she was competing with everyone else in the program for the courses she needed.

Hannah finished her fall classes with a cumulative grade point average of 3.79 (on a 4.0 scale). Hannah described in a journal some of her fall final exam experiences:

December 11, 2010:

I am so stressed out with finals looming ahead of me. I took my final for Math for the Liberal Arts on Thursday at the testing center. I took it early so that I'll be able to focus completely on my finals in my nursing classes now and next week.

December 14, 2010:

Yay! My two biggest nursing finals are over and they went a lot better than I expected. I won't actually know my grades until the end of finals week, but I think I did decent. After my final on Thursday morning, which shouldn't be bad at all, I

will be done! I'm excited about break. My sister will be coming home for a month starting tomorrow, from Macedonia where she's been living for a year.

I can't wait to spend some much needed rest and relaxation time with my family!

Winter break. In mid-December, Hannah returned to her parents' house to enjoy the break from classes and holidays with her family. She said it was wonderful to be home with her parents and family and celebrate the holidays together. Hannah's older sister returned home from a Macedonian mission. She was thrilled to spend time with her sister and learn about her experiences in Macedonia. Hannah has also thought about working overseas after she finishes her nursing education.

Spring semester. As the time for spring semester to begin came closer, Hannah felt more confident about starting classes again. She shared some thoughts about the start of classes in a journal:

January 12, 2011:

The end of a wonderful Christmas break is almost here. I am beginning to feel mentally prepared for the rigorous semester ahead of me. I'll be taking OB nursing, psychiatric nursing, health assessment and general psychology as well as working 15 hours a week. I have one more week of break left and the closer I come to school starting again the more excited I get and the less I dread it.

It will be a good challenge for me.

One pretty major thing happened over break. Something that I'm very excited about. My oldest brother got engaged and will be getting married in May. I'm pretty excited about being a bridesmaid in the wedding. That will be a first experience for me. Christmas and New Year's were both a lot of fun. I have been

blessed with a wonderful family to spend these holidays with every year. Particularly a wonderful mom who goes to a lot of effort to make Christmas special for the whole family. My sister leaves to go back to Macedonia again this Monday. I know she's ready to go back, but at the same time I'm very sad to see her go again.

Hannah noticed that her instructors assigned homework and projects even before classes began. She and her classmates began to feel very stressed about the intensity of the second semester nursing class requirements, more stressed than Hannah had felt during the previous semester. In addition to the regular nursing students, a small number of those who already possessed their licensed practical nursing degree were also in these classes, taking the spaces left behind by students who did not succeed the previous fall semester. Hannah admitted it was difficult to see anyone drop out of the program after having spent so much time learning together.

Clinicals. Clinical experiences began, and the nursing students kept journals about their experiences. The following excerpts from her clinical journal reveal two of Hannah's more exciting experiences during clinical trials in the Spring 2011 semester. Hannah remarked that clinical experiences were an important part of her nursing training, and she felt it helped shape more than just her skills, but also her character, because the learning aspects of clinical experiences and the serious ramifications of the quality of her care upon live patients played a crucial role in Hannah's transition from homeschooled student to nurse:

Hospital Journal

My day at the hospital was layed [sic] back and enjoyable. I feel like I learned a lot watching the dementia DVD and then going and putting what I

learned into practice with the patients there. It was neat to see how well the techniques actually do work. For instance, I was standing by one of the doors leading to outside with my patient and we were talking about the birds out there. Another woman walked up to the door and started acting like she was about to open it. I didn't want her to open it because the alarm would have gone off so I asked her a few times to step back. She just looked at me with a blank face as she continued pushing on the door. However, when I reached out my hand to lead her away, she immediately took it and was more than happy to do what I said. All she needed was a little cue. I enjoyed talking to my patient and doing activities with her. She was as pleasant as can be.

Schizophrenia Journal Entry

My experience with the schizophrenia SP was action packed to say the least. When I walked in the room the patient began banging on the wall and yelling at me asking me who I was and telling me I better let him go back home. I stood by the door feeling slightly afraid with the patient on the opposite side of the room. I knew at this point I should not get any closer to him until he was calmed down some.

When the patient finally stopped yelling and banging on the wall I walked over near where he was and sat down at the table. I was able to get him to sit down with me. I was surprised at how readily he would answer the questions I asked him. Initially I was doubtful that he would talk to me. I enjoyed the experience, bizarre as it was. Listening to the patient describe his delusions about how his neighbors were plotting to poison his dog and about how they were

planting land mines in his back yard was fascinating. However, knowing how to respond to the delusions was difficult. Looking back, I wish I had shown a little more empathy toward the patient about all the anxiety and fear he was experiencing. I was afraid of feeding into the delusions, but now I see that showing empathy would not have been feeding into them.

Over all, I enjoyed the experience. After I got the patient to settle down and sit in the chair, I was put at more ease. I can certainly say I learned from this experience!

The journal entries reveal how thoughtful and courageous Hannah can be in times of stress. She was fascinated with patients who suffered from mental illness, who she encountered in clinical visits. However, she was not as impressed with her experiences at the obstetrics and gynecology ward of the hospital. She said she did not feel as though she had “learned that much despite having worked an entire day there.”

Doubts. By March 2011, Hannah and her classmates were inundated with a barrage of assignments, tests, and projects due. Hannah began to doubt if the nursing curriculum was the right decision for her. She had second thoughts about nursing as a career because of the enormous responsibility that caring for someone when they need help most entails, but decided to not make any decisions about it until after the semester was completed. She spent the week of “spring break” in March completing many of the projects and assignments, but spent one day with her boyfriend. He had noticed that Hannah devoted much of her efforts to the nursing program. She commented about this:

My friends and boyfriend don't always understand why I am so busy. It's hard having to say no to them so much when they want to hang out, but at this point

school was my number one priority. I can't wait until May when I can have a normal life again. From what I hear, this is the hardest semester in the MACC program. I hope to God that is true.

Hannah was also grateful to have friends within the nursing program who knew and understood what she was experiencing. She thought it was important to have their camaraderie when assignment pressures and tests taken proved discouraging.

Instructors. Hannah also noticed a change in attitude among her instructors during the course of the year. In the first semester, she felt that one of her instructors, "Ms. Able," seemed very aloof and not very approachable. In the second semester, however, she became very friendly to the students. Another instructor, "Ms. Bader," seemed at first to be very friendly in the fall, but was now very short-tempered and sarcastic to them in the spring semester. Hannah had a favorite instructor, "Ms. Ceto," whom she mentioned "was her favorite teacher of all time." Ms. Ceto taught the psychiatric nursing courses. Hannah also looked forward to taking her courses in the upcoming fall 2011 semester.

Final exams. Only when Hannah earned a 95% on a final exam in late April did her doubts vanish about being able to complete the semester successfully. She was filled with renewed hope and finished the remaining exams successfully, earning final grades of "B" in all of her classes. Hannah was relieved and thankful to have successfully completed the semester:

I got a 95% on my first final exam! Just what I needed to help give me a boost to motivate me to do well on the rest of my exams. This particular final was early. It was the final skills exam for health assessment, so it consisted of us performing a physical examination on our partner while being evaluated by our instructor. For this exam, if we scored less than 78% we failed the whole class, so it was a

lot of pressure to be under. However, I studied for eight months in advance, so I know that paid off! I'm so relieved right now! I have one O.B. test, one psychology test, one clinical day, three exams and then I'm finished!

Hannah completed half of the nursing program by summer 2011. She still had one additional year of nursing courses to complete the program and earn an associates' degree in registered nursing.

Incorporation Stage

One aspect of incorporation that is evident is the way Hannah now separates herself emotionally from her academic achievement. Hannah was tempted at times in the first year to drop out of the nursing program because it is such a stressful curriculum; however, by mid-spring, she dismissed these thoughts in favor of staying in the nursing program because she was convinced through clinical experiences that it was what she truly wanted to do as a career:

I've definitely thought about quitting before...I'm not gonna lie! (chuckles). You know, sometimes when it gets really stressful, I think, "Do I really want to do this or not?" But I think I've decided to stick with it as long as I can.

Hannah also offered some insights concerning her academic progress:

Say I don't do well on a certain test. I have a tendency to...want to attach myself to that, and say... "I'm not a good person because I got a bad grade on this test." But I've learned that I'm separate from my test grades, and my test grades don't determine who I am....so that...helps me not get quite as stressed out if I do bad on a particular test....I'm able to separate myself from it.

Hannah had ample opportunity to experience this emotional separation. She had earned excellent grades in the semesters leading up to entry into the nursing program, earning final

grades of all A's and just one grade of B in the five semesters of courses taken at MACC. Once she was admitted into the nursing courses, she recognized that the standard for achievement was very high for all nursing students, and Hannah felt pleased to have successfully accomplished mostly B final grades in the nursing program classes the past year with no concerns.

Conclusion

Future Plans

Hannah has not yet fully developed future plans beyond her nursing education. Hannah is interested in finishing the nursing program, possibly transferring to a university close to where she lives so that she can earn a bachelor's degree in nursing. Hannah mentioned at the focus group that perhaps she will work at a hospital or doctor's office after graduation to gain some experience. She has an interest in psychiatric nursing and stated that she may pursue that specialization in her nursing career. Her sister is overseas on a mission in Macedonia, and Hannah has also considered doing a mission using her nursing skills overseas in the future. She is fortunate to be part of a large family who cares for her very much, and she has a positive relationship with her boyfriend. These relationships may also shape her future. Hannah is a very intelligent, grounded young woman with great potential in life.

Theoretical Implications

Hannah's homeschooling background was mainly self-directed, yet guided by her parents who ensured she was prepared eventually for college level work. They also developed a strong work ethic in Hannah. Her parents and friends also encouraged her to pursue a nursing program when they learned she was interested in medically related tasks. Hannah is deeply connected to her family, so intensely that she felt moving away from them was wrong even as it made life easier for her to participate in the nursing program. Separation experiences occurred for Hannah

from the moment she applied to MACC to the time she entered the nursing program. Moving away from home made the experience similar to that of university students who move away to attend college but, for Hannah, the experience occurred later in her college experience. The transition experiences occurred intensely for Hannah as she began the first year of nursing program classes. A nursing career is a stressful occupation, with the lives of patients often at risk. The nursing curriculum at MACC is designed to prepare students for the rigors of the nursing profession so students will excel competently in their career field. Hannah is a student who recognized the stressful nature of her chosen career field and has responded accordingly. She completed the first year of the nursing curriculum and looks forward to completing her second/ last year. Therefore, she is just beginning to show signs of incorporation or mastery experiences of the community college environment. Upon completion of the program, it is expected that Hannah will eventually be a very competent nurse and will enjoy a bountiful future because she has purposefully strived to accomplish these goals in life.

CHAPTER VI

JAMES

James rushes into a laboratory classroom at Mid Atlantic Community College just before the class period begins. He drops his backpack and sits next to Mike, his friend and lab partner, who has been waiting for him. James is wearing a pair of black jeans, a dark green T-shirt, gray sneakers and black leather jacket which almost matches the color of his tousled, short hair. Mike is similarly dressed. Both men blend in with the rest of the students in the room. They seem excited about what they are going to work on today.

The lab is a large room divided into various sections devoted to different types of electronic equipment. It is lined with shelves that display various tools and pieces of electronic gadgets. In the front section of the room, ten computer control stations are placed evenly on a long, black table with metal and plastic chairs placed near them. This is where the students typically check in at the start of class, because it is located next to the instructor's office. Large pieces of machinery rise above the long benches in the back section of the room, providing occasional outside visitors with clues concerning the focus of this curriculum: traffic lights, a miniature roller coaster, hydraulic power tanks, and even a robotic arm. As the students wait for their instructor, everyone either quietly types on their computer keyboards or speaks in hushed tones with their lab partners about the projects they are about to complete. At exactly 9:00 a.m., the instructor bounds from the office adjacent to the lab and greets his class, "Hello everyone! Are you all prepared to continue working on your circuits?" Everyone nods. He assigns lab partners to the existing stations for lab projects and they break off from the front of the room to approach the assigned lab project in the back of the class. "James, you and Mike will continue working at station five in the back. Let me know when you are ready to test the circuit, and we'll

run it from the remote computer station to assure you've got it right and earn credit for it."

Taking their backpacks with them, James and Mike then walk to the back of the lab once they are dismissed by the instructor.

They are building a circuit to operate a sorter which counts pellets as they fall out of a hopper and into a separate container. James and Mike are supposed to make it automatically stop after a certain number of pellets have been dispersed. Then, the machine must resume dispensing the pellets into another device that advances an empty container to the sorter/hopper. The cycle of dispersing pellets and advancing containers is to repeat until it is signaled to stop. James and Mike work together, discussing the type of resistors, sensors, and power supply which they think will work best in combination with the hopper device. They appear enthusiastic about their attempt to solve this problem, and each partner seems to understand and provide worthwhile input into the project. Once they feel they are ready to begin, they each take turns building various aspects of the setup for the circuit, working in tandem for about an hour until it is complete. They occasionally test the functionality of the sorter as they complete each step. When the counter fails to keep track of the pellets, they replace it with another counter, and test it. It eventually works as it should. The two young men proudly stride to the computer console and log in, press "test," and stride back to witness their sorter project functioning properly. James immediately informs the instructor that it works.

Both James and Mike are homeschoolers who finished high school level courses while homeschooling at approximately the same time and enrolled in the associate's degree program in electrical engineering and instrumentation at Mid Atlantic Community College. They have known each other since they were young boys attending a church-sponsored private school.

James has a unique story to share concerning his own life experiences and preparation for the community college.

Family and Education Background

Family

James was born in Indiana in the fall of 1990. He is the oldest son in his family; his father was an engineer at a tire factory, and his mother stayed home while earning money as a babysitter. James has a younger brother and two younger sisters. For the first seven years of his life, James attended public school in Indiana through the third grade. However, in 1998 his family moved to Virginia to be closer to James's grandparents. James's father transferred his job to another tire factory there as an engineer, and his mother also continued her practice of babysitting children of neighbors and members of their church. They moved to a town in Virginia that is located close to Mid Atlantic Community College.

Private School at Church

Their church espoused the benefits of providing religious instruction along with schooling for the children of the congregation. Because they were new to the area and unfamiliar with the public school system in Virginia, James's parents decided to enroll him in the church's school. Later, when his younger brother was old enough to attend school, he was enrolled in the public school system. His two sisters also were later enrolled in public school but eventually homeschooled their last four years of high school. James has fond memories of his church schooling experiences. He describes his early years of schooling at the church this way:

I went through kindergarten to first and second grade in public school, and afterwards, we moved up here....I... moved into ... a Christian school, which, you know, is ...a "little public school" setting. But those are people you know,

people you're grown up with. A class of 15 or 16 kids, but they're kids you've known all your life. And so then I went from that into all of us (i.e. the church kids) just being homeschooled with the same curriculum, which was A.C.E. It was just a little private curriculum they used...A.C.E. was alright. It wasn't like the greatest program. There was a lot of repetition...until you got it...

James remarked that the setting grew very familiar and comfortable to him as he spent more time there growing up and schooling with his fellow church friends:

We went to the church, which was only a few minutes down the road. You drive over there; it's the same place you go to church, so you already know the building. You know everybody and you pretty much sleep through classes, or goof around, or whatever you were doing. Try to get through it.

In spite of the relaxed descriptions regarding his behavior, James earned excellent final grades during his grade-school-level private schooling, and continued studying at the church school until he reached the high-school-level work. In his free time, James enjoyed playing games and working with the family computer: "I had worked with electronic since I was five years old. I worked mainly with the computer aspects of it. The first electronics I worked with a lot was on Windows 95. It was with an IBM computer." James's interest in computer applications and electronics would later influence him (as well as a few of his church friends) to pursue electrical engineering and instrumentation at Mid Atlantic Community College.

Homeschooling during the High School Years

In preparation for high school studies, James left the church school to homeschool alone. His mother encouraged him to enter a different curriculum which she had once followed when

she was a teenager: “American Schooling” which is based in East Lansing, Illinois. She told him she felt it was a good program for her, and James wanted to learn at his own pace.

I liked American Schooling a lot more. American Schooling prepared me for college a lot more than A.C.E. did. American Schooling used... the college textbooks and ...I learned to better find information and how to retain what was useful and what I needed to know better by doing American Schooling.

As he pursued studies independently, James decided to study at a faster pace and complete the home schooling curriculum sooner. He admitted, “...in homeschooling I could get a book, and if I really liked the subject, I could just pour myself into it and I’d have two or three tests done in a week and I’d be done with the book in a couple weeks, so I finished it way early. That’s how I graduated so early.” He independently learned which subjects he enjoyed readily and which he needed more help to understand:

..I never really liked English. I didn't mind doing it....I was decent at it and I could always get good grades ..., but I was never really great at it because I just hated writing all the papers. I ended up getting better when I got more efficient at typing. Because by then, I could just type it out. So, I’m on the computer all the time; you can type it out, and it spell checks it, you can even grammar check it, so you don't have to worry about all these commas and quotations and semicolons and think, “What are the different rules for semicolons?” ...all that different stuff was irritating when you went over it over and over again.

I've always loved science and social studies. I always did decent at math. I never liked or disliked math. Math was all about if you have a good calculator and know

how to work formulas...so as long as you can manipulate the formulas and go, "This is what goes on this side this is what goes on this side. This is what I need, so I need to change the formula just a little bit, plug in the numbers and you're good to go." So math was kind of... I don't know... it was okay. And other subjects were... I don't really have any other subjects that really stand out. I did some automotive and stuff then, that was nice. I didn't mind doing that because it was beneficial because it's always helpful to know how motors work and everything else, and I do work on my vehicles.

He enjoyed the flexibility of being able to study at his own pace, and having the ability to delay tests or assignments as needed for family trips, or until he was thoroughly prepared to pass them. However, the pace of his studies did not cease. James admitted that even when they took family vacation trips, he recalls that he and his father would sometimes go to a quiet place together to work on English grammar and spelling exercises, as that was a constant source of difficulty for him. James finished homeschooling his high school level work through American Schooling just before he reached his 17th birthday, a year ahead of others his age.

Work and Vehicular Experiences

James also worked part-time to earn spending money when he grew older and was legally able to work a part time job. By age 14, he was working at a Dairy Queen fast food restaurant near his church. He started working in the kitchen area, cleaning and doing food preparation. Later, he transferred to the front cashier tasks. He also saved money from his job for a car and, eventually, college expenses. When he bought a truck (a 1992 Chevrolet S-10 Blazer 4X4), his father taught him how to properly maintain it:

A lot of the hands-on stuff was taught to me by my dad....He always has worked on his vehicle so I get my vehicle and he goes, "Alright son, these are my tools," and we've got big old racks and racks of tools and he goes, "This is your torque wrench and here's the oil pan and now get up under the vehicle and I'll teach you how to do it." and I started doing that and he was making me do it. I got the hands-on kind of experience and I'm now able to change the transmission fluid. I can drop the pan. I can change the oil, and I can change my spark-plugs. Whatever needs to be done.

James decided to work several part-time jobs simultaneously to save money for college expenses for a couple years after he finished homeschooling:

There was a time I worked two jobs at once. I would have to be at work at five in the morning to open, and that was absolutely awful. But I would do it. I would get up, and drive to exit 101. I got down there into that little Dairy Queen near the interstate, and I would get set up for everything in the morning and I worked from five to twelve. From 12:00 p.m. I would change in my car and go from Dairy Queen into another town nearby to work in a Subway store. I did that for a couple months, working two 40-hour jobs....that was exhausting....tedious. It was Monday through Saturday, the only day I had off was Sunday. I had to go to church with my family, so my Sunday mornings and Sunday evenings were gone too.

James also worked another job in construction and apartment maintenance after that busy summer. There, he learned many building and repair skills related to home maintenance while

working with a team of other young, male workers. With money saved from these various jobs, at age 18, James had eventually earned enough to attend a community college for two years.

Community College Experiences

Separation Stage

Pre-college experiences. James's friends who had attended Mid Atlantic Community College provided some information concerning the college:

A lot of my friends were older than me....so they started [college] before [me]. I have probably three or four friends who are younger than me but probably five or six who are in their mid-twenties, roughly thereabouts. They started their college experience earlier.....so you hear these bits of advice like, "This one's hard," and, "...don't go to this one's class, or if you do, you better pay attention," and, "This one's so hard"...and all this different stuff, so you already...feel anxious about it.

Just days before fall semester classes began, James visited the community college to register. He drove there with an older friend from church who was already attending. James applied online the evening before and stayed up late into the evening, unable to sleep. He was required to take English and mathematics assessment tests before registering for classes, and he completed them in the counseling center. James admits:

...One of my good friends, he doesn't go here anymore, he went with me. He helped me. He was going to a nearby university, but I got with him on pretty much the last day to set up classes. Me and him got together, we wrote out the schedule for the first time, and I got all my classes situated. We drove up here, we paid for them, and I was advised that that I had to go ahead and take the

placement test. I remember I knew I was going to take it so I went to bed early but I did not sleep at all, I was so awake and was probably running that way for about 48 hours. So I went in there and looked at that computer screen of the placement test and suddenly I felt all tired in there, reading the tests. I knew I could do really good on it, but as I was reading, the lines started to merge together, so I had to take it sentence-by-sentence. I spent like four hours on it, but I aced it! I got it right!

James placed into college-level English classes, but he was advised to take a developmental algebra course before enrolling in technical mathematics for the electrical engineering/instrumentation programs. He recalled, "I messed up on the math, but that didn't surprise me. I was so tired." James enrolled in 15 credits for his first semester. James then toured the college buildings with his friend to see where his classes would be held on Monday, and then returned home, satisfied that he was adequately prepared.

First semester experiences. James felt a bit shocked upon arriving to his first class of 20 or more students. He had limited experiences being in large classrooms as much of his homeschooling had been accomplished independently. Still he was able to adapt to the classroom environment within a few days:

When I first started, it was...almost to the point where I could not even focus on what the instructor was saying...I was just busy just trying not to stand out. I was just trying to back into the crowd, be one with everyone else, to sit there in class until it ends and then I'm headed out the door as fast as I can go. I think for me, what helped me especially in the beginning was that I had an

outgoing personality. I like to talk to new people and to meet new people and do new things. Even though this was so *different* I made friends in the class. Even if you don't know them, you start making friends with them. Talking to the instructors, I found out that the instructors were very nice. I had a lot of instructors who would talk to me. I would talk to them after class. So you start building up a relationship with your instructors as well as your peers, and that negates the effect of the shell shock of it and then after a couple months, you walk-in, you know the people, you know the instructors and it's not so bad and you start getting into the swing of things and it's a little bit different adjusting to the schedule of school.

James grew more comfortable attending classes the more he learned about his instructor and classmates. He also had to adapt to a new schedule that was not of his own making:

Now I've got to get up, get my vehicle, and make sure I'm at my class on time. I'm working on instructor and school scheduling now rather than asking myself, "How will I get this by done by November the fourth?" Or, "I've got to get this one done by 17th or 18th" and just pacing yourself.

Learning to meet the requirements of attending classes and submitting assignments on time was a more difficult adjustment for James. He also learned that he had less personal time than when he was homeschooling. As a homeschooler, James often had personal time in the afternoons, after finishing his studies. As a college student, his personal time now came in the evenings, when he arrived home after classes. Much of that time was also devoted to homework and studying for exams. James viewed his homeschooling background as a very positive attribute because he felt comfortable relying on himself to accomplish the work needed to succeed in his

college classes. He also viewed his work experience as preparation for the schedule-keeping skills required in college work:

And you know, you kind of get used to that when you work a job. You get used to having a schedule. If I had not worked a job, I probably would've been in trouble. But you know, you work a job and you kind of treat school in the beginning like a job, for homework and stuff. It wasn't as hard for me as it was for some people because I was self-motivated. I did excellent on my online classes, simply because, when I saw a deadline and I made sure it was done before the deadline. I think homeschool really help me in that aspect because I was so used to doing things by a deadline. Where, with some people, they forget their online class, or let the deadlines go, or wait until the last minute. Where I always had to be a self-starter, I kind of knew how to do it that way. It also kind of hurt me a little bit slightly when I came in to class and had to deal with that kind of new thing. But only in the beginning, once I got used to it, then I just ...I kind of adapted to my situation.

James's technical classes often required him to partner with another student to conduct laboratory work. At first, he would choose partners who were his own age because he thought he could relate better with them. His experiences were unexpectedly challenging:

My first year in school, I had joined up with two younger guys, not the same time, just one after the other. The first one ... never really showed up for class. He could've been pretty smart, or he might not have been, but he showed up occasionally and would copy my lab homework. And I tried to help him through school, I helped him with his homework, and I gave him all my labs. I gave him a

copy of the labs, and sometimes he helped me with a few little things, but he didn't make it long in class and he dropped out.

Then, I picked another younger guy my age and he was fine, except for when he came in and he was hung over. And...he wasn't in any kind of shape really to be any kind of help. And then I was like, "Well, I'm going try to find somebody that is very studious that will help me and be a benefit" so that we can be mutually beneficial, because I do need...in some the more advanced labs you need somebody to help you out. I wanted somebody that I could help out, but they could help me out as-well-back and be a team player. So I just kind of watched and saw who is doing what and...a lot of the older guys were coming back, and it seemed like the younger guys were coming in with that high school mentality like well I'll just kind of do it and if I do good, I do good, and if I don't, I don't. My mindset was more like I'm paying good money to be here. And this is for my future. This is what my life is going to be. I don't want to just helter-skelter this and just, you know, as it comes I'll take whatever. However, it works. I want to make good grades. I wanted to do good, and I want to learn stuff. I want to have somebody if they're going to be my lab partner and have to work with them to the semester I want them to have a similar mentality. My current lab partner, I saw that he is taking good notes. He was always present. He did the best he could, but sometimes you have difficulties grasping different concepts. But you can look at a person's work ethic and you can tell how compatible you will be with them. So I went through him for the rest of the semester, and it's been the best decision I've made for a lab partner.

From these various laboratory partners, James learned that he had to look beyond a student's appearance and consider the potential partner's character to find someone with whom he could succeed in class at the same rate of accomplishment and learning that he wanted. His instructors noticed his difficulties with lab partners and sometimes even worked directly with him to learn the lab materials because they recognized how driven James was to succeed in his academic work. At the end of his first semester, James had earned final grades of three A's and one B for his classes.

Transition Stage

Subsequent semester experiences. One of James's second semester classes was canceled due to low enrollment. He attended class on the first day only to find it locked with a sign on the door that the course was canceled. He said, "I found that really odd considering that I was only fifteen minutes early." He went to the office of dean of the technologies division and was informed that he should speak with the instructor to learn if he can enroll in the same course taught at a different time. "Fortunately, I knew the teacher, and he is very understanding, so I... talked to him and he said that if I would get the paper work filled out, he would add me into the class." James adjusted his schedule and attended the other class. James was relieved: "I'm not sure what would have happened if I would have had something else scheduled in that time block. But as it is, I get to sleep in longer, so I can't say that the switch hurt my feelings." At this point, everything seemed uneventful to James academically. He was attending classes and meeting the instructors' expectations, and the courses were meeting his learning expectations as well. He was pleased to earn a scholarship, however:

The best news so far is that I got some financial aid. I didn't think I would get it, but I got online and got the forms filled out. My parents helped me out a lot in

getting the paperwork straightened out with the school. I had got a late start and so the deadline came up and they was [sic] able to help me get the necessary forms to the school on the last day. I'm very grateful that they put time and effort into helping me get the money because it paid off and I did receive some aid.

James earned a private scholarship from the foundation office at Mid Atlantic Community College, and it contributed \$500.00 toward two semesters (for the subsequent fall and spring coursework).

James enrolled in an electronic devices course which was taught by an instructor who he had learned was especially demanding, according to friends who had taken this class years earlier. He took a seat in the first row, close to the instructor. Although he was afraid at first, he learned that this instructor was very friendly and had just expected more effort from the students. He moved the classroom from one which had computers at each seat to one which was held in a laboratory classroom simply because the computers were a distraction to the students. He expected them to read the textbook and discuss what they had learned. James enjoyed the class with each meeting and grew fond of the instructor. They even talked after class sometimes about electronics. James learned that his instructor once worked for NASA, and this background seemed to impress James very much:

I answered a question in devices class. I'm so used to doing it that whenever he asked, I always did my best to answer. He asked if anyone could bring up an AC signal. And I said, "Yes, I believe that you can." He asked how I would do that and I said, "I would add a DC power supply in series with the AC on, and I believed that the AC signal would ride on the DC voltage. He then drew a

schematic on the dry erase board and asked if it was like his drawing. I told him, “That that was my understanding of it but that it had only been mentioned once in a class I had before and I had asked the teacher about it and he said that he would cover it more thoroughly in the second semester.” To that, he replied, “Oh so it is your teachers’ fault you do not know.” That got a lot of laughter from the class. My reply was, “No, it was not the teachers’ fault, it was mine because I could have studied it more but that I did study it some and to the best of my knowledge, my answer and the schematic on the board were correct.” After I said all that, he stood there for a second and then smiled and said “Yes that is correct.” We ended up talking for a little bit after class about his life and his work with the college and for NASA.

James once had difficulty using an oscilloscope, and “because the class was ignorant,” the instructor took extra time in class to teach them how to use the device because they had missed certain lessons due to winter snow storms that closed the college several days that semester. At that point, James decided to read ahead in the text book to learn the material before the instructor lectured about it. This initiative aided him in staying current with the lectures, and eventually, James earned a final grade of 89.9 out of 100 in the class. The instructor retired after this semester, but he met with James, consoled him on his grade (James expected a higher grade), and even gave James some textbooks from his personal collection where James could learn more lessons about aspects of the class which had fascinated him during that semester. James was again very impressed.

Personal Experiences during Transition

Friends. James describes himself as extroverted. He enjoys meeting and socializing with friends. His favorite activity is skiing at a lodge in another state close to Mid Atlantic Community College. Through friends with whom he skied, he met a young lady, and they started a relationship. She lived with her parents in the other state, but not too far of a commute for James to accomplish on some weekends. He would stay with other friends who lived nearby, and then visit her and her parents during the daytime, and at the end of the weekend, he would drive home. Through these additional relationships, he learned to plan his days to adequately give himself time to complete his studies as well as enjoy his personal time with them.

Home. His parents, having experienced James' busy work and college class schedule, were quite used to him being away from home so often. They allowed him this freedom ever since he learned to drive and own his truck at age 17. They continued to require him to attend church with the family on Sundays and Wednesdays, and James accomplished some household chores as needed in return for his living at home. During holidays, James would celebrate with his family and also travel to his girlfriend's home to celebrate with her and her family. James appreciated the support of his family and girlfriend, not just for the holidays, but also the entire year.

Time management issues. James often stayed up late each night to accomplish homework. He would go to sleep about 2:00 am some evenings. He said he naturally enjoyed the late evening hours and could accomplish a great amount of homework assignments then. The difficulty with that schedule was, whenever he had morning classes, he would struggle to attend them and stay awake:

For one, I'm not a morning person anyway, so I'm already having to try and get used to a morning schedule. It doesn't help that I have late classes and that there is

homework and stuff that has to be done. I normally am more alert at night so I'll do my homework in the evenings. The problem with this is that then I get little sleep and am not able to focus. Also, on Wednesday, I've got church and we normally don't get home until late, so there is no way for me to go to bed early enough so that I'll be well rested in the morning.

James would sometimes arrive late to class. He was often concerned about what the instructors thought of his tardiness. Some instructors admonished him, "Don't be late again, James." Others would let it go unnoticed, perhaps because they were aware that James led the class academically, and as long as he was mastering the lessons, it was not as important an issue for them. Math and physics classes met at 8:00 a.m. on certain days. James lived 30 minutes away from Mid-Atlantic Community College, and so he had learned to leave home in time to make it to his seat before class began. This was an issue with which James struggled for the remainder of the semester and (one might argue), his entire community college education. James completed his second semester with two final grades of "A" and two "B" final grades. James earned a place on the Dean's list at Mid Atlantic Community College, a feat which made James and his parents very proud.

Summer. James did not enroll in any summer courses, instead opting to work more in construction to earn additional money for college and maintain/improve his vehicle. He also continued to see his girlfriend and enjoyed going out with her and other friends in their free time. James was pleased to get back to a more normal sleep schedule and rest from the heavy homework schedule. He found that he was changing as he continued his education. He was more confident about attending community college courses and how to do well in them academically.

He also understood how the material he learned applied to certain careers or solved more advanced problems as he completed the last half of his curriculum.

Incorporation Stage

Academic progress. During the next year, James continued to take additional classes in the electronics and instrumentation curricula at MACC. His final grades in each course continued to primarily stay in the A/B range, and he stayed on the Dean's list each semester. In the fourth semester, he earned all A's for final grades, and saw his name listed on the President's list of honor students. He also joined the Phi Theta Kappa honor society. These were academic honors which validated his efforts. When asked who the most important people were regarding his community college education, James gave a very insightful answer:

I would say just from experiencing going to college, the most important person to whether you really learn something or not...it would be, really, yourself. If you study something and really put yourself through it, you can really learn. The second most important person,...is a very knowledgeable instructor. If you've got an instructor that doesn't really know the subjects well, it's bad. Not good at relaying what he knows, that's just about as bad as not knowing it and having a knowledgeable instructor, or someone who is able to work with you and relate how he understands it is key. A good instructor will help you learn, and then, of course, people that you work with and that you associate with in class, especially your lab partners or someone that you're tied in with a grade to figure out what's going on.

James believed he had learned to create a personal education plan and follow it to completion. This habit originally started with his homeschooling education (particularly his later,

more isolated homeschooling experiences). The community college provided not just his technical education, but also gave him experience with a variety of methods of completing the curricula, from lecture and lab courses that met at various times, to classes held at different sites, to independent, online or print-based courses that were completed in a manner very similar to home school unit-studies.

Conclusion

James has timed the completion of his curricula for the spring of 2012, and he plans to graduate with two associate degrees: an Associate of Applied Science in Instrumentation and another Associate of Applied Science in Electrical Engineering. James proposed to his girlfriend in the summer of 2011, and they plan to marry shortly after he graduates from MACC. James believes his career outlook is a very promising one because of MACC:

I feel that MACC is accredited. There been some companies that have come in that said they appreciated the MACC electronics curriculum. The instructors seem very knowledgeable. I've definitely learned lot about electronics and a lot of it is applicable to what I'll be doing. So in that sense I'm very happy with the school.

James is aware that his career may cause him to travel to, and live in, other parts of the country to build experience. He is also aware of the opportunities his career will provide him:

If I can...if I can get a good job in the area, I wouldn't mind staying local. The thing with a lot of electrical jobs...sometimes you have to kind of go to a different area. Even if it's just for a time to gain experience. A lot of [local employers]...are looking for five years or 10 years experience,...I might have the knowledge to do the job, just not the experience. I might have to relocate... just to gain experience and if I like the area then, I might stay. If I don't, I could

always move back once I got experience. I don't want to tie myself to this area. I don't want to spend a lot of money and time on education and be so tied up in this area that I just take a base level job. I could've flipped burgers without getting an education. I've got this electronics degree so if I need to go to other states,...one of these places to get experience to work in my field and make a good living, then that's what I'll do.

James is an aspiring young man with great potential and a very friendly, outgoing personality. He strives for the best outcome of any future situation he plans for himself, and will hopefully benefit greatly from both his diverse educational background and enthusiasm for learning.

CHAPTER VII

DISCUSSION

This chapter concludes this study by providing a cross-case analysis along with discussion of this study's research findings. The chapter is divided into four sections. The first section summarizes the research on homeschooled students and their college experiences. The second section addresses the methodology of the study and events which impacted it. The third section details the collective and individual experiences of the homeschooled participants, including challenges experienced by the students at community college, their transition to the community college environment, and their perception of various programs and services at the community college. The last section provides the overall recommendations and conclusions of the study.

Review of Related Research: An Overview

Homeschoolers and College

As more homeschooled students apply to colleges within the United States, interest in homeschooled students and their college experiences has grown to produce a body of research related to how they are usually received at colleges and universities compared with their public and private school counterparts (Callaway, 2004; Duggan, 2010b; Greene & Greene, 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Ray, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). While some studies examined the perceptions of homeschooled applicants from a college admissions officer's point of view (Duggan, 2010a; Greene & Greene, 2007; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004a; Sorey & Duggan, 2008a), others describe the college financial aid characteristics and challenges therein for homeschoolers (Callaway, 2004; Cogan, 2010). Recent studies have explored the actual experiences of homeschooled students once admitted to college (Cogan, 2010; Ray, 2004a; Saunders, 2009),

particularly their transition from the homeschooling environment to the more structured educational settings of four-year colleges and community colleges. This information is useful to academic practitioners who wish to plan and prepare programs and services to recruit, retain, and assist homeschooled students for their colleges.

This study extended Bolle, Wessel, and Mulvihill's (2007) qualitative multiple case study, which applied Tinto's theory of student departure to examine the transition of homeschool students. Bolle, et al. (2007) discovered that the homeschooled students did not differ in transitional experiences from their public school and private school educated classmates. In an earlier study, Sutton and Galloway, (2000) also reported that homeschoolers perform similarly to other students in college environments. However, in a more recent, statistically-based study, Cogan (2010) proved that homeschoolers earned higher academic GPA's in their first and fourth year of college, but that study did not explore in depth the qualitative experiences of those students. Research on college experiences of homeschoolers varies concerning the similarity of experiences between homeschoolers and students from other types of educational backgrounds. Some studies assert homeschoolers' college experiences are similar to students of other backgrounds, while other studies reveal variations in their college experiences stemming primarily from alternate educational backgrounds (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b; Ray, 2004a). The findings of this study may support both points.

Bolle granted the researcher permission to use an instrument from that 2007 study. The researcher then expanded the instrument to encompass not just one, but four interviews over the course of two semesters of data collection. Three additional methods of data collection were also included for cross-analysis: journaling, observations, and a focus group interview at the conclusion of data collection.

Addressing the Research Questions

The following information details the cross case analysis of the participants' experiences at Mid Atlantic Community College. Common experiences are discussed first, and individual experiences follow. This information is presented so that it addresses each of the study's three research questions.

Research question 1. What challenges do homeschooled students face during their enrollment at a community college?

Pace of learning. Interviewees suggested the classes and institutional services of the community college environment are intrinsically instructor- and institutionally-driven, not flexible for students. These participants admitted being shocked at first by the presence of so many students in classes with them, as well as the presence of instructors who were strangers to them. This culture shock occurred because the homeschooled students were initially only familiar with learning at their own pace in a more isolated environment, and learning at the pace of the instructor and other classmates felt very awkward to them at first. The homeschoolers adapted to this change in pace rapidly, usually within a two-week time span. The homeschoolers appreciated instructors who made a point of introducing themselves and allowing students to introduce themselves as well at the beginning of the class. These faculty members helped all class members, particularly those who were homeschooled, to make the connections which led to academic success and more social comfort at the community college. The homeschooled students appeared to be acclimated to studying independently. They were not compelled to "follow the crowd" to achieve their own interests, unless they believed it served them to do so. The homeschooled students did, however, take time to pursue interests and activities that especially appealed to them.

Time management. The homeschooled students had to adapt to a different daily structure for completing lessons, homework, and enjoying leisure time. As homeschoolers, they would finish studies before early afternoon, in time to do other activities. In college, however, their classes usually began in the morning and lasted to mid-afternoon, followed by studying and assignments. Leisure often did not occur until later evenings for the students. The amount of homework to be completed each day was also greater. The three homeschoolers often claimed they finished their homeschool studies within two to three hours each day. In college, however, they needed more time to finish their homework, in addition to the time required to attend lecture courses. Their use of college support services, such as the tutoring center, however, was rare or only “as needed,” but they usually found that extra help was often not as necessary as their own self-motivation and determination to accomplish their academic goals. What little support they required was found in class materials, classmates, instructors, the college website, family, and friends.

Individual Challenges

Participants also faced some individual challenges within their community college experiences.

Margaret. Margaret had difficulty choosing a major at first, but once she found one, the effort she put into achieving her goal of earning an associate degree in Medical Administrative Support Specialization made her stand out as a class leader among her peers. She was especially challenged with low self-esteem, not from homeschooling, but from her medical conditions of mild Tourette syndrome and Attention Deficit Disorder. She viewed her community college classmates and instructors as more mature and accepting of her than those in the last structured

educational environment which she left years earlier: the junior high school. This environmental difference provided her with great relief and closure regarding her unpleasant past experiences.

Hannah. Hannah was intently focused on completing the nursing curriculum, which at times was so demanding that she questioned whether or not it was the best career for her. Prior to beginning the nursing program, she decided to move out of her parent's home and relocated with roommates to an apartment close to the community college. This move caused her to occasionally experience intense emotional separation. She decided to continue on with the program and successfully passed coursework with final grades of B or higher. Socially, Hannah blended in with most of the other students, and her individual homeschooling background was not particularly evident to those around her. Hannah was also very socially adept, which was apparent by the number of people often found near her when encountered outside of classes.

James. James was challenged with difficulties finding laboratory partners who had the same determination as he to accomplish the work and finish the program. After a few incidents where he was left to finish lab work and projects alone, he overcame these setbacks by finding other partners who seemed to have the same work ethic. James also found a laboratory partner who attended the same private school with him originally to partner with and finish some coursework. James also struggled somewhat with English grammar, but this deficiency did not affect him academically at Mid Atlantic Community College. James successfully completed most of his college coursework with final grades of A. James believed his homeschooling background instilled a confidence to learn complicated material to accomplish his goals and objectives. James was popular among many other people in the program, his instructors, and friends who also attended his family church.

Discussion Concerning Challenges

Homeschooling proved to be a viable means of precollege preparation in this study. This finding is consistent with other recent studies involving homeschoolers and community college admissions (Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010b). Indeed, homeschoolers may find the community college setting to be a preferable alternative to the university, because students do not have to completely move away from their home setting to attend them.

Prior to beginning college coursework, all three homeschoolers were tested for English and mathematics readiness, and all three scored well enough to enter the college level English classes. One student was required to enroll in a developmental algebra course for his curriculum, but the other two participants met the entry level math requirement for their programs. Each participant entered the community college environment and mastered the course work and curriculum for three various occupational majors with little difficulty in adapting to the different structure of the community college setting. These results supported those of Cogan's (2010) study, finding homeschoolers actually do much better academically in college than public or private-schooled students. Other studies (Duggan, 2010b; Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b), also suggested homeschooler pre-college preparation is no less effective than other types of schooling when examining ACT scores and other admissions criteria. Also, the challenges of entering the more structured community college classroom setting from an individual homeschooling background did not adversely affect the result of successful completion of the college level coursework. The three homeschooled students felt that they were adequately prepared for college, actually *more so* by what homeschooling had instilled in them: an attitude of self-reliance, making a plan for their future, and possessing the determination to meet their goals despite whatever challenges the curriculum imposed upon them.

Stages of Community College Experience

Research question 2. How do homeschooled students experience Tinto's (1993) three stages of *separation, transition, and incorporation* during their enrollment at a community college?

Separation stage. The separation stage, as explained by Tinto (1993), is the initial period of experience when subjects are removed from their home environment and thrust into the new setting to advance their status. This is typically the period of time when a student leaves home and moves to the four-year college dormitory and begins learning to care for him or herself and live as an independent adult. For the commuter or community college student, it is a different transitional experience, but separation is still “just as real” (Tinto, 1993, p.95). The adult student does not necessarily separate him or herself from the home and family setting, but the educational setting itself is more challenging. The student also must now commute to and from the campus, register for, be tested for, and attend courses while still maintaining relationships with her or his family. The option of keeping family close appeals to many homeschooled students, who typically grew up in a close family environment. The three students in this study were encouraged by their parents to attend Mid Atlantic Community College for a few common reasons: cost, location, and availability of the occupational curriculum that appealed to the students. The students also claimed they were free to make their own decisions, but appreciated the advice of their parents enough to mention it as a deciding factor when interviewed.

During this initial stage, the students experienced unfamiliarity with the experience of attending large classes of students and having instructors whom they did not know who taught these classes. They also had to accept that the pace and design of college courses were set by the instructor, thereby classes were often not as flexible as they had experienced while homeschooling. It was in this stage (with the unfamiliarity effect) that the students admitted that

their homeschooling background had the greatest negative impact in their college experience, but that it was not detrimental enough to cause them to withdraw from the community college. They simply addressed it by remaining, watching others in the class, and following along. As they grew more comfortable with the setting, they became more social and outgoing in their interactions with the instructor and classmates. Two students earned very successful final grades their first semester of study at the community college, whereas one student failed the first courses in which she enrolled.

Transition stage. The transition stage of college experiences is evident as the college student begins to learn what is appropriate and inappropriate for success in the college setting (Tinto, 1993). Marked by successes and failures in a variety of circumstances, this stage builds the student's identity development into a feeling of positive self-worth and confidence. In this study, the three students all experienced transition most markedly. They were all accomplished students who had experienced many successes and some challenges and failures as they completed their semesters of study within their chosen curricula. They each claimed they maintained academic excellence through good study habits, self-reliance in learning, and making academics a high priority in their lives, traits which they stated they had originally developed as homeschoolers.

Incorporation stage. Incorporation is the period of time in a student's experience where one has mastered the challenges of the college environment and obtained a sense of identity and ownership instilled through the curricula (Tinto, 1993). It could be argued that two of the students in this study had not completely moved past the transitional experiences and were only showing flashes or moments of incorporation at the conclusion of the study. For example, the fact that Hannah was able to see past her experiences and separate her feelings of self-worth

from lower grades became a moment of incorporation. Her acceptance of the difficulty of the nursing program was not a reflection of her being a “bad student.” James’ ability to also look past the immediate appearance of students in choosing a lab partner and notice other students who matched his determination to successfully complete the lab exercises was based upon past failures, but caused a greater appreciation for the knowledge he was gaining at the community college and what it will help him to achieve in his future career. Both students were still one more year away from graduation. Margaret, however, had graduated, and her transitional experiences stretched across several semesters and two different community colleges before she experienced incorporation. She eventually mastered not only her chosen curriculum, but personal challenges she faced socially concerning her experiences with Tourette Syndrome and Attention Deficit Disorder. These two conditions shaped much of her educational experience, forcing her out of the public schooling system and into homeschooling. Margaret used homeschooling as a way to recover from harmful experiences and entered the community college hoping things there would be more amiable. They were, and because of this, she was able to decide upon a viable career path to follow after a few semesters of searching. Incorporation occurred when she enrolled in the medical administrative support specialization with a plan to find work and continue her education in a similar field later. Margaret excelled in this curriculum becoming a class leader due to her strong work ethic and friendly personality. Graduation from the community college was a very important and meaningful event for Margaret.

Discussion Concerning Stages

It could be argued that feelings of incorporation at the community college are quite possible for homeschoolers to achieve because they are able to remain close to home and maintain close relationships with their family. The three students claimed to have very close,

supportive relationships with their parents and other family members while attending the community college which helped them to more confidently face a variety of personal, academic, and social challenges. Despite remaining near home, the students assert they were still free to make their own decisions because their parents treated them as adults. Still, the family often continued to play a key advising role to the homeschooled students in this study in most matters concerning what college to attend, which curriculum to study, and developing a plan for a successful life after college. Upon the conclusion of this study, Margaret indeed reached the incorporation stage in the last year of her curriculum, and Hannah and James were quite ready to experience incorporation by the end of the study's data collection period.

Overall, the homeschooled community college students in this sample reported experiences which supported Tinto's theory of college student transition. They had progressed through his three stages of transition; separation at the initial entry to the community college environment, transition from the second semester of college to near completion of the curriculum, and finally, incorporation or mastery of the community college experience at the end of the college education. Tinto (1993) stated that commuting students, however, have a less effective transitional experience because of their close association with home. Despite living close to home, the results of this research affirm that the transition experience was still very evident in the lives of these students. This is because the students, being mature enough to be treated as an adult at home, were responsible for all of their own choices regarding curriculum selection, course registration, and, for some, deciding to move or spend more time away from home. These situations provided a variety of defining moments which made the community college transition experience memorable to each student.

Community College Services and Experiences

Research question 3. What programs or services at the community college aided and/or hindered the transitional process for the homeschooled students?

Beneficial factors. These homeschoolers were pleased with their decision to attend the community college and listed many beneficial factors or experiences at Mid Atlantic Community College. At first, the three students were particularly drawn to consider MACC because of parental suggestions. The community college option was favorable because it was local, allowing the homeschooled students to reduce travel time to attend courses without having to relocate. MACC also offered two-year occupational programs that matched their career aspirations. Open admissions policies at the community college allowed them to apply for admission, with proof of residency, without requiring them to present a high school transcript. Mandatory placement testing in English or mathematics skills presented an opportunity to determine how prepared they were for college coursework. In all three cases, the students learned through the testing process that they were prepared for college level English coursework. One homeschooled student was adequately prepared for Mathematics; however, two needed to complete a developmental mathematics course before taking the college level mathematics courses. Cogan (2010) found that statistically, homeschoolers excel over other types of students (who attended public & private school) when examining academic performance. The students' performance in this study seems to corroborate with both Cogan's and Duggan's findings (Cogan, 2010; Duggan, 2010a).

In addition, community college tuition, books, and fees were also somewhat affordable, which was another strong deciding factor. The students also mentioned their parents suggested that they enroll at the community college for one or two courses just before completing high school requirements as a homeschooled student. Completed MACC courses also applied to their homeschooling coursework for high school level completion. Attempting MACC courses early

also bolstered the students' academic confidence and helped them to adjust to the community college setting. Completing some community college coursework also created a useful transcript for the homeschooled students if they later decide to transfer to a four year college with a more selective admissions process (Jones & Gloeckner, 2004b; Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Site preferences. Mid Atlantic Community College offered two sites: a 100- acre main campus and a much smaller, off-campus site at a local shopping mall located 20 miles away from the main campus. The population of the mall site was roughly one-third that of the main campus. When asked which community college site they favored, the three homeschooled students favored the mall site over the main campus, primarily because the site was smaller, closer to home, and many friends and people familiar to them attended that site. They all wished they could study there exclusively.

Academic environment. Once they began attending college-level classes, the three homeschooled students shared many observations concerning the community college environment. The students were pleased to find the instructors were friendly and professional with all students. The instructors were also experienced in their career fields, often sharing specific training and advice to their students concerning workplace requirements. The students also noted that the instructors welcomed them and did not seem confused or uncomfortable with the fact that the students were homeschooled (if they were given this information). Classmates also reacted similarly if they were informed of the student's homeschooling background. Many classmates seemed familiar with the concept of homeschooling or asked the students questions about aspects of their homeschooling, but never shunned or ostracized them. As Saunders (2009) noted, this may have been a key factor to their remaining at the community college. Encounters involving homeschool background were rare by all reports of the students in this study. The

students truly “blended in” with their classmates, participating to the best of their abilities in all classes, and concentrating primarily on learning the skills and material taught by the instructors.

Student services and college environment. Although the college offered free tutoring, financial aid, academic advising, and other student services, the homeschooled students stated they would not use these services unless it was absolutely necessary for them to pass a course. However, one student often met with and used some of the services offered by the disabilities services counselor.

Financially, the three students qualified for in-state tuition because of their local residency. One student did not apply for financial aid, claiming that his/her family made too much money. Two others applied for financial aid, yet only one received a grant and a scholarship. Cogan (2010) found that homeschooled students were likely recipients of Pell Grant scholarships, yet this particular sample did not receive very much financial aid during the data collection period. The students initially purchased their books and materials at the bookstore, but as they adjusted to the college environment, two of the students bought their textbooks online or from other classmates to save money.

The three homeschooled students also commuted to and from the campus using their own vehicles, selecting a consistent parking spot near their class building with each visit. Two students worked part-time while enrolled at the community college, and one student worked for two years prior to attending the college and also during the summers. The latter student, James, felt his work experiences helped him acclimate more quickly to the challenges of the community college course requirements, particularly adapting to the set schedules.

They all were comfortable with computer technology. Between classes, the students found places on campus, such as the library, where they could check their social networking sites

or email on a public computer, study, or socialize with classmates. One student frequented the student lounge at least twice a week, whereas another student noted that studying in the lounge was “difficult for my study group and me” because it was a very active, noisy environment.

Extracurricular activities. Extracurricular involvement was not a high priority for the three students. Margaret eagerly joined the honor society once invited, while James casually joined a “multicultural club” at their professor’s urging. Hannah, however, stated she was, “too busy with the nursing program to be involved in anything else.” Margaret, showing she had overcome a great deal of insecurity, decided to participate in a Halloween costume contest once.

Academic honors played an important part in all three students’ college experiences. They all exhibited great pride whenever they experienced academic success, especially upon receiving awards such as being named to the “Dean’s List” or the “President’s List” after final grades were posted. To them, special rewards for college academic success validated they were very competent community college students.

Challenging Factors

It was often difficult for the homeschooled students to list or identify challenges in their community college experiences. One might speculate that they were reluctant to share challenges or negative aspects of the community college with the researcher because he worked at the institution. While conducting the study, the researcher did not notice many homeschooling background-related challenges with the students. For example, James often struggled with English grammar and spelling throughout his schooling, but this did not seem to ultimately affect his grades. Many interview questions and observations were designed to record possible challenges based upon the students’ homeschooling background. At the time they entered the study, the students concentrated their efforts and focus on their present experiences, rather than

on their past academic preparations. The researcher asked them to reflect upon their homeschooling background and what it meant to them, as well as how it prepared them for the community college. The students seemed proud to have been homeschooled and felt that it adequately prepared them for their college experiences. They also genuinely appeared to be very pleased with the experiences they had while attending Mid Atlantic Community College. In another study concerning college challenges, Braxton (2000; see also Saunders, 2009) stated,

College students, even those in high academic standing, may depart from their particular college or university when their values and beliefs are different from the prevailing attitudes and beliefs at that institution, or when they experience isolation from other members of the campus community (p. 22).

The students in this study did not experience any challenges that might force them to leave the community college, but they did, however, share several challenges.

Collective challenges. The most overt challenge to the three homeschooled students during their community college education was “course design.” The pace of a course at the community college is largely determined by the instructor, and is generally not adjusted by the student. Usually, the instructor determines when each lesson will be taught, when quizzes will be given, when tests are to be taken, and when papers or other assignments are to be submitted. In contrast, during their homeschooling experiences, if the students needed to delay taking a test to for one reason or another, the flexibility was there to allow them to do so. Now enrolled in community college classes, the students immediately noticed that, to be successful in their courses, they had to carefully attend to each course requirement. Even distance education courses at the community college seemed different to the homeschooled students because the pace of the distance courses was more deliberate. If the students experienced a conflict or challenge in

completing an assignment, they immediately had to inform the instructor to work out an alternate plan. Previously, when the students were homeschooling, they could begin their studies whenever they chose to accomplish them (or whenever their parents required them to accomplish the lessons). When they became community college students, they were not only required to accomplish their assignments, but also to attend all classes and laboratory courses punctually. This additional expectation was the most noticeable challenge for the homeschooled students. However, they also stated that within a few weeks, they were “used to the routine” and that it “became less of a problem” for them.

Individual challenges. In addition to the collective challenges, each student experienced individual challenges that had little to do with their homeschooling education. The challenges were complications related to their personal conditions or college curriculum:

Margaret. Margaret was challenged initially with acclimating to college level coursework and then deciding a career or major that appealed to her medical interests. She had Attention Deficit Disorder and Tourette Syndrome, and she was concerned about how these conditions would affect her academically, as well as how others at the community college might behave toward her. She worked with the community college’s disabilities services coordinator to address some of the possible deficiencies related to these conditions, but Margaret also personally endeavored to find study skills and preparation methods that improved her performance academically, such as using self-hypnosis techniques, recording the lectures, taking the notes from the recording later, and taking the time to study intently before class lectures began.

Reputation. Margaret also discovered while working off-campus that co-workers who were also four-year college students appeared to be less impressed with the community college

than with their own university environment. She thought they viewed community college students as less capable because of the less stringent community college admission standards. Margaret disagreed with this assumption and argued that the community college environment gave people an excellent college level education. She noted that this assumption is perhaps a pervading opinion with the public that may dissuade potential students from attending community colleges who might otherwise benefit from them.

Hannah. Hannah experienced very few academic challenges with her community college education until she entered the nursing program. In her first year in the nursing program, she was shocked by how challenging the curriculum was for her cohort. She and several students with her spent great amounts of time preparing for tests and assignments, which were issued very often in rapid succession. This pace forced them to either make success in the nursing classes a top priority for their lives, or fail the classes and choose a different career. She wanted to be a nurse very much, but she also admitted that at times, she questioned her devotion to the program, asking herself if it was “worth so much effort to be a nurse.” Ultimately, Hannah decided to stay in the program and complete it to the best of her ability. She credits this decision with the experiences she had while completing clinicals in the nursing program. Working with mentally-ill patients helped her to decide to become a psychiatric nurse.

Academic challenges. Hannah also noted that she had to become less emotionally attached to her academic results in the nursing program because she was so accustomed to earning excellent grades in her homeschooling and earlier college work. When she earned slightly lower grades in the nursing courses, she eventually realized that she was not becoming a “worse” student, but that she was merely being challenged to a greater extent than ever before. This was a very maturing, character-building realization for Hannah.

James. James performed very well academically at the community college, yet he was concerned with finding lab partners in his courses who were similarly motivated. His early attempts to find a lab partner resulted in his being abandoned by two seemingly uninterested students. This did not, however, dissuade James from completing the course or learning the material. He simply had to work somewhat faster to complete the lab assignments individually. His instructor noticed his challenges and assisted him by acting as his lab partner occasionally until James found a lab partner who worked in tandem with him to complete the assignments.

Some challenges were common to all three students, and this may indicate a trend concerning the campus climate or culture. The existence of individual challenges proved students were comfortable sharing information with the researcher and trusted him enough to reveal these challenges in multiple ways such as interviews, journal entries, observations, and a focus group interview.

Limitations

This was a single-site study. These findings cannot be generalized to other institutions. The participants were from one Mid-Atlantic regional, public, community college setting. The researcher did not seek out students from backgrounds and settings other than community college students who were homeschooled. The methodology was useful for conducting a two-semester multiple case study of a limited number of homeschooled students at a community college. However, conclusions drawn from this study may not necessarily apply to other community colleges or similar institutions of higher education. The students in this study were occupational/technical degree students, and not immediately interested in college transfer opportunities. They wanted to work after college graduation. The analysis might also include some bias based upon the fact that the researcher was employed at the institution being studied.

A Hawthorne effect may have been present because the students participating may have felt somewhat uncomfortable sharing problems or negative information related to an employee of the college (Merret, 2006). To combat this limitation, the two-semester duration of the study provided the students with a great amount of time to become more familiar and comfortable with the researcher, thus offering him more honest opinions. In addition, the researcher repeatedly reassured the students that their identity and information would always be kept confidential during the study. Although the researcher was not homeschooled and did not homeschool his own children, this lack of familiarity with homeschooling provided the researcher an opportunity to be more objective while reporting data concerning the topic of homeschooling.

Recommendations

Implications for Research

Demographics. Scant research has explored homeschooled student transition to the community college, so further research is necessary to better understand the needs of this population. This study only looked at the transition of three students. Involving more homeschooled community college students would help improve the generalizability of the study, and using a longitudinal approach that follows these students from application to graduation would enhance knowledge of their experiences. Following the students as they navigate the transition provides the researcher with a different view of the process, a more objective view. Students could also be asked to reflect upon each year to identify where they have seen growth. The current study also included only white students, and exploring the transition experiences of homeschooled students from other ethnicities would perhaps fill an additional piece of the transition puzzle (Edman & Brazil, 2008).

Care needs to be taken to ensure that both genders are studied equally. In this study the one male homeschooled student faced challenges that differed from those of the females. While all three homeschooled students commuted, studied occupational curricula successfully, and spoke well of their experiences at the community college, their outlook and support system during the experience seemed different. James was more concerned than the female participants with his academic obligations and time management skills. He revered his instructors, sought classmates with similar academic values, and balanced time to visit his girlfriend or other friends when not studying. He enjoyed having fun with loved ones whenever he felt he could do so. He saved money to attend college while working multiple part time jobs before enrolling at MACC so he could have more free time to enjoy. James also seemed to be given more independence from his family than the other participants in the study. He spent a great amount of time away from home, only sleeping there weeknights and attending church functions on Sundays and Wednesday evenings with his family. Margaret and Hannah had close relationships with their families and often strived to please their parents with their academic prowess. Both worked part time jobs while attending MACC to manage personal finances, and valuing their free time spent with friends. However, they were centered foremost on mastering their classes completely, occasionally making sacrifices in personal time and relationships to ensure this success. Though it was her decision, it disturbed Hannah greatly to move away from home, and Margaret stayed at her parents' home the entire time of the study, with plans to move out after beginning her career. The sample size was too small to effectively determine if these differences were truly gender related. Determining the impact of gender on the transition of students would be very helpful to community colleges designing resources for homeschooled students.

Employment. As mentioned previously, two students worked part time to earn enough money to pay for their vehicle costs and other expenses, whereas one student worked several part time jobs to save enough money to attend college without having to work for two years.

Employment while attending college is an interesting variable to explore, as it impacts many experiences and relationships of students in college (Kulm & Cramer, 2006). Some students, such as James, may view their work experiences positively. James claimed that the time management habits he learned while working helped him to succeed academically. Conversely, others may find employment to be a distraction from their studies, even suffering academically if they choose to work too much. Research comparing students who work versus those who do not may yield helpful information to college practitioners especially if it focuses on a particular set of students, such as those who were homeschooled.

Homeschooling approaches. Also of interest within the sample is the need to include as many types of homeschool curriculum as possible to explore their possible impact on student transition. For example, homeschoolers who used the classical method may be more likely to succeed academically than those who have used an un-schooling approach. The classical approach is used by parents to introduce students to classical literature and older methods of learning grammar and other topics such as science and history, and this approach usually corresponds well with traditional higher education curricula (Miller, 2005). However, un-schooling students often study topics in which they are naturally interested, and minimally cover other topics which do not appeal to them. Thus these students may discover they have a deficiency in a key discipline (such as mathematics) as they face college placement testing (Morrison, 2007). In this sample, the participants were homeschooled for a variety of years, and they used different approaches. Hannah was homeschooled for twelve years, whereas James and

Margaret homeschooled the last few years to complete high school requirements. Hannah's parents used a variety of eclectic approaches on Hannah and her siblings, including unit studies and occasional associations with other homeschooler families. James studied a homeschooling curriculum his mother had once used, called "A.C.E." Margaret's parents chose Cambridge Academy for her homeschooling curriculum because of their concern with accreditation. Comparisons of homeschooled community college students who have used various approaches will help future homeschoolers in choosing an approach that best prepares them to enter college.

Religion. Little research examines the relationship between religious practices and community college student success. The three homeschoolers in this study often referred to their religious background in their responses, yet research reveals that not all homeschoolers come from a religious background, as there are many reasons a family may decide to homeschool, not just for religious reasons (Cox, 2003). Studies comparing academic performance of homeschooled students whose background is faith-based versus those who are not may provide additional knowledge concerning the college transition of these students. Churches and schools share some similarities. The practice obtained through actively attending and participating in a church congregation and quietly hearing weekly inspirational messages as a group may condition some homeschooled students to maintain their attentiveness whenever they enter traditional classroom settings.

Settings. Repeating this study in other two year settings may also expand our knowledge as we look at homeschooled student transition to several different post high school educational settings. Including private junior colleges and proprietary schools would allow researchers to compare transition experiences between those unique settings. This study revealed how the homeschooled students experienced transition consistent with Tinto's theory of student departure

at one community college, but other location studies might have a different transitional outcome depending on the setting services and programs offered to the students.

Programs of study. Are transitional experiences for students consistent despite one's chosen curriculum of study? Future research needs to also explore the transition of homeschoolers by selected curricula. This study's nursing student experienced several challenges which were program-based, yet it is possible she may not have faced those same challenges had she selected another program of study. Carefully designing a study that explores homeschooler transition in occupational programs, transfer programs, and general education may provide a compelling difference in student perception of academic success and occupational preparation.

Method of course instruction. Community colleges now offer a variety of courses using traditional, video-streaming, and asynchronous online formats to teach lessons. Instructors of popular courses, such as college English composition, might teach the same lessons, yet use different learning formats to impart the knowledge to their students. The type of courses into which students enroll may certainly impact their transition and perception of the college (Harrell & Bower, 2011). One of the homeschooled students mentioned in this study that when she enrolled into distance education courses, the courses "felt more like homeschooling than traditional courses," yet different because the "pace was more deliberate." Developing research to study this variable using students from similar (as well as different) backgrounds such as homeschooling would yield useful information for college leaders and practitioners determining the effectiveness of various methods for teaching courses and their potential for academic success. Community college leaders must often measure the effectiveness of certain modes of teaching to determine if courses of a certain modality should be continued or changed to another mode of instruction.

Pre-college preparation. The only way to discover how homeschooled students truly compare is to add other types of students into the research. Following the transition of community college students who have been homeschooled, private-schooled, and public schooled will allow for such a comparison, hopefully demystifying the view of homeschooling as an alternative approach. At several points in the current study, the students voiced a concern about how others view them as being homeschooled. In fact, one possible participant opted out of the study because of her concern of other's perceptions. Perhaps homeschoolers adjust no differently from other traditional aged students, but research does need to embrace all of them in one study. More research comparing homeschooled, public-schooled, and private-schooled students would (with limitations) determine which kind of precollege preparation is most effective for academic success. Determining students' preconceptions of the community college is also important. While research has long connected preconceptions to success and failure at community colleges (Burns, 2010; Edman & Brazil, 2008), little has explored homeschooled students specifically, and none have explored privately-schooled students. These two groups may have more in common than realized due to shared demographic characteristics of being mostly white and from middle class family backgrounds (Broughman, Swaim, Hryczaniuk, & NCES, 2011; Ray, 2004a). Yet, the average size of family is different for both groups, as are the actual educational setting characteristics (Broughman, et al., 2011; Ray, 2004a). Developing research on this topic would yield many useful comparisons and a better understanding of the relationship between these two types of pre-college preparation.

Quantitative research. Much research has addressed the link between pre-college preparation and college success, but this research has focused on those in a public school setting (Bolle, Wessel, & Mulvihill, 2007; Lattibaudiere, 2000). Exploring the graduation rates of

homeschooled students compared to the rates of public schooled and private school students could expand our knowledge of what preparation is truly effective and how best to provide that preparation. Nationally, 43% of all undergraduate college students begin at a community college (AACC, 2012), and community colleges typically provide developmental education to approximately 40% of their new enrollees (Lumina Foundation Website, 2011). Finding ways to improve pre-college preparation would allow community colleges to better plan their courses and services for student success. Connecting this pre-college preparation to academic success and persistence would be extremely useful in this endeavor.

Implications for Practitioners

The experiences shared by the homeschooled students in this study may be no different from those shared by other students whom community college practitioners see every day. However, to serve homeschooled students best, one needs to explore their unique perspective more, and share their knowledge with other practitioners to broaden the ability of serving this type of student better across the institution. Advertising to homeschooling families through online and community initiatives will also influence homeschooled students to consider attending the community college when they are ready to explore such options.

Online initiatives. To recruit homeschooled students to the community college, practitioners should initially focus on the college internet presence, as homeschooled students are generally very practiced with online learning and naturally do a great amount of exploration of facts and knowledge on the internet. Community colleges may create websites that attract homeschoolers and provide specific information on programs and services directed at meeting their needs. (Duggan, 2010a). Examples of information addressed in a community college homeschooling website may include admissions criteria, types of financial aid available,

placement testing information, campus directions, building layouts, and tips for homeschoolers new to the college experience (e.g. classroom etiquette, personal finance, and study skills). In addition, colleges can develop recruiting initiatives beyond the institutional website and establish an internet presence on other iconic internet sites such as Facebook, MySpace, and YouTube videos. Colleges can also create chat opportunities with a college representative online, and now develop cell phone applications to make college and recruiting information convenient to homeschooling families (and others) searching online for information concerning local higher education opportunities.

Community initiatives. It is important that community colleges connect with the surrounding community to recruit and serve their localities. To begin, the college recruiter could also focus attention on local libraries in the community, perhaps leaving college catalogs and other community college information where homeschoolers and others potentially congregate (Shinn, 2008). Perhaps the recruiter could also visit local churches, synagogues, temples or other religious congregations that are known to have many homeschooling families. College recruiters may also confer with local school superintendents that (because of their authority over homeschooling) might have contact with homeschooling associations in their service area. Perhaps recruiters could meet and speak with these groups to determine how the local community college could help the homeschoolers in their associations to succeed academically. Local markets, newspapers, recreation attractions, and public bulletin boards are also plausible marketing opportunities for community colleges recruiting homeschoolers, because many homeschooling families use these attractions and markets as much as other local public or private schooling families.

Campus initiatives. In essence, the community college must focus on marketing itself

as a vehicle for positive growth and educational enhancement for these homeschooling families who strive to provide the best education possible for their children. There are several ways of targeting homeschooled applicants to make them feel more welcome and improve their retention and success rates at the community college. To ensure effective service to homeschoolers within their institution, community college practitioners should offer in-service training opportunities to faculty to familiarize them with the various homeschooling approaches, and ways to facilitate successfulness in class (such as leading the class in introductions at first, a gesture that seemed to assist the students in this study to adjust to the classroom setting faster). It is important that instructors receive the best student characteristics familiarization training to enhance not only teaching and learning in the classroom, but to also prevent distractions or obtrusive behavior by unfamiliar or disinterested students within the shared learning environment.

College admissions personnel should also be aware of the various homeschooling approaches and be familiar with their characteristics so that they can effectively advise incoming homeschooled applicants based upon their academic interests and needs (Sorey & Duggan, 2008a). Similar to other applicants, homeschoolers may have strengths in one subject, such as English, and weaknesses in other areas such as mathematics. The admissions counselor may consider granting college credit or waiving placement testing where there is evidence of advanced study in a particular academic area. Conversely, the counselor may require additional developmental study for a weak area of knowledge to bring the homeschooled student up to par with other students entering challenging courses. The homeschoolers in this study claimed to have appreciated the welcome response the community college admissions personnel greeted them with when they applied to Mid Atlantic Community College. Some students returned to these same employees for additional advising for subsequent semesters of study.

Holding an open house event for homeschooling families would provide a number of beneficial services to both the college and student families. An open house event would provide an opportunity for homeschoolers and their families to meet one another, hear from key faculty and other college representatives, gain information appropriate to their unique educational situations (topics included could be admissions requirements, placement testing information and tips for success, applying for financial aid, and student services offered), and tour the campus facilities and setting where their loved ones will spend much of their time away from home.

Additionally, if there is a greater number of homeschooled students attending an institution, colleges could also offer orientation or honors courses for homeschooled community college students during the semester to help them realize the potential of their learning as a group. A weekly mentoring program might be coordinated involving experienced homeschooled students who have attended the community college for at least a year successfully who can play a vital role as mentors to new homeschooled college students. Whatever approaches to recruiting and retention the college decides to offer, it is beneficial to the homeschooled students to learn that they are not the only homeschoolers attending the college. Some of the homeschoolers in this study mentioned that they would have appreciated learning who else was homeschooled and attending their community college.

The homeschoolers in this study also held academic awards, such as the Dean's list, the President's list, and membership in the honor society (Phi Theta Kappa). They deliberately strived to attain these goals every semester for validation of their academic efforts. Perhaps this was because, in some homeschooling scenarios, the students may have been provided few special awards or encouragement for their academic achievement. It is difficult to determine why, as little was explained about the value placed upon these awards, except the need to attain

them. The students in this study seemed to value the college level awards because they originated from a traditional or institutional source. There are many variables within each individual community college student that help to determine or define one's academic success (Burns, 2010). Overall, homeschooling initiatives can be held in the community, on campus preceding the start of the semester, or throughout the semester of study. They are worthwhile endeavors, because creating and supporting various initiatives targeted toward homeschooled students can build self-esteem and pride in many students' homeschooling backgrounds as well as build their association with a community college that supports and understands their perspective.

Implications for Community College Leaders

This study explored the transition of three homeschooled students who have pursued occupational and technical curricula at a community college. The number of homeschooling applicants varies annually, but over time, some institutions may realize an increase (or decrease) in the number of homeschooler applications and college leaders may be curious as to why area homeschoolers find their institutions more (or less) attractive. It may benefit these leaders to confer with admissions personnel who have experience in serving homeschooled students to determine what might be affecting these trends. College leaders are always interested in discovering new ways to enhance enrollment at their institutions, and homeschooling as a method of precollege preparation is becoming more popular nationally (AACC, 2012; Cogan, 2010, Duggan, 2010b; Ray 2004a). Yet this set is still often overlooked or unrecognized as a very potent source of students. Homeschooled students have a unique and compelling educational story to share, and their love of learning, fostered by family initially, can now be developed and expanded through their community college experiences to create outstanding students and potential future leaders in science, medicine, business, technology, and many other

exciting career fields. Finally, leaders who recognize this potential in homeschooled students will realize a broad spectrum of intangible benefits if they make a concerted effort to attract homeschooled students to their community colleges, because they will be recruiting students who especially care about learning.

Conclusion

This study begins the discussion of homeschooler transition by applying Tinto's (1993) theory of student departure and its three stages of transition to the community college setting. Tinto's theory was appropriate for this study because it provided a framework for observing and comparing the experiences of the students over a period of time. The homeschooled students in this study adapted and thrived in their academic programs using the skills they had originally developed as homeschoolers to meet challenges encountered at the community college.

In the focus group meeting, these students stated that "persistence," "dedication," and "a positive attitude" were the chief personal attributes for their success. Although challenged with overcoming difficult personal conditions, including Attention Deficit Disorder and Tourette Syndrome, finding lab partners that work equally well academically, and deciding whether or not a curriculum is the best choice for oneself, these students persevered and faced these challenges through self-determination, careful consideration of the situation, and taking an active approach using problem-solving skills. Overall, these experiences proved that homeschooling was a very successful method of academic preparation for the community college experience of three different students.

Several recommendations for research spring from this study. Research could be conducted using variables such as demographics, school setting, course instruction methods chosen, homeschooling background, pre-college preparation differences, religious background,

and homeschooled students' employment experiences while enrolled at the community college. Adding homeschooled students to the research on these variables extends the wealth of knowledge useful to educational researchers and practitioners who wish to develop programs and services to recruit and retain these students with their institutions.

Because homeschooling is becoming a more widely accepted method of educating and preparing students for college (it nationally consists of 2 million children), colleges must be prepared to serve homeschooled applicants as they will likely encounter them more often (NHERI, 2012). As community colleges begin to serve a growing number of homeschooled applicants, they will likely benefit from the experiences had with these students because they have been educated in a manner which instills self confidence in finding information, socializing with various members of the population, and developing an appreciation for various disciplines consistent with traditional educational missions of community colleges. Finally, community colleges can target the homeschooling population of their service region for recruitment by familiarizing key employees across the institution about homeschooling backgrounds and characteristics, hosting specific orientation or open house programs for homeschoolers, and perhaps designing honors courses for groups of them should the community college realize a significant number of homeschooled applicants. Any community college that takes specific measures to accommodate homeschooled students will increase its enrollment headcount with an otherwise often overlooked population of potentially excellent students. The homeschoolers in this study were among the most academically successful students at this community college. From this observation, one may conclude that community colleges should strive to attain more homeschooled applicants as often as they recruit public and private-schooled students. It may be

more challenging because the students are not found in central locations, but this is now a much more worthwhile endeavor for many community colleges to pursue.

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Appendix A
(Old Dominion University
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Application)

IRB Identifier: _____
(To Be Assigned by the IRB)

**APPENDIX C
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
HUMAN SUBJECT RESEARCH REVIEW APPLICATION FORM**

Responsible Project Investigator (RPI)		
Responsible Project Investigator: The RPI must be a member of ODU faculty or staff who will serve as the project supervisor and be held accountable for all aspects of the project. Students cannot be listed as RPIs.		
First Name: Molly	Middle Initial: H.	Last Name: Duggan
Telephone: 757-683-3165	Fax Number: 683-4413	E-mail: mduggan@odu.edu
Office Address: 166-5 Education, Old Dominion University		
City: Norfolk	State: Virginia	Zip: 23529
Department: Educational Foundations and Leadership	College: Darden College of Education	
Complete Title of Research Project: From homeschool to the community college A multiple case study		Code Name (one word): homeschool
Investigators		
Investigator(s): Individuals who are directly responsible for any of the following: the project's design, implementation, consent process, data collection, and/or data analysis.		
First Name: Ben	Middle Initial: G.	Last Name: Kramer
Telephone: (540) 674-3600, ext. 4431	Fax Number:	Email: bkramer@nr.edu
Office Address: Activities Counselor New River Community College 5251 College Drive P O Box 1127 Dublin, VA 24084		
City: Dublin	State: VA	Zip: 24084
Department:	College:	
Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
First Name:	Middle Initial:	Last Name:
Telephone:	Fax Number:	Email:
Office Address:		
City:	State:	Zip:
Department:	College:	
Affiliation: <input type="checkbox"/> Faculty <input type="checkbox"/> Graduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Undergraduate Student <input type="checkbox"/> Staff <input type="checkbox"/> Other		
List all information for additional investigators on attachment and check here: _____		
Type of Research		

Appendix B
(Old Dominion University
Institutional Review Board (IRB) Packet)

No. 10 - 128

OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY
HUMAN SUBJECTS INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD
RESEARCH PROPOSAL REVIEW NOTIFICATION FORM

TO: Mr. M. Duggan DATE: August 26, 2010
Research Director, IRB *PI: [unclear]*

RE: From Homeschool to the Community College - a Multiple Case Study
Case of [unclear]

Please be informed that your research proposal has received approval by the Institutional Review Board. Your research protocol is:

- Approved
 Tabled/Disapproved
 Approved, contingent on making the changes below*

[Signature] August 26, 2010
[Signature] *[unclear]*

Contact the IRB for clarification of the terms of your research or if you wish to make ANY change to your research protocol.

The approval expires one year from the IRB decision date. You must submit a Progress Report and seek re-approval if you wish to continue data collection or analysis beyond that date, or a Close-out report. You must report adverse events experienced by subjects to the IRB chair in a timely manner (see university policy).

* Approval of your research is **CONTINGENT** upon the satisfactory completion of the following changes and attestation to those changes by the chairperson of the Institutional Review Board. Research may not begin until after this attestation.

* In the Application:

- #7 changes the maximum number of subjects in the study to 10 as the potential total of the study sample to allow for possible attrition throughout the longitudinal data collection period of time.
- #8, a letter of support should be obtained from the administration of the New River community college stating their support of the research project and the data collection. The letter going to the parents/students inviting them to participate should be generated from the admissions office or be equally signed by the admissions office and the research study investigators.
- #10 the checked response should be changed to Yes.

Appendix C
(MACC Support Letter- included with Appendix D Letter to Participants)

[Mid Atlantic Community College Logo Here]

P.O. Box xxxxx

Town, State , Zip Code

Phone (xxx) xxx-xxxx
Or (xxx) xxx-xxxx (TDD)

FAX (xxx) xxx-xxxx

September 7, 2010

Mr. Ben Kramer
Mid Atlantic Community College
Address
Town, State, Zip code

Dear Ben:

As you have requested, I provide this letter of support for your proposed research project here at Mid Atlantic Community College (MACC). I understand that you plan to conduct this study to support your dissertation in partial fulfillment of the requirements for a doctoral program at Old Dominion University.

I am aware that you plan to conduct a two-semester (Fall 2010 and Spring 2011) qualitative study of homeschooled students who have subsequently enrolled at MACC. Your focus is to learn more about the academic and social characteristics of these students and how these factors may affect their success in a community college.

I offer my support and the college's support as you embark on this next phase in your doctoral program.

Sincerely,

[Signature of President]

Name
President

Appendix D

(INVITATION LETTER TO POTENTIAL PARTICIPANTS. INCLUDES MACC SUPPORT LETTER)

Dear (Use full name),

Congratulations and thank you for choosing to attend Mid Atlantic Community College for the Fall 2010- Spring 2011 academic year.

I wish to invite you to participate in a research study being conducted for my doctoral studies. My research focuses on the impact of having been homeschooled on a student's first-year experience in college, and MACC records indicate you were homeschooled at the time of your application.

Your participation in this project will include being available for a series of interviews and observations, completing a journal, and participating in one focus group. Interviews and the focus group will be audio taped with your written permission. Each participant will receive a \$20 gift card from Walmart after each interview, at the end of each semester after submitting your journal, and at the end of the focus group in May 2011.

Any information that is obtained in connection with this study and that can be identified with you or Mid Atlantic Community College will remain completely CONFIDENTIAL. Data gathered from the interviews will be used only for authorized research, and will not be used for competitive advantage or financial gain by anyone. You will not be identified in connection with this study, and all data will use pseudonyms. Your participation or decision not to participate will not be shared with any faculty members or administrators and will have no impact on your grades in any course. All data collected will remain confidential and stored in a locked file cabinet or password protected in a computer for five years. After five years, the data will be destroyed. Your participation in this project is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time.

This study, with your participation, will ultimately help community college officials to provide better student support services to homeschooled students attending this community college.

Please complete the reply slip below and return in the enclosed self-addressed, stamped envelope by October 7 if you are interested in being a part of this study.

Sincerely,

Ben Kramer
Doctoral Student
Community College Leadership Doctoral Program
Old Dominion University

Yes, I am interested in participating in the study. I plan to attend Mid Atlantic Community College for the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters. I have been homeschooled for at least four years, and have completed my secondary school requirements.

I agree to participate in 4 one-hour interviews with the researcher (September and November 2010, January and March 2011) and to allow the researcher to observe my activities both on campus and during MACC-related activities. In addition, I will keep a journal about my experiences, writing at least two entries per week. I also understand that I will not be told the identity of the other students in the study until the focus group is held at the end of the study in May 2011. I understand that upon the conclusion of each interview, submission of each journal, and at the end of the focus group, I will receive a \$20 gift card from Walmart as a thank you for my participation.

I understand that my participation is purely voluntary and I may withdraw from the study at any time.

Name
(Printed): _____

Signature: _____

Address: _____

Telephone/ Cell phone Number: _____

Email: _____

Number of years homeschooled _____ **Age:** _____ **Gender:** _____

Appendix E
(Denial Letter)

Dear _____,

Thank you for volunteering for my study regarding homeschooler transition to the community college. We had a large pool of qualified applicants, and the response was overwhelming. We only had a limited number of people we could accept, and those slots have been filled.

Thank you again for your interest. I wish you great success in your year ahead at MACC.

Sincerely,

Benjamin G. Kramer
2125 Lonesome Dove Drive
Christiansburg, VA 24073
540-230-3759 (cell)
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Appendix F
INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT
OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY

PROJECT TITLE: "From Homeschool to the Community College: A Multiple Case Study."

INTRODUCTION:

The purpose of this form is to provide information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The title of this research project is "From Homeschool to the Community College: A Multiple Case Study", and it will take place on the Town, VA, campus of Mid Atlantic Community College. Interviews will be conducted in the Student Activities Office in Campus Hall, and the focus group will be conducted in the Corporate Board Room in Campus Hall. Observations will occur in a variety of locations at both the [Town]campus and [Town] site of Mid Atlantic Community College.

RESEARCHERS

The responsible project investigator is Molly H. Duggan, PhD., Assistant Professor, Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University. As his dissertation chair, she will be supervising the Co-Investigator, Benjamin G. Kramer, who is the Activities Counselor for Mid Atlantic Community College. He is also a doctoral candidate conducting this research to complete a dissertation toward earning a Ph D. from the Community College Leadership program at Old Dominion University.

DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY

Researchers are just beginning to examine the relationship between homeschooling and higher education. None of the existing studies have explored the transitional experiences of homeschoolers attending a community college. With both homeschooling education and community colleges becoming more popular among the general public, it is increasingly important to learn the effects of homeschooling on community college experiences.

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving first-year community college students who were homeschooled for at least four years prior to applying to the community college. This study will involve two semesters of interviews, observations, and journaling, ending with a focus group of all the participants. All participants will participate in the same interviews and observation sessions, be given a chance to journal their experiences, and finally be invited to meet together to conclude the study. If you say YES, then your participation will last from September 2010 until the middle of May 2011 at Mid Atlantic Community College.

Approximately 10 first year community college students who have been homeschooled will participate in this study.

EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA

You should have applied for admission and registered for at least 12 credits of courses at Mid Atlantic Community college and have been homeschooled for at least four years before attending Mid Atlantic Community College. To the best of your knowledge, you should not have had any prior course experience with a higher education environment or less than four years of homeschooling background. These criteria would keep you from participating in this study.

RISKS AND BENEFITS

RISKS: If you decide to participate in this study, then for two semesters, you may face a risk of additional time commitments of one hour interviews per month, the occasional, additional presence of the researcher in courses, club meetings, and free time while on campus (estimated at 20 hours per semester), a time commitment of journaling for an estimated hour per week, and a time commitment of two hours for the focus group meeting in May 2011. There are no other known harmful physical, psychological, or emotional risks associated with participating in the study. As with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

BENEFITS: there are no direct benefits to participating in this study. Indirect benefits may include the opportunity to have your worldview, personal thoughts, feelings, and experiences as you attend Mid Atlantic Community College heard and recorded confidentially by the researcher, and this opportunity may help you to notice aspects about your experiences that might not otherwise be noticed where you not reflecting upon them. Others may benefit from the information you provide to possibly help community colleges design future services and programs that serve homeschoolers' student support needs.

COSTS AND PAYMENTS

The researcher wants your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. Yet he recognizes that your participation may pose some costs or inconvenience, etc. such as gas expenses and less work time. The researcher will try to schedule all meetings at convenient times for each participant. To help defray your participation costs each semester, you will receive a Walmart gift card worth \$20 for every interview you attend (\$80), for completing and submitting your journal in the fall and spring (\$40), and for participating in the focus group (\$20). These payments will be made upon completion and/or submission of each item.

NEW INFORMATION

If the researcher finds new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then he will give it to you.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The researcher will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as interview tapes, transcripts, notes, journal documents, and drawings confidential. Upon entering the study, the researcher will ask you to provide a pseudonym which will then be used in all writings concerning your experiences, thereby protecting your identity. The researcher will keep digital information only on a password protected flash drive device which is kept personally by the researcher. All documents will be stored in a locked file cabinet at home or at work. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGE

It is okay 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 Mid Atlantic Community College, Old Dominion University. The researcher reserves the right to withdraw your participation in this study at any time should potential problems with your continued participation be observed. If you withdraw from the study, the researcher reserves the right to withdraw the incentive gift card.

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 following who will be review the matter with you:

Responsible Project Investigator

Dr. Molly H. Duggan, PhD.

757-683-3165

mduggan@odu.edu

Co-Investigator

Benjamin G. Kramer

540-xxx-xxxx, ext. xxxx, or 540-381-5243

bkramer@ma.edu

Chair, University IRB

Dr. George Maihafer

757-683-4520

gmaihafe@odu.edu

Office of Research

Old Dominion University

757-683-3460

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 researcher should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later on, then the researcher should be able to answer them:

Benjamin Kramer may be reached at xxx-xxx-xxxx, ext. xxxx, or 540-381-5243, or 540-230-xxxx, or by email at bkramer@ma.edu

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. Maihafer, the current IRB chair, at 757-683-4520, 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 the study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

Subject's 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 the study. I have witnessed the above signature on this consent form.

Benjamin G. Kramer Investigator's Printed Name & Signature	Date
---	------

Appendix G

(EMAIL TO INSTRUCTORS OF PARTICIPANTS)

(Date)

Dear (Insert instructor's name here),

I am conducting a study of homeschooled students at Mid Atlantic Community College for the fall 2010 and spring 2011 semesters. The purpose of this study is to examine the transition of homeschoolers to the structured educational environment of the community college. This is my doctoral dissertation research through Old Dominion University's Community College Leadership PhD. program. This study has been approved by my doctoral dissertation committee, the Old Dominion University Institutional Review Board, and the College President's staff at Mid Atlantic Community College.

You are teaching a course in which one of this study's participants is enrolled, and I would like your permission to observe _____ (name of course) meeting at _____ (time) in room _____ on _____ date. I wish to observe the student as he/she interacts with you and others in your class. I will not interfere with your class activities in any way, but plan to observe, take notes, and record interactions using a small recording device. The recording will be solely maintained by me, and will only be used in my study to ensure accuracy of my observations. Your name will not be used in my study. I assure you that for your protection, you, the student, and the college will be identified only through pseudonyms assigned as needed throughout the study. If you are not comfortable with these visits, please let me know and I will respect your request.

If you have additional questions about the study please feel free to contact me at bkramer@nr.edu or through my cell phone at 540-230-3759.

Thank you very much for your support of this study, and good luck with your courses this semester.

Sincerely,

Benjamin G. Kramer
Activities Counselor
ODU Doctoral Candidate
xxx-xxx-xxxx, ext. xxxx

Appendix H

(Initial Interview with Homeschooled Students, October 2010)**Researcher welcome script:**

“Thank you, (name), for meeting with me today.

As we discussed earlier, this is part of a series of series of interviews scheduled throughout this year where we will explore your first-year experiences here at the community college. You will not be identified in connection with this study, and all data will use pseudonyms. All data collected will remain confidential. If at all possible, I would like to record this interview. The tape will ensure that I have an accurate transcript of your responses.

Do I have your permission to record this interview?”

(If the student responds, “no,” the researcher will take notes within this protocol guide. If the student responds with, “yes,” then the researcher will begin tape recording the interview.)

“Then, let’s begin!”

RESEARCH QUESTION CATEGORY	INTERVIEW QUESTION
<p>Homeschool Experience- Academic Pathways</p> <p>Parental Involvement</p>	<p>"Please describe your homeschooling experience."</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ # years homeschooled ➤ type of instruction (parent? Class through organization, etc.) ➤ % of day spent in instruction per subject ➤ academics/sports ➤ field trips ➤ examples of activities ➤ languages ➤ dual credit/AP/online courses ➤ guidance counseling/advising ➤ support services ➤ other <p>"Tell me about the reasons for you being homeschooled."</p> <p>"What did you like best about homeschooling? Least?"</p>
<p>Parental Involvement</p> <p>Career Decision-Making</p>	<p>"Why did you decide to attend Mid Atlantic Community College?"</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Other options ➤ Scholarships ➤ Location ➤ Advising ➤ Peer influence ➤ Parental influence ➤ CC website ➤ Other

	<p>“Tell me about your parent’s involvement in your decision to attend Mid Atlantic Community College.”</p>
	<p>“How involved do you expect your parents to be in your decisions here at Mid Atlantic Community College?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Choice of major ➤ Choice of classes ➤ Other
	<p>“What is your current major? Tell me about the process you used to choose that major.”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ reading about major/career ➤ assessment (which one/how & when administered, etc) ➤ academic counseling at university ➤ personal interests ➤ parental influence ➤ friends ➤ other
	<p>“What is your chosen career at this time? Tell me about the process you used to choose this career.”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ reading about career ➤ assessment (which one/how & when administered, etc) ➤ academic counseling at university ➤ personal interests ➤ parental influence ➤ friends ➤ other

<p>Homeschool Experience – Academic Pathways</p> <p>First-year Experience</p> <p>Homeschool-Friendly</p>	<p>“What are your expectations about your first year here?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Family life ➤ Class/Instructor ➤ Social life, participation ➤ Orientation process ➤ Health ➤ Time management ➤ Work <p>How has being at the community college met your expectations – so far?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academic progress ➤ classmates ➤ faculty ➤ Social expectations ➤ College services/ offices ➤ Work/ Financial obligations ➤ Family ➤ Friends ➤ Personal Life ➤ Any expectations not met?
	<p>“Are you working on or off campus?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Where employed ➤ Number hours employed ➤ Effect of working upon grades, homework, social life, etc. <p>“How well academically do you expect to do this semester? Please explain.”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do you know this? ➤ What plans have you made to accomplish this?

	<p>“When you finish Mid Atlantic Community College, what are your plans?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academics – transfer? Graduate school? ➤ Social ➤ Employment ➤ Family
<p>Pre-college preparation /College Entrance Experience / Separation from Homeschooling</p>	<p>“Now, let’s talk about registration and class choice. Tell me a little about that process for you.”</p> <p>Prompts to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ courses – types, number, full-time/part-time ➤ major – are courses in major ➤ financial aid paperwork ➤ registration process (finding courses, establishing schedule, counseling center visit) ➤ other
	<p>“Tell me about your first week here on campus. What was this like for you?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Concerns/ fears ➤ Adjustment to physical plant ➤ Commuting ➤ Classes ➤ Instructors ➤ Homework/assignments ➤ Classmates ➤ Social activities (on/off campus) ➤ Use of campus/services ➤ Parental involvement ➤ Family involvement ➤ Routines versus flexibility ➤ Other

	<p>"How has homeschooling prepared you for college?"</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ time management ➤ study skills ➤ technology skills ➤ other academic skills ➤ research skills ➤ interaction with peers ➤ interaction with instructors ➤ Other
	<p>"What, if anything, do you miss about being homeschooled?"</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ contact with family ➤ flexibility ➤ trips ➤ mentors ➤ topics ➤ tutoring
<p>End of separation experiences/ Beginning of transition experiences</p>	<p>"Think back over the last few weeks. What stands out for you about this time?"</p>
	<p>"Have you had any problems with college so far? If so, please tell me about them and how you handled them."</p>
<p>Conclusion</p>	<p>"Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences so far at Mid Atlantic Community College?"</p> <hr/> <p>"Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Is there anything else you feel would be helpful for me to know?"</p>

	<p>Again, thank you very much.</p> <p>We will meet again 4 more times during the year – once this fall, twice in the spring, and once again in May after classes have ended. I will be emailing you to arrange those meetings.</p> <p>Do you have any other questions for me?</p> <p>Here is your \$20 gift card to Walmart, a thank you for participating in today's interview.</p> <p>Thanks again. Have a wonderful semester!"</p>
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Appendix I

**Interview #2 November
(Week 12 of Fall Semester)**

Researcher welcome script:

“Thank you, (name), for meeting with me today.

As we discussed in September, this is part of a series of interviews scheduled throughout this year where we will explore your first-year experiences here at the community college.

You will not be identified in connection with this study, and all data will use pseudonyms. All data collected will remain confidential .If at all possible, I would like to record this interview. The tape will ensure that I have an accurate transcript of your responses.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? “

(If the student responds, “no,” the researcher will take notes within this protocol guide. If the student responds with, “yes,” then the researcher will begin tape recording the interview.)

“Then, let’s begin.”

RESEARCH QUESTION CATEGORY	INTERVIEW QUESTION
Rapport Building	"How are you doing today?"
	"Tell me a little about how you spent your fall break."
	"How do you feel overall about this first semester?"
	"How much time do you spend studying each week? Has this changed for you since the semester started?"
	"Tell me about some of the techniques you use to prepare for class. Which techniques have worked best? Which have not?"

College Experience/
Transition/ Beginning
Incorporation

"How do you spend the rest of your time? Are you involved in any campus activities/groups/clubs or community organizations?"

Topics to be used as probes:

- Identify activities, etc. and amount of time spent in them per week
- How students heard about these activities, etc.
- Other activities, etc. in which student is considering participating

"What were some of the more remarkable experiences you had in your first semester here at Mid Atlantic Community College?"

Topics to be used as probes:

- Courses
- Instructors
- Homework
- Classmates
- Work
- Family/ home life
- Social/ Activities
- commute

"What have been some of the challenges you have experienced?"

Topics to be used as probes:

- Grades
- Feedback
- Interaction with faculty
- Interaction with staff
- Interaction with classmates
- College policies or services

"Please explain how you responded to these challenges."

	<p>“How do your experiences at this community college compare to those of your homeschooling experience?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Instruction ➤ Teachers/Mentors ➤ Grades ➤ Level of difficulty of the classes ➤ Physical layout of the homeschooling setting ➤ Stresses ➤ Pros and cons
Personal development	<p>“Who are some of the most important people to you here at Mid Atlantic Community College? Please explain.”</p>
	<p>“In what ways have you changed since this summer?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academics ➤ Social ➤ Family ➤ Job ➤ Friends ➤ Community
Conclusion	<p>“Is there anything else you wish to share about your experiences so far at Mid Atlantic Community College?”</p>

“Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Is there anything else you feel would be helpful for me to know?”

Again, thank you very much.

We will meet again 3 times more in the spring, two interviews and once again as a part of a group in May after classes have ended. I will be emailing you to arrange those meetings.

Do you have any other questions for me?

Thanks again. Here is your gift card, in appreciation for your assistance with this study. Have a wonderful semester!”

Appendix J

Interview #3, January

Week 1, Semester 2 (End of January)

Researcher welcome script:

“Thank you, (name), for meeting with me today.

As we discussed earlier, this is part of a series of interviews scheduled throughout this year where we will explore your first-year experiences here at the community college.

You will not be identified in connection with this study, and all data will use pseudonyms. All data collected will remain confidential. If at all possible, I would like to record this interview. The tape will ensure that I have an accurate transcript of your responses.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? “

(If the student responds, “no,” the researcher will take notes within this protocol guide. If the student responds with, “yes,” then the researcher will begin tape recording the interview.)

“Then, let’s begin.”

RESEARCH QUESTION CATEGORY	INTERVIEW QUESTION
<p>Rapport building</p> <p>Transitions/ Second semester transition/ incorporation</p>	<p>"Tell me how you spent your winter break.</p> <p>Topics to be used as prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academic activities ➤ Social activities ➤ Family ➤ Employment ➤ Other <p>"Tell me about your experiences with class registration for this semester. How did it compare/differ from the one last fall?"</p> <p>Topics to be used as prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Their level of comfort ➤ Parental influence ➤ Employment ➤ Schedules ➤ Courses/Instructors ➤ Advising ➤ Any concerns? <p>"How well did you do academically last semester? Did you do as well as you expected? Please explain."</p>

	<p>“What adjustments, if any, did you have to make last semester?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academically ➤ Within your family ➤ Socially ➤ With regards to work ➤ Behaviors
	<p>“How well academically do you expect to do this semester?”</p> <p>Topics to be used for prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How do you know this? ➤ What plans have you made to accomplish this?
	<p>“What college services, if any, did you use during your first semester?”</p> <p>Topics to be used for prompts:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Type of service ➤ How often they used it ➤ How found out about service ➤ Useful/not useful
	<p>“How do you feel about Mid Atlantic Community College? What are your impressions of this community college?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ What would you tell others about MACC? ➤ What does MACC do particularly well? ➤ Weaknesses of MACC? ➤ Friendliness to homeschoolers?
	<p>“Do your instructors/others at MACC know you were homeschooled? Please share some of your interactions with faculty.”</p>

	<p>“What adjustments, if any, have you had to make since this semester started?”</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Academically➤ Within your family➤ Socially➤ With regards to work➤ Behaviors
	<p>“How has this semester differed for you from last semester?”</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Courses➤ Instructors➤ Classmates➤ Home/ family➤ Work➤ Commute➤ Campus➤ Offices/services
	<p>“What changes, if any, have you noticed regarding your parent’s involvement with your college-related decisions?”</p>

Conclusion	<p>“Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to meet with me today. Is there anything else you feel would be helpful for me to know?”</p> <p>Again, thank you very much.</p> <p>We will meet again 2 times more in the spring- one more interview in March and again as a part of a group in May after classes have ended. I will be emailing you to arrange those meetings.</p> <p>Do you have any other questions for me?</p> <p>Thanks again. Here is your gift card, in appreciation for your assistance with this study. Have a wonderful semester!”</p>
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Appendix K

Interview #4, March Interview

(Week 9, 2nd Semester)

Researcher welcome script:

“Thank you, (name), for meeting with me today.

As we discussed earlier, this is part of a series of interviews scheduled throughout this year where we will explore your first-year experiences here at the community college.

You will not be identified in connection with this study, and all data will use pseudonyms. All data collected will remain confidential. If at all possible, I would like to record this interview. The tape will ensure that I have an accurate transcript of your responses.

Do I have your permission to record this interview? “

(If the student responds, “no,” the researcher will take notes within this protocol guide. If the student responds with, “yes,” then the researcher will begin tape recording the interview.)

Then, let’s begin.”

RESEARCH QUESTION CATEGORY	INTERVIEW QUESTION
Rapport Building	<p>"How did you spend your spring break?"</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Academic activities ➤ Social activities ➤ Family ➤ Employment ➤ Other <p>"Tell me about your experiences so far this semester."</p> <p>Topics to be used as probes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Courses ➤ Instructors ➤ Classmates ➤ Home/ family ➤ Work ➤ Commute ➤ Campus ➤ Offices/services
Second semester -Incorporation strengthened	<p>"How do your experiences at MACC compare to those of when you were homeschooled?"</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Instruction ➤ Faculty/staff ➤ Grades ➤ Level of difficulty of the classes ➤ Physical layout ➤ Stresses ➤ Pros and cons

	<p>"How well do you think your homeschool experiences prepared you for classes here at MACC?"</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Study habits ➤ Class work ➤ Social life ➤ Support services
	<p>"How much time do you spend studying each week? How has this changed since you started here?"</p>
	<p>"How do you spend the rest of your time? Are you involved in any campus activities/groups/clubs or community organizations?"</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Identify activities, and amount of time spent in them per week. ➤ How students learned of these activities ➤ Are there other activities which the student is considering participating?
<p>Personal Reflection</p>	<p>"What do you feel you have accomplished this year at MACC?"</p> <p>"Next, let's discuss your experiences leaving home and starting community college."</p> <p>"What has it been like for you to leave your home and family each day and attend the community college?"</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ How did you initially feel about the change? ➤ Changes in relationships with family members

	<p>“Think back to the first few weeks of community college. What has changed for you since then?”</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ What were you feeling at this time?➤ What adjustments did you have to make during your first year?
Personal impressions	<p>“Who have been the most important people in your life on-campus during this year? Why?”</p> <p>Topics to be used for probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">➤ Parents➤ Instructors➤ Family➤ Friends➤ College staff➤ Community mentors

**Appendix L
Observation Checklist**

Name _____

Sheet # _____

Course/ Activity _____ Setting: _____

Date: _____

Time Beginning: _____ End: _____

Key:
 Transition Indicators:
 S= Separation
 T= Transition
 I= Incorporation

	Y	N	Transition: S/T/I	Comment:
Appearance:				
Emotion:				
Looks interested				
Involved/focused/motivated				
Confident in activity				
Orientating themselves				
Interacting on task				
Interacting off task –				
creative				
Activity appropriate level				

Interacts with Instructor (I / S= Instructor/ student initiated)				
Interaction with other Students (S/O= self/other initiated)				
Asks questions				
Expresses information (Show)				
Listens				
Answers				
Discusses				
Observes				
Instructs				

Writes				
Draws				
Math activity				
Other task based skills				
Problem solving				
Teamwork				
Working as Individual				
Thinking/reflecting				
Completes goals				
Pleased with success				
Disruptive				
Plays				

Eats/ Drinks				

Diagram or additional comments:

Appendix M

**(Moderator's Guide for May 2011 (Post Semesters) Focus Group Meeting)
From Homeschool to Community College: A Multiple Case Study**

Time of Focus Group: Start: _____ End: _____

Date: _____

Place: _____

Group

Members: _____

(Pseudonyms only)

Position of Focus group

Members:

(Diagram)

I. Introduction (10 Minutes)

“Welcome to the final part of our study. It’s great to see all of you again. Thank you for bringing the journals with you. I am happy to collect them now.... (Researcher collects journals). The purpose of this group meeting is to allow us to share our individual and group thoughts and feelings as we discuss the study and our experiences at the community college.”

II. Guidelines

“I will be the moderator for this meeting. As a moderator, my job is to facilitate the discussion, take notes of the responses, and keep time so that we cover all of the topics thoroughly. I will only speak up to about a third of the time to allow the discussion to focus on your input and responses. No names will be recorded during this discussion. All of your identities are kept confidential using pseudonyms. Here are the nametags with your selected pseudonyms to use during this meeting (Researcher issues prepared nametags with pseudonyms). I also wish to stress that whatever is said in this group *stays* within this group, and information should not be shared with folks not here. Is everyone clear on this?”

As we respond to these group interview questions, please be completely honest with your responses, and please allow each person to speak fully without interruption. There should be no side conversations. Everyone should feel free to participate and answer each question. Discussion and disagreements are acceptable, and there are no right or wrong answers, just different points of view. Agreeing to disagree is acceptable. Everyone must respect the confidentiality of each participant by not quoting or attributing comments to anyone outside of the group.

The meeting will be recorded on this tape recorder. I will be the only person using and keeping these tapes. I will use them to ensure the accuracy of comments made as I write the results of the meeting for this study. As I write these results, I will use mainly group opinions and responses. I may, however, use a direct quote to emphasize some points, but these will be attributed to the pseudonyms assigned, not directly to you.

Feel free to enjoy any of the provided refreshments during the meeting, and once this focus group is concluded, I have a gift card to give to each of you.”

III. Consent

“Do you have any questions before we begin? May I begin recording the conversations?” (Participants respond with yes or no answers and researcher starts recording device with their permission. If one student does not want the session to be recorded, then the researcher will acknowledge that request, putting aside the tape recorder and only taking notes.)

“Let’s begin by introducing ourselves to one another.” (Researcher allows each person to introduce themselves using pseudonyms).

Questions: (80 Minutes= approximately 10 minutes reserved for each question= Allows each participant 2 minutes response per question --if we have 5 participants)

1. “First, I’d like to know more about your homeschooling background. What was homeschooling like for each of you?”

Prompt: How has being homeschooled prepared you for college?

Prompt: What were your biggest challenges while you were homeschooling?

2. “Next, let’s talk about the application process. Tell me about that experience.”

Prompt: Expectations before coming to MACC

Prompt: Process of applying to MACC

3. “Do you think the experience of attending this community college this year was any different for you than it was for other students? Why or why not?”

Prompt: academics

Prompt: social life

Prompt: family/parents

Prompt: grading

4. "As a homeschooler, how would you compare your preparation for college to that of your classmates here at Mid Atlantic Community College?"

Prompt: subject areas preparation

Prompt: study skills

Prompt: socialization

Prompt: grading

5. "What challenges have you faced over the last year?"

Prompt: Academic

Prompt: Social

Prompt: Work

Prompt: Family

Prompt: Personal

6. "What might the community college do differently to serve other homeschooled students?"

Prompt: Changes to Academics

Prompt: Changes to Student Services

Prompt: Campus Environment changes

7. "How did you feel about being a part of this study?"

Prompt: Interviews

Prompt: Observations

Prompt: Journals

Prompt: Focus Group

8. "What else would you like me to know about you or your first year here at Mid Atlantic Community College?"

Wrap-Up (5 Minutes)

(Researcher issues index cards and sharpened pencils to participants and reads the following to the group :) **"This is the last item we'll discuss. On the index card in front of you, please write one word that sums up the most important piece of advice that you would give other homeschooled students attending this community college. You have 2 minutes time to think of a word and when you are finished, please put your card face down on the table in front of you. You may start now..."**

(Once 2 minutes have elapsed, the researcher reads the following :) **"Now please share your word with the group, along with what it summarizes as advice for future homeschoolers. You may then return the card to me. Who wants to begin?"** (Researcher takes notes on responses as the tape recorder records the remaining conversation).

The researcher then reads the following to the group.

Closing Statement

Researcher: **"Are there any questions or final statements to be made before we close?"**

Thank you for your participation. Sharing your life with me this year through the various interviews, observations, journals, and this meeting means so much to me. Over this past year I have had the chance to know you all very well. I hope you also have enjoyed this study. I wish you all the greatest success with your endeavors both here at this community college and in your life beyond. I will be happy share the results of my study once they are complete, and I may contact you for clarification occasionally as I write them. If you ever have any questions or concerns about the study, please feel free to contact me. (Researcher gives cards containing contact information to the participants). I am sure we will see one another in your remaining time here at this community college. Please keep in mind that that the responses of this meeting are to be kept confidential and I have a gift card to give you as we dismiss.” (Researcher gives gift cards to participants).

“Thanks again, and have a great summer!”

Appendix N
(TIMETABLE)

September 2010	Receive permission to conduct study from Old Dominion University IRB (See Appendices A & B) and the designated Community College (See Appendix C) Invite participants into the study (See Appendix D)
October 2010	Informed consent of participants signed(See Appendix F) Request access from instructors of participants (See Appendix G) Conduct first interviews (See Appendix H) Schedule and conduct initial observations with all participants (See Appendix L)
November 2010	Schedule and conduct second interviews (See Appendix I) Schedule & conduct second observations (See Appendix L)
December 2010	Collect fall journals and issue gift cards to participants
January 2011	Conduct third interviews (See Appendix J) Issue spring journals to participants
February 2011	Schedule and conduct third observations (See Appendix L)
March 2011	Schedule and conduct fourth interviews (See Appendix K)
April 2011	Schedule and conduct fourth observations (See Appendix L)
May 2011	Conduct focus group interview (See Appendix M) with all participants Collect journals-Data Collection ended. Issue gift cards to participants
Fall /Spring 2011/2012	Begin analysis of data/information. Write results and final chapters of study Defend dissertation when writing is concluded.

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Education

Old Dominion University, Norfolk, VA May 2012
 Ph D. Community College Leadership
 Internship: New River Community College President's Office.
 Dissertation: "From Homeschooling to the Community College: A Multiple Case Study"

Radford University, Radford, VA May 1993
 MS Counseling Psychology, Higher Education Emphasis
 Internship: Radford University Office of International Student Services

Mary Washington College, Fredericksburg, VA May 1991
 BS Psychology and Performing Arts, Dance Concentration
 1990 Klein Theater Scholarship Recipient

Experience

New River Community College, Dublin, VA: August 1993-Present
Activities Counselor – Plan, organize and implement special events, clubs, sports programs, and community services with student population. Advise students on academic coursework, college programs, career, and transfer options. Operate student ID system for college. Annually edit and publish college student handbook & planner. Investigate student disciplinary policy offenses as they occur outside the classroom. Supervise college fitness center. Collaborate with college community through various committees, programs, and projects to benefit campus population.

New River Community College, Dublin, VA: May 2008-August 2008
Intern – Assist college president and senior administrative assistant with various aspects of college emergency planning. Conduct extensive community college emergency response research and official document preparation.

Other Experiences

Pulaski Correctional Center Community Advisory Board Member, 2008-2010
 Girl Scout Instructor Fall 2006-Spring 2008
 Sergeant, Virginia Army National Guard January 1992-November 2006
 Slate Mountain Presbyterian Church Session Elder 1997- 2004

Awards

Association for the Promotion of Campus Activities: Earnest P. Jones Advisor of the Year Award, 2007

Coventry Commonwealth Games 2011 5K Race, 3rd place, Males, Age 40-44, Time:28:53.9.

References:

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