THE LOW RETENTION RATES OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGES: AN EXPLORATORY CASE STUDY

By

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Liberty University

A Dissertation Presented in Partial Fulfillment
Of the Requirements for the Degree Doctor of Education

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Abstract

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. Tinto's integration framework guided this study to test connectedness and its association with student retention rates. The central research question for this study was: What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution? The study was conducted at Waynesboro Community College in Waynesboro, NC. The purposeful sample size selected included 10 nontraditional students as research participants. The triangulation of data collection methods used in this study consisted of an interview, journal prompts, and a questionnaire. The data also included field notes and memos were also analyzed by finding commonalities in categories through coding, common themes, and phrases that were synthesized to address the research questions using exploratory analysis. Results indicated that nontraditional students do not feel connected to their institution and need support services that are unique to their needs. Four themes were identified in this study: 1) nontraditional student connectedness is not strong within the college, 2) nontraditional students need additional student support services, 3) nontraditional students with strong academic relationships are satisfied with their college experience, and 4) nontraditional students have personal factors that challenge their success in college. The sub-themes identified are nontraditional students need more knowledgeable and consistent faculty members and they have personal responsibilities that affect their success and need more social interaction in and out of the classroom.

Keywords: connectedness, framework, institutions, perceptions, nontraditional, retention rates

Dedication

I am dedicating this dissertation to my Aunt Sissy who passed of cancer this year. She helped me do my first college application and assistance with tuition. Even though I had a child, she still believed in me. I spent a lot of time with her during the summer as a child as my parents worked. She took me to church regularly and provided me with lots of wisdom along the way. My parents for instilling discipline in me and never turning their back on me. I also want to dedicate this to my children so that they know the value of hard work and dedication. I want them to know that no matter what comes your way in life, you can still accomplish your goals. Lastly, Ms. Jean for always being there to listen and give me great ideas.

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List of Abbreviations

Humanitarian Entrant Background (HEB)

International Review Board (IRB)

American College Testing (ACT)

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Overview

Nontraditional students at community colleges are facing low retention rates (Persistence & Retention, 2020). Remenick (2019) stated that there are studies by the United States

Department of Education that show nontraditional students are a growing trend. This study helped increase the knowledge of the perceptions of nontraditional students' experience in community college and identify what student support services they found beneficial. Tinto's integration framework (1993) insists that students must feel connected to their institution and have suitable retention programs in place for students to persevere. Hutto (2017) added students need to feel a sense of community in their school through out of classroom activities and be proud to be in attendance there. The information gathered helps researchers understand what resources the students found helpful to increase institutional pride and student persistence. Assessing the accessibility of these resources to help aid persistence is important as well.

Remerick (2019) suggested that resource accessibility is a concern among nontraditional students due to the fact they rarely use them, and they would benefit the most from them. The student support services will be assessed so the findings can increase their accessibility and students can persist. Instructor immediacy is also crucial to student success. Burke's persistence model suggested that how students interact with their institution socially and academically has a great impact on their persistence in college (Burke, 2019). This chapter will cover the background of the study, problem statement, purpose statement, significance of the study, research questions, a list of the definitions for the study and summary.

Background

Retention rates of nontraditional students have been an ongoing issue over the years (Tinto, 1993). Tinto (1993) contributes to the student's satisfaction and connectedness with the institution. Tinto's integration framework (1993) suggested that students who are integrated into their institution socially and academically tend to make their educational goal an external commitment. Nontraditional students stated student support service helps them feel supported, but they need additional academic help (Bennett, Bochenko, Hsiao, Dees, & Kim, 2021). Students over the age of 25 are considered nontraditional students according to Baugus (2020). All students should have access to student retention programs (Tinto, 1993). This section will cover the historical, theoretical, and social context of student retention.

Historical Context

Most of the studies in retention rates were in the 1970s (Tinto, 1993). Nontraditional students consist of any student over the age of 24 (NCES, 2019). Nontraditional students accounted for one in every four students who enrolled in college in 1986. The nontraditional enrollment increased to one in three students who were nontraditional in 1992. Nontraditional students who attended two-year public institutions increased their enrollment from 37.4% in 1986 to 41.2% in 1992 (Horn & Carroll, 1996).

Stage and Hossler (2000) suggested that student perseverance depends on individuals rather than their environment. Nontraditional students had a persistence rate of 57.6 Hagedorn (2005) argued that retention cannot be easily calculated. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center reported that in North Carolina in 2009, nontraditional students had a retention rate of 54% and in 2019 it decreased to 47.5% (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2020).

Historically, nontraditional students have become a growing trend with one third of them making up the student population in 2011 and almost half were at community colleges (Knapp, Kelly-Reid, & Ginder, 2012). The persistent rate for the national three-year average for community college students was only 26.9% (American College Testing [ACT], 2011). The national average dropped in 2013 with 22.5% (ACT, 2013). Even though the nontraditional student population has continued to grow, only 58% of the colleges who participated in the NASPA Research and Policy Institute Vice President of Student Affairs Census (2014) have student support services adequate for nontraditional students (Hittepole, 2022). The enrollment of nontraditional students grew to 40% of all colleges in the country in 2015 (CLASP, 2015). In 2021, community college enrollment dropped by 9.5%. Of that 9.5%, was a 1.2% decline in nontraditional student enrollment (Bouchrika, 2021). This study focused on the environment to try to discover the resources that help students persevere in community colleges.

Social Context

Student retention has been an area of concern of community college administration over the years, but it has become more of a focus in recent years. Historically, community colleges have lower retention rates than universities (Tinto, 2012). Enrollment numbers are declining as well. Students struggle with food shortages, inadequate childcare, and lack of transportation. Community college students struggle with food insecurities. Twenty-five percent of the students at a community college reported that they had experienced food insecurities and twenty-six percent of community college students were parents and did not have adequate childcare (Troester-Trate, 2019). Low-socioeconomic community college students struggled with transportation issues and experienced higher health concerns.

Nontraditional students also deal with the same problems and their enrollment is growing. Nontraditional students are considered anyone over the age of 25 (Baugus, 2020). Nontraditional students also have a lack of parental involvement and studies show that parental involvement helps their student retention (McCulloh, 2022). Therefore, student support services that are tailored more towards nontraditional students would be helpful in increasing retention rates in community colleges. These support services will help them feel more connected to their institution and be more likely to persist.

Nontraditional students have also expressed the need for additional academic support (Bennett et al., 2021). The ability for nontraditional students to complete college by utilizing modified support services will help prepare them for employability. They develop social skills to help with networking, acquire new perspectives, build trust, and develop authenticity with interest-based communities (Bridgstock & Tippett, 2019). The skill the nontraditional students will acquire by completing college will not only help them in their future career but in civil society as well. Art, humanities, and social sciences courses help students develop skills important for civil and political participation. Higher college retention rates can lead to higher social capital (Evans, Fox, Rees, & Taylor, 2020). Therefore, proper student support services for nontraditional students can help them feel connected to their institution, higher retention rates, and help prepare them to participate in civil society.

Theoretical Context

Student retention has been a major concern for colleges and universities over the years. It was not until the late 1960s that researchers began to apply theories and models to this ongoing issue (Tino, 1993). Marks (1967) and Summerskill (1962) have models that suggested intellectual attributes are what shape the individual's ability to meet academic demands. Rose

and Elton (1966) felt that a student's personality, motivation, and disposition determined their college persistence. They also felt student dropouts reflected maladjustment and direct hostility.

Spady's (1970) first undergraduate dropout process model focused on four aspects of retention rates: intellectual development, social integration, satisfaction, and institutional commitment. This model was the first to link student retention to Durkheim's suicide theory.

Tinto (1993) linked Durkheim's theory to his framework on student retention as well. Durkheim believed that students' social relationships and interaction within the college was related to their suicide rates. Spady's (1970, 1971) theory focused more on the interaction between the student and the institution. Spady felt that institutional satisfaction and student success was linked to the students' social integration within the institution. Both Spady and Durkheim believed that students needed friendship support within the social system to persist in college.

Nontraditional students often struggle building relationships in college due to other obligations (Sallee and Cox, 2019). Karabel (1972) and Pincus (1980) were two conflict theorists that believed institutions were structured to fit prevailing social and educational elites. They felt academic and social inequity was due to poor student retention. Nontraditional students are not being provided adequate support to help increase their retention. Bean (1980, 1982) argued that student persistence was dependent on institution satisfaction. Bean states that employee and student satisfaction of the institution are connected. The students and employees leave for the same reasons.

Jensen (1981) felt that student persistence was an economic decision where the students weigh out the costs and benefits of completing college. Financial obligations are another key point in his theory and that closely relates to the same financial issues nontraditional students face when it comes to student retention (Nguyen et al., 2019). Tinto's (1993) integration

framework focused on students' persistence being attached to their social and academic connection to the institution. Academic connections occur in the classroom and social connectedness occurs outside the classroom. Rendon et al. (2000) found three conceptual issues with his theory, and one was that it focused on minority students. The theory focused on the individual's responsibilities to persistence and not the institutions.

Problem Statement

The problem is that there was a low retention rate among nontraditional students in community colleges and the student support services offered may not help them feel connected to their institution. Student retention of nontraditional students in all institutions was 44.5% in 2019 (Persistence & Retention, 2020). Community colleges are increasing nontraditional enrollment but their retention rates for these students are not improving, especially in online courses (Knapp et al., 2012). They make up at least 40 percent of the community college population and are generally from low socio-economic backgrounds which makes it harder for them to complete college. They generally have children and struggle with finances (Troester-Trate, 2019).

Hutto (2017) states students at community colleges lack motivation and encounter structural barriers. Students need to feel a sense of community in their school through out of classroom activities and be proud to be in attendance there (Hutto, 2017). Glazier (2016) conducted a study on building rapport to decrease retention rates of online college students. This study will include information on student support services with a focus on nontraditional in enrolled in online courses and traditional seated courses.

Data was collected and analyzed. The questions that students completed also inquired about the resources available to help them succeed provided by the institutions. "If institutions

can award outside credit, increase flexibility, and provide accessible resources, nontraditional students may not only have the spirit, means, and ability to return to college, but the support they need to persist and graduate too" (Remenick, 2019, p.124). Therefore, online courses may need to be structured specifically towards nontraditional students. The problem was that when nontraditional students increased in enrollment, they were lacking instructor immediacy and rapport to become successful in online community college courses (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016).

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. There was a focus on nontraditional students' perceptions of the helpfulness of the student support services provided at the intuition located in eastern North Carolina. At this stage in the research, student connectedness was analyzed to see the connection between student retention and dropout rates in community college among nontraditional students.

Significance of the Study

The significance of this study was to analyze nontraditional student retention rates in community colleges. The National Student and Research Clearinghouse Research Center reported that student retention of nontraditional students in all institutions dropped from 47.6% in 2015 to 44.5% in 2019 (Persistence & Retention, 2020). Retention rates of nontraditional students has been an ongoing issue (Tinto, 1993). In Tinto's framework (1993), he generalized all the students as traditional. This study analyzed data from nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services offered at their community college to find the cause of the low

retention rates. The following sections will provide additional information on the theoretical, empirical, and practical significance of the study.

Theoretical Significance

Tinto's integration framework (1993) was the theory that guided this study on the low retention rates of nontraditional students at community colleges. The nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services offered at their institution and their connectedness to their institution was analyzed against Tinto's revised model of student attrition (Tinto, 1997). Nontraditional students need academic and social integration to increase their retention rates. Tinto feels that all students should have access to retention programs. The purpose of student support services is to help increase student retention rates. This study used Tinto's (1993) integration framework to explore how the student support services help increase the retention rates of nontraditional students in community college.

Empirical Significance

Nontraditional student retention rates are declining in the recent 2021 Student Retention Report published by the National Student Research Clearinghouse Research Center (Persistence & Retention, 2020). Institutions must have certain retention rates to qualify for government funding (Thomas & Thomas, 2022). Society will have more productive citizens upon graduation (Evans et al., 2020; 2021). Tinto's (1993) integration framework generalizes students as traditional, and this study will use his integration framework to see how connected nontraditional students feel to their institution. Student support services offered were reviewed by the students and their feedback was compared to Tinto's (1993) integration framework to determine if they are adequately supporting the integration of nontraditional students socially and academically.

College retention rates have been studied over the years in hopes of increasing them (Tinto, 1993). Glazier (2016) believed that building rapport with students was a factor in student retention. Mentoring services were also researched to see how they helped increase retention rates (Blue, 2018). Financial aid options were reviewed to see if it affected retention rates (Anderson & Goldrick-Rab, 2016). Researchers also studied food insecurity, inadequate childcare, and transportation disadvantages among students in colleges with low retention rates (Troester-Trate, 2020). This study expanded upon the previous ones to investigate nontraditional students' retention rates at community colleges and how the nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services relate to it.

Practical Significance

College institutions can use the results of the study to help reform student support services that are more tailored to nontraditional students' needs. Increasing student connectedness and enhancing their support services will increase student retention at community colleges and generate more funding opportunities. Higher retention rates will also help increase student enrollment and the revenue generated for the college. More nontraditional students will be able to join society with an education and be able to network. Higher Education stimulates the economy and lowers unemployment rates. It will also help institution accreditations and organizations to customize resources to meet the needs of nontraditional students (Persistence & Retention, 2020).

This study examined how the student support students are at helping retention rates through the nontraditional students' perceptions. Personalized texts or even standardized texts from the institution would be beneficial to nontraditional students' success, satisfaction, and connectedness. Text messages are a great way to connect students, help them become aware of

resources offered at the college, and share important information (Taylor and Serna, 2018; 2020). Students are constantly checking their phones and text message usages would be a great way to build student connectedness among nontraditional students. Question four of the questionnaire addresses text messages from the institution as a possible student resource (see Appendix G).

Research Questions

This study consisted of four research questions. Each question was developed to help discover factors that hinder student retention rates from increasing among nontraditional students, their institution satisfaction, connectedness, and how that relates to their perception of the student services offered. This study consisted of one central research question and four sub questions. Tinto's (1993) integration framework was used to construct these questions.

Central Research Question

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution?

Sub Question One

What are nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services?

Sub Question Two

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of connectedness to their institutions?

Sub Question Three

What could student support services offer nontraditional students to increase their retention rates?

Definitions

- 1. *Connectedness* It is how integrated a student is into their institution academically and socially (Tinto, 1993).
- 2. *Nontraditional student* This is anyone who did not go to college directly out of high school (Remenick, 2019).
- 3. *Persistence* It is when a student completes the course and goes on to the next one (Burke, 2019).
- 4. *Retention rate* It is the percentage of students at an institution that persists to the next academic year (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010).
- 5. *Tinto's integration framework:* It focuses on students' persistence being attached to their social and academic connection to the institution (Tinto, 1993).

Summary

The main purpose of this study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. The retention rates for nontraditional students in 2019 was only 44.5% (Persistence & Retention, 2020). A main area of concern is the connectedness of the student to their institution and academic support systems. College plays many roles in the success of these students. Tinto (1993) states students need to feel connected to their institution academically and socially to persevere.

The researcher aimed to discover ways to support these students and uncover barriers the students may face. These barriers were expected to be a combination of personal and institutional origins. Student support services need to be in place to assist students and the community needs to be involved more at these institutions as well, building relationships and their

reputation. Nontraditional students need to have a higher rate of connectedness with their institution and professors.

Serna and Taylor (2020) stated community colleges should consider utilizing text messaging as part of their suite of initiatives to increase student engagement, retention, and graduation, if the text messages consider student preferences. If these preferences are ignored, the text messages could simply lead to information-overload or be white noise and ignored by students. Text messages could aid in student connectedness. By looking at individual accounts of students' lives, further information can be gathered to help increase student retention rates in community colleges.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

Overview

A systematic review of the literature was conducted to examine the causes of low retention rates among nontraditional community college students. The current chapter will reveal a detailed review of the literature on the current topic researched. The first section will cover the theoretical framework behind student retention rates. The related literature section includes mechanisms of student retention, connectedness, predicting variables, disadvantages, faculty employment status, financial aid effects, and psychosocial factors. The gap in literature was identified and the importance of the study conducted.

Theoretical Framework

Tinto's (1993) integration framework helps determine the connectedness of the college student to their institution and their satisfaction with their institution. Nontraditional students continue to have low retention rates in community colleges and their sense of connectedness is unknown (Persistence & Retention, 2020). Student support services are retention programs to help students and were analyzed through the perceptions of nontraditional students. Tinto's (1993) theoretical framework guided this research to help uncover the factors related to student's connectedness and retention rates of nontraditional students.

Theory of Social/Academic Integration

Tinto's (1993) integration framework focused on students' persistence being attached to their social and academic connection to the institution. Academic connections occur in the classroom and social connectedness occurs outside the classroom. The framework suggested that students feel more connected to their institution if they are engaged in extracurricular activities or clubs. They are also more likely to persevere and graduate if they are connected socially to the

institution. In the same token, if they are not connected socially and academically then they are unlikely to persist (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010; Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Nontraditional students do not tend to engage in activities at their institutions due to their busy lives. Many students attending community college have a narrow experience because they commute to campus. College interaction is mainly limited to the classroom, and they come to class and then leave afterwards (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010). Nontraditional students usually have family and work obligations to tend to outside of the school setting.

Students who have used information networks in a variety of ways that made the campus feel more friendly and manageable, and which helped them overcome obstacles that could have resulted in alienation from or frustration with the institution (Karp et al., 2010). Karp et al. (2010) found that information networks appear to have helped students feel at home on campus while giving them the tools necessary for successful degree completion. The researcher aimed to see how student support services at institutions use tools like information networks to help the students manage their time and have adequate resources to persevere. Student connectedness to the social and academic side of college is important to college retention.

Figure 1

Tinto's Model of Student Integration

"Removed to comply with copyright"

Note. This table explains Tinto's student integration framework. It shows how students need academic and social integration to persist. Modified from Tinto (1993), copyright 1987, 1993 by The University of Chicago Press.

Related Literature

Tinto's (1993) integration framework is widely used in college student retention studies. It is necessary to understand how this affects nontraditional students' retention and connectedness. Nontraditional students deal with lack of resources, personal demands, financial issues, and lack of support in higher education. The literature serves as background knowledge to help conduct a thorough study. The following literature review was conducted to get a better understanding of nontraditional students and their retention rates.

Social and Cultural Capital

Bourdieu's theory is based on student success associated with social and cultural capital. He feels that institutions do not provide enough social and cultural support for nontraditional students (Bourdieu, 1986). This causes students to not engage in activities or relationships at institutions; therefore, not persisting or being satisfied. Bourdieu describes that students need to be a part of a group to feel satisfied. Students need to also feel connected to their institution socially and academically to persevere (Tinto, 1993).

Cultural capital is also not allocated properly to individuals (Bourdieu, 1986; Cotton, Kneale, and Nash, 2017). Students need to feel a sense of belonging and be encouraged to use support services to enhance their satisfaction. Policies and practices of institutions affect the student success rates as well. These constructs are being further investigated and applied to student dropout rates. Cotton, Kneale, and Nash (2017) conducted a study on supporting nontraditional students' retention rates and wrote that there was significant variation between respondents in the extent of use of student support services.

In some cases, students had limited awareness of what was available to them. This information shows that students do not have enough information on resources available to them

at institutions and need further information on them. The current study will question participants on best practices of communicating this information in an effective manner and describe what resources would be beneficial to aid students in course completion. Cotton et al. (2017) stated that students need to be encouraged to feel that they are entitled to the support that is available, rather than feeling that they are expecting too much in seeking help. Some students were concerned about building relationships with unfamiliar staff, hence the care leaver advice officer facilitated sessions with support teams to enhance engagement. The aim of this study is to engage students in the institution and help them build relationships with the staff to encourage their use and knowledge of student support services to benefit their persistence (Bourdieu, 1986; Cotton, Kneale, and Nash, 2017).

Social Presence

The community of inquiry (CoI) framework by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) was supposed to help engage college students. It incorporates three constructs: cognitive presence, teaching presence, and social presence. It focuses on communication with peers and instructors increasing success. It promotes groups of students who reflect on assignments, find meaning to it, and form an understanding of the content. The theory basically promotes social and academic integration among staff and students (Jinhee at al., 2020). Age and gender are said to influence learning satisfaction. Teacher immediacy is a concern with the satisfaction of students in online courses. Jinhee et al. (2020) performed a study that focused on students' perceptions of cognitive, social, and teaching presences compared to their satisfaction.

Online education has been challenged with creating student satisfaction and connectedness. Jinhee et al. (2020) wrote that their research confirmed that online course satisfaction was linked with the relationship the students had with their instructor and how often

they communicated. The course satisfaction was influenced by the student's age and gender. Therefore, social presence is especially important for nontraditional students in an online setting (Glazier, 2016; Jinhee et al., 2020).

Connectedness

Connectedness is how integrated a student is within the social and academic aspects of their institution. It derived from Tinto's (1993) integration framework. Personalized texts or even standardized texts from the institution would be beneficial to nontraditional students' success, satisfaction, and connectedness. Serna and Taylor (2020; 2018) conducted a study using a qualitative causal comparative research design. Serna and Taylor (2020; 2018) focused on how text messages from institutions can benefit the success and satisfaction of the students. It examined how students felt about receiving text messages from the institution (Taylor & Serna, 2020; 2018; Tinto, 1993).

Serna and Taylor (2020; 2018) had two research questions, (a) what are community college student preferences for receiving a text message from their institution in terms of time, day, and frequency; and (b) how can institutions compose text messages that engage community college students? (Taylor & Serna, 2018). Serna and Taylor (2020; 2018) used a random sampling technique that consisted of 13 community college students (6 females, 7 males; 12 students of color). They were asked various questions about receiving text messages from the college.

The instrument had 16 questions and was transcribed electronically. It was then encrypted in a database for researchers to analyze. This is a reliable instrument and allowed for personal responses to be analyzed (Taylor & Serna, 2020; 2018). The research team completed a collaborative round of theoretical coding and analysis and developed five themes for the

findings. Taylor and Serna (2020; 2018) found five themes in their study, (a) students should be primed to learn what to expect from the text messaging service before it begins, (b) the first text message is critical for student engagement, (c) students want information specific to them, (d) the timing and frequency of the text message determines student interaction with the text, and (e) students prefer specific technological elements of a text message primarily due to the student perception that an institution of higher education ought to communicate professionally with their students.

The text messages were standardized, and the students expressed that they would want personalized text reminders. Therefore, a trial on student success should be conducted to see if persistence increases with personalized texts. Taylor and Serna (2020; 2018) stated students had strong opinions on what type of content they would like to receive from their institution via text message. Taylor and Serna (2020; 2018) found that most students mentioned emergencies (9 of 13), crime alerts (7 of 13), and class cancellations due to weather (8 of 13) as being important information to receive in a text message from their institution. There were other students who cited the importance and convenience of receiving reminders about important deadlines, such as when payments are due (Taylor & Serna, 2020; 2018).

Texts help remind students about upcoming assignments and information pertaining to the institution that could be beneficial to nontraditional students' persistence. Text messages are a great way to connect students in higher education and provide a more personal form of communication. Institutions who utilize text messages will show positive results and student satisfaction (Taylor & Serna, 2018; 2020; Tinto, 1993). Students are constantly checking their phones and text message usages would be a great way to build student connectedness among

nontraditional students. Students thrive when they are supported and connected to their institution (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020).

Disadvantages

Financial assistance could be a huge barrier for nontraditional students and community college persistence (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). Troester-Trate (2020) conducted a study with a quantitative, quasi-experimental research method approach to compare matched samples of students who participated in the Jefferson Community Schools program and students who did not participate in the Jefferson Community Schools program. Retention and Persistence were the dependent variables of the study. The independent variables are credit hours, age, gender, Pell Grant status, and utilization of student support services (Troester-Trate, 2020).

Troester-Trate (2020) research question was, what is the relationship between enrollment in JCS to community college student retention and persistence? Troester-Trate (2020) had two null hypotheses: (1) Students enrolled in JCS have identical mean persistence to students not enrolled in JCS and (2) Students enrolled in JCS have identical mean retention to students not enrolled in JCS. The study consisted of students in a rural community college located in New York and 56% received a Pell grant. There were 90 students selected from the 3,748 full and part time students enrolled. They were selected based on credit hours, age, gender, and Pell status. 31 % of the students were considered nontraditional and 58% were female at the institution. The ethnicity of the population was 73% of enrolled students self-identified as White, 11% Hispanic/Latino, 7% Black or African American (Troester-Trate, 2020).

The data in this study was collected by the Institutional Research team at the study site, through the downloading of student records from the JCS tracking software, as well as through

Banner (Troester-Trate, 2020). Troester-Trate (2020) had a campus-specific tracking system in place that generated aggregate data of all participants of JCS. The aggregate data was extracted by the Institutional Research team at the study site and was uploaded into the Banner software (Troester-Trate, 2020).

The Institutional Research team used Banner to generate a report consisting of retention and persistence rates for the enrolled and non-enrolled sample groups (Troester-Trate, 2020). Troester-Trate, (2020) identified data sets that were sent to the researcher for analysis. Therefore, the data should be accurate since it is from the institution and their study team. The results showed that 30 out of 45 students in the Jefferson Community Schools program were retained and 41 out of 45 persisted and this was compared to retention of 30 out of 45 and persistence of 42 out of 45 of the matched non participatory sample (Troester-Trate, 2020).

Troester-Trate, (2020) suggested that providing non-academic resources to low-income students may serve to equalize the chances of being retained or persisting when compared to peers that have more resources of their own (p < .05). The results of the ANOVA indicated that there was not a statistically significant difference in the retention or persistence rates of JCS students versus non JCS students (Troester-Trate, 2020). It means that students enrolled in the JCS program were just as likely to be retained from fall 2016 to spring 2017 as those students who were not enrolled in JCS and that JCS students were just as likely to persist, during the fall 2016 term, as those students who were not enrolled in JCS (Troester-Trate, 2020).

The mean age of participants of this study conducted by Troester-Trate (2020) was 27.58 for JCS students and 26.53 for non JCS students thus categorizing the participants of this study as nontraditional students. The researcher used a balanced ANOVA with a two-tailed significance test. This helps test groups in both directions. The study showed that nontraditional

students who use services provided by the institution can persist equally to other students (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). The limitations of this study are that it focused on one college in New York. The economy of New York is higher than the other stated and would yield a different population. This college consisted of 91% financial aid students, which is not typical.

Education fuels the economy, and this study needs to be broader to stand for all community college students. The study showed that nontraditional students who used the services persisted as much as non-JCS students (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). Therefore, more financial support should be provided for nontraditional students to perform better.

Faculty Employment Status

Institutions now employ both permanent and adjunct staff members. Students tend to persist more with permanent staff members who are more aware of the institution's resources and regularly communicate with students outside of the classroom (Conefrey, 2021; Hutto, 2017; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). Hutto's (2017) study proposed two research questions were proposed: (a) is there a correlation between the employment status of faculty members and course retention? (b) Is there a difference in course retention between permanent and adjunct faculty members? Hutto (2017) had two null hypotheses: there is no correlation between the employment status of faculty members and course retention and there is no difference in course retention between permanent and adjunct faculty members. The dependent variables were permanent and adjunct staff members. The independent variable was course retention.

The subjects were permanent and adjunct faculty members at Florida Community

College. Students enrolled in the 451 general education courses were included in the data. The

college had a total student population of 27,012, consisted of with 40% males and 60% females (Hutto, 2017). The racial makeup of the student population was 73% White, 15% African American, 5% Hispanic, and 7% other (Hutto, 2017). The instrument used was pre-existing data from the college on the retention rates of students enrolled in these courses. There was a significant correlation of p = .02 between retention rates and faculty status.

Retention rates improved for students with permanent staff. Hutto (2017) concluded that this study was limited in location and scope; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized to all public community colleges. This research was conducted at a community college located in north Florida (Hutto, 2017). The study was conducted at one community college and cannot speak for the rest. There was also a lack of ethnic diversity in the study. Hutto (2017) wrote that finding a correlation between course retention and faculty status serves as a reminder of the important role all faculty members play, regardless of employment status, in retaining students. Therefore, permanent staff members help student retention, and this information needs to be applied to the persistence of nontraditional students in community colleges (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993).

Financial Aid Effects

Nguyen, Kramer, and Evans (2019) wrote "The effects of grant aid on student persistence and degree attainment: A systematic review and meta-analysis of the causal evidence." This article is a review of research on the effects of student aid on college student persistence and degree attainment. Students persist more when they have adequate financial aid for college (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). A meta-analysis review of 43 studies with an effect size of 75 showed that students persist 3-4 times more with financial aid assistance (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Nguyen et al. (2019) wrote, given the large public and private economic returns to college completion, there is likely a positive return on investments in grant aid. Institutions should seek outside funding to help assist students with financial aid. It yields positive results when assisting students with funding college and persistence. Nguyen et al. (2019) stated that their results confirm that grant aid improves persistence and degree completion conditional on enrollment. Averaging the effects over all the studies provides point estimates of approximately 2 to 3 percentage point increases in the probability of persisting and completing a degree (Nguyen et al., 2019).

Institution completion rates would increase if financial aid was sufficient to meet nontraditional students' needs. Nguyen et al. (2019) included that given the large positive effects of grant aid programs incorporating a supplementary service, our results support continued efforts to combine aid with additional services to improve outcomes. Along with additional aid, students benefit from support services (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). Nguyen et al. (2019) added that students would experience worse outcomes without this investment and expanding these financial supports would not only induce more students to attend postsecondary education but also increase their educational attainment. Therefore, there is adequate need for research on how these factors can help nontraditional students persist and increase the institution's completion rate.

Psychosocial Factors

Nontraditional students have more demands than traditional students and it impacts their focus on their schoolwork. These demands and loss of focus can hinder nontraditional students from graduating on time. Griffin (2020) conducted a study on how psychosocial techniques can help the success of nontraditional students. Nontraditional students have more responsibilities

and lack of support, they are more likely to have mental health symptoms (Kalkbrenner, Flinn, Sullivan, & Arteaga, 2021). Psychological factors negatively affect nontraditional students' success at community colleges (Fong, Davis, Kim, Kim, Marriott, & Kim, 2017).

The REDFLAGS Model is an approach to help professionals identify students who are at risk for mental health issues. This tool helps support mental awareness and was proven effective in the study for helping students identify these needs (Kalkbrenner et al., 2021). Students in Greek organizations were more likely to identify these symptoms than other students.

Nontraditional students are at a higher risk of exhibiting symptoms of depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and even suicide. Some even engage in heavy drinking (Kalkbrenner et al., 2021). Griffin (2020) set out to help increase student success rates by helping them raise their self-esteem.

Students went from hopelessness to encouragement. Students were instructed to set small and large realistic goals. Most of the students accomplished their goals and they felt good about them. They developed self-pride through this process. In the study they were identified as Junior Scholars and that was positively impactful. Students who emailed their professors identified themselves as Junior Scholars by their names (Griffin, 2020). Students who were connected to their institution were more likely to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Fong et al. (2017) stated that of the five categories of psychosocial factors, it appears that motivation and self-perceptions were the most influential predictors for both achievement and persistence outcomes. More motivational resources need to be provided for nontraditional students who may struggle with psychological factors. Students who received mentoring strategies that helped with self-actualization. This helped the students hold themselves accountable while reaching their educational goal (Griffin, 2020). Persistence models are used to

compare the following factors: motivation, self-perceptions, attributions, self-regulation, and anxiety. The two outcomes often studied are persistence and achievement (Fong et al., 2017).

Fong et al. (2017) wrote that Vincent Tinto's (1975) integration model is perhaps the most influential model for understanding student retention. For many decades, it has contributed to our understanding of the complex factors and processes higher education institutions face when fostering college student success (Fong et al., 2019). Tinto's (1993) model has been used in many studies pertaining to student persistence and will be utilized in this study. Fong et al. (2017) discovered that after interactions within the institution, students employ strategies to become socially and academically integrated. Some of these strategies are coping behaviors, self-assessments, and locus of control, which lead to the development of students' positive attitudes and intentions toward greater persistence (Fong et al., 2017).

Students who work with their peers increase their understanding of course knowledge and they use this same motivation to engage in class discussion of content (Griffin, 2020). Fong et al. (2017) found that compared to effects on persistence, there is a significantly larger association between psychosocial variables and achievement. The findings suggested that the power of psychological qualities the students possess were more influential at the course level in relation to their grades, GPA, and test scores, compared with broader level outcomes such as reenrollment (Fong et al., 2017). Therefore, identifying the physiological factors that affect the nontraditional students and creating ways to help the students cope with them will help their academic persistence in community colleges.

Mechanisms of Student Retention

Lisciandro and Gibbs (2016) conducted a study on students who participated in a college success preparation program. The study was a quantitative research correlational design. It was

to analyze student retention who participated in a pre-college program and factors that affected it (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020). The independent variables were gender, age group, NESB, Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander (ATSI), Humanitarian Entrant Background (HEB), low SES and prior education level. The dependent variable retention (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016). The study had three research questions, (a) What are the student retention and success rates in the OnTrack program? (b) What proportion of students progressed to undergraduate course enrolment at Murdoch University?, (c) Which specific factors predict or influence student retention in the OnTrack program? (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016).

There were a total of 1384 participants. Their ages ranged from 19-50. There were 714 females and 670 males. The instrument used was a multivariate regression model and SPSS, version 21. The multivariate logistic regression models use an n value of at least 10-15 per independent variable included in the model (Johnson & Wichern, 2007; Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007). The sample size for modeling was sufficient (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016). SPSS, version 21, was used to conduct the regressions and is an instrument that is valid. It is used in many studies. Many of the students in the program were from low socioeconomic backgrounds and were the first in their family to attend college (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020).

The program resulted in 74% of the students being retained until graduation. Student support programs are cost effective and successful (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). Students mainly exited the program due to family or medical reasons (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016). SPSS, version 21 was used to conduct a chi-square analysis on the demographics and a multivariate regression model was used to test the retention rate of

the students in the program. Enrollment rates of the program continued to increase annually (Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016).

The study conducted on the effectiveness of the precollege programs on retention did not include data on why students persisted despite their personal difficulties and what helped them succeed. Gibbs and Lisciandro (2016) stated that the main reasons for student attrition reported in OnTrack were personal circumstances relating to medical/emotional problems, or family issues and responsibilities. These programs help students persevere through challenging situations and have better institutional satisfaction. OnTrack programs can be utilized to help nontraditional students' retention rates increase in community colleges (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020).

Herzberg's two-factor theory consists of motivators and hygiene factors (DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak, 2005). This is a job satisfaction theory that is being applied to nontraditional college students and professors. Students completing their assignments would fall under motivation. Professors would consider that hygiene factor by how they assist the student in learning. Therefore, the professors having high quality performance at their job will create higher student satisfaction (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020).

There is an emphasis on advising staff, creating a higher satisfaction for students when they perform their job well (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). This would increase student retention. Long-term college satisfaction is a construct of this study and theory. Researchers seek to find the medium between student satisfaction and college retention in higher education. Good student advising is said to be a major factor in student retention and satisfaction (DeShields et al., 2005). Academic advising is a support service that can help students feel connected to their institution academically and support student retention

(Tinto, 1993). This enables the students to thoughtfully plan the courses they should take and be able to complete them satisfactorily.

DeShields, Kara, and Kaynak (2005) stated attracting students, processing their applications, and guiding admitted students through the enrollment process are extremely important activities. These activities are also very important to the success of nontraditional students. DeShields et al. (2005) believed that student satisfaction is closely related to them having a positive experience in college and that this theory fuels a market-oriented institution to satisfy the wants and needs of its customers. Therefore, if we properly assist nontraditional students with having a positive college experience, they will be more likely to persist to completion (Tinto, 1993).

Surprisingly, background variables of students were less significant in their persistence compared to overall intuition satisfaction. Margarit and Kennedy (2019) conducted a quantitative research study with a causal comparative design. The dependent variable was overall college satisfaction, and the independent variables were persistence in college, no financial aid support, financial aid support, race, campus activities, gender, mother's education, self-motivated to do well in school, prepared for college, working to support family, and father's education (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Margarit & Kennedy, 2019; Troester-Trate, 2020). Margarit and Kennedy (2019) sought out to find the relationship between background, financial, and academic variables related to first-time, full-time students who graduated between 2011 and 2013 from the community college campus. The students' timely graduation; specifically, was Margarit and Kennedy (2019) focus.

Margarit and Kennedy (2019) felt there was a statistically significant correlation between the variables and graduation and aimed to find out the strength of the correlation. This was a

random sample and it consisted of 91 respondents. Those respondents consisted of 35 males and 56 females. The data's mean age of respondents was 24.16 years with a standard deviation of 6.8. The race and ethnicity of the survey respondents included 47 White (51.6%), 21 Hispanic (23.1%), 11 African American (12.1%), nine multiple ethnicities or other (9.9%), and three Asian Indian (3.3%) (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019).

Margarit and Kennedy (2019) found that the demographics of the sample participants were consistent with those individuals attending community colleges in the United States.

Margarit and Kennedy (2019) used a survey questionnaire with a 5-point Likert-like scale. It also had "Yes," "No," and open response questions. The instrument is valid and should be bias free.

The exact questions are unknown. The survey was provided to the participants through SurveyMonkey (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Margarit and Kennedy (2019) showed that overall student satisfaction of the institution helped student retention more than background variables. There was a positive relationship between the parent's educational status and the student's timely graduation. The relationship between college preparation in high school and motivation to graduate was positive as well (Glazier, 2016; Margarit & Kennedy, 2019).

SPSS was used for statistical analysis. Correlation analysis was used to test more than one variable and their relationship direction. Males had an insignificant correlation with college persistence with r = .189 and r = .014. Females had a positive correlation of r = .370 and r = .390. Working with family was negatively correlated with college persistence with a r = .45 and overall experience of r = .44 (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). One limitation is that the study does not include data on student transfers to universities and it is a major part of community colleges as well. Margarit and Kennedy (2019) wrote that it is widely accepted that we live in a

competitive global society where education beyond high school is requisite for employment success.

Community colleges are serving increasingly higher proportions of students in higher education but with disappointing results (Margarit & Kennedy, 2019). Nontraditional students are continuing to grow and are an ongoing topic of research. Margarit and Kennedy (2019) stated that neglecting the unique needs of these students implies that community college administrators are ailing the population their institutions are intended to serve. Furthermore, community colleges have obligations to multiple stakeholders with increasing demands for results (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020).

Colleges must collaborate with stakeholders to provide nontraditional students with resources to meet their unique needs (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020). Margarit and Kennedy (2019) found that this study demonstrated that, although background and academic integration factors exerted a significant influence on community college students' overall satisfaction with college (the proxy for timely graduation), academic integration variables surpassed background variables in their influence. Institutions need to strive to gather information to help increase nontraditional students' institutional satisfaction to help their persistence rates (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020).

Retention rates are often used to measure the performance of institutions (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020). Helping raise the retention rates of nontraditional students can help the students and the institution. Researchers conducted a study on first-time business students at a large university. The researchers looked at

the participants' academic background, socioeconomic status, grade point average, sex, ethnicity, and academic standing (Mitra & Zhang, 2021).

The study referenced Tinto's (1975) persistence theory. Berger and Braxton (1998) found that an institution's characteristics of the organization and the student's ability to interact with their academic environment impacts the retention rates. Kuh and Love (2004) believe that the student's ability to connect to other cultural groups and make connections in social groups helps their persistence in higher education. A support system is important in higher education to become successful. They can assist with emotional and academic support. Additionally, Allen, Robbins, and Casillas (2006) found that students who have accountability for their academic success and regulate it through self-discipline have a great impact on student retention in higher education.

The sample of the study included 1,051 students who were first time students. Studies have found that first-time students were not as prepared academically as the traditional students (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Lisciandro & Gibbs, 2016; Troester-Trate, 2020). They needed additional remediation and students who did not take them ended up not being retained. Hispanic students and low socioeconomic students were more likely to drop out their first year. Family support and finances were also huge barriers for first-generation students and their success (Mitra & Zhang, 2021).

Services and Support

This article was a historical review of literature on student retention in higher education among nontraditional students who are growing in population. Community colleges are offering services and support to help students enter college (Conefrey, 2021). However, there are no practices currently working to help improve student retention rates. Tinto's (1975) theoretical

model of persistence, Astin's (1984) theory of involvement, and Tinto's (1993) social integration model were used to examine the retention rates of nontraditional students. Studies by the United States Department of Education have shown that nontraditional students are a growing trend (Remenick, 2019).

Researchers studying the phenomenon of retention rates among nontraditional students can greatly increase the chances of community college retention rates increasing due to their growing population (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Nontraditional students face many barriers while attending college. Remenick (2019) stated that nontraditional students in colleges and universities are increasing in number but have greater barriers to persist and thrive. These barriers need to be studied so that data can be transcribed into themes. The themes can help create action plans to be implemented.

Remenick (2019) wrote that a third period that contributed to an influx of nontraditional students was the rise of federal financial aid and the subsequent rise of community colleges. Monetary resources are scarce for these students who are mostly from low-socioeconomic backgrounds. Remenick (2019) stated that the second point is that many nontraditional students of the past thrived in part because of the unique services and support they received from their institutions. Researchers must examine the support services that are beneficial to nontraditional students so that they can thrive (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Remenick (2019) mentioned that the idea that nontraditional students are not using available services even though they are in greater need of them leads one to consider the issue of accessibility, as we know that nontraditional students have a host of other responsibilities that demand their attention and time. Institutions must work on ways to help these students become

more aware of the services and encourage them to utilize them by showing their effectiveness (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). Remenick (2019) suggested that if institutions can award outside credit, increase flexibility, and provide accessible resources, nontraditional students may not only have the spirit, means, and ability to return to college, but the support they need to persist and graduate too. Nontraditional students need special resources that are aligned with their needs socially and academically (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Retention Models

This literature review examines studies conducted to test student retention models. It analyzes the students' social interaction during their college experiences. Students who are involved in campus related activities have higher retention rates and institutional commitment (Burke, 2019). Spady's (1970, 1971) undergraduate dropout process model, Tinto's (1975, 1993) institutional departure model, and Bean's (1980, 1982) student attrition model were used to explain student retention rates. The models that are grounded on the relationship between the student and the institution (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Burke (2019) stated that providing professional development, increasing staff compensation, and creating a healthy culture to promote the services that lead to student retention efforts are all important. In addition, institutions will need to invest in new and innovative programming to engage students and increase their institutional commitment. Therefore, attending to the professional needs of the staff and the academic needs of students helps improve student retention rates. It can be beneficial to nontraditional students

for staff to be trained properly to meet their needs (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Burke (2019) argued that the current research and theoretical models also suggested that higher education institutions must be cognizant of the demographics and backgrounds of incoming students. Institutions should be aware of the population of nontraditional students attending their school and their demographics to meet their individual needs. Burke (2019) wrote that the models suggested that students' predetermined characteristics and interactions with the academic and social systems within their institutions influence their decisions to persist. These social systems need to be tailored towards nontraditional students to help them persist and information needs to be provided to these students to increase their institutional satisfaction (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

English as a Second Language

Studies have been conducted on characteristics of nontraditional and English as a second language in higher education students. The studies discussed how nontraditional students take college more seriously but have more obstacles that can deter them from completion (Jeffreys, 2015; Tinto, 2012). English as second language students struggle with writing proficiency, technical vocabulary, and syntax (Donnelly, McKiel, & Hawg, 2009). Translating slows down writing speeds and taking notes during lectures can be challenging too (Olson, 2012; Starr, 2009). These students also lack support for their cultural needs from their institution.

Students lack time to address their cultural needs due to financial, family, and additional work responsibilities. These higher workloads lead to attrition in nontraditional students (Starr, 2009). Studies consist of data containing students with the majority being Caucasians and Hispanic students being the leading monitories. The ages range from 19-56 years of age. The

results were like the former findings of Jeffreys (2015) and Fettig and Friesen (2014) where financial pressures, family obligations, and employment commitments hindered them from early or on time success in their nursing program (Petges, 2019). However, nontraditional students generally have higher GPAs when entering the programs than the traditional students (AACN, 2014).

In these studies, the students had a two-day opening seminar. It went over an introduction of the institution, policies, expectations, study strategies, and stress reduction strategies. This gave the students a realistic overview of what to expect during their educational experience and ways to help them succeed (Petges, 2019). The introduction to the institution helps build the students' connection to their institution; therefore, helping their persistence (Tinto, 1993).

Students also participated in a peer mentoring program that provided them with someone with more experience and knowledge to assist them. The faculty met with the students twice during this time as well to check on their needs and educate them on support services available to the students (Petges, 2019). Some first-generation college students are placed in remedial courses due to their first language not being English. Those students felt as if they did not need those courses and discouraged them in their studies (Conefrey, 2021; 2018).

Predictors of Persistence, Retention, & Completion

Most first-generation students are from low-income and minority families. They struggle with insufficient academic preparation, lack of financial support/resources, and lack of support from family members (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). A study was conducted to determine the motivation for obtaining a degree by first-generation students and their perceptions of education. It also covered social networks for support and support services needed to assist them in their

educational journey. This quantitative study used the integrated model of student retention and self-determination theory of motivation (Lunceford, 2011).

The study confirmed that there is a difference between first and second-generation students. Academic integration includes the students' connection to the staff outside the campus, their use of support services, and study habits. Academic advising and guidance are crucial for first-generation students to be successful (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Lunceford, 2011). Tinto's theory (1990) also aligns with the theory that students need to be connected to faculty members to increase their retention rates. Another valid point mentioned in this study was that students of different ethnic backgrounds like African Americans, need support staff that they can identify with (Walker, Hanley, and Wright, 2001). This mixed method study conducted survives from students and faculty members.

Participants were asked to use a Likert Scale from 1-10 to rank support services and activities available to them. The survey had several important findings. Students responded that support personnel and facilities were major factors in determining which college to attend. Most of the students found the practicum and seminars to be the most helpful in their education (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Lunceford, 2011).

Students also ranked student support services and the writing center as the top beneficial resources available to them. Participants noted that family responsibilities were the most challenging aspect of their education. This study found the need for more student support services that are intended to support first-generation students (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Lunceford, 2011). Due to the recent COVID-19 pandemic, there have been more doors opening to assist and service students with unique needs (Hutson, Nasser, Edele, Parrish, Rodgers, Richmond, Marzano, & Curtis, 2022).

High-Impact Practices

Nontraditional students tend to have difficulties when transitioning to higher education. A study showed that they experience anxiety and have low self-efficacy about their academic potential (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Gill, 2021). Students were happy with the student support services and felt they made the transition smoother. However, students had difficulty with teachers having enough time available to assist them and they encountered issues with the new writing styles in higher education. Nontraditional students were also hesitant to seek help when they needed it (Gill, 2021).

Students were pleased with being able to put theory into practice in their courses and the feedback from assignments were very helpful to their adjustment (Conefrey, 2021; 2018).

Students also spoke about how developing relationships with their peers and staff members helped them adjust to their new environment. Five out of the sixteen participants sought help from student support services their first year. This was due to students having low self-efficacy, social anxiety, and difficulty in academic skills (Gill, 2021).

Conefrey (2021; 2018) wrote that students who attend institutions that utilize high-impact practices tend to have higher retention rates. Students are more likely to be connected to their institutions academically; therefore, increasing their retention rates (Tinto, 1993). Burke (2019) suggested that providing professional development, increasing staff compensation, and creating a healthy culture to promote the services that lead to student retention efforts are all important.

Studies have been conducted on the effectiveness of high-impact practices on first-generation students. They focused on how learning communities, writing-intensive courses, and ePortfolios impacted the success of first-generation students. Students signed waivers granting permission for the researchers to review their course information and ePortfolios. Students also

participated in first year seminars, collaborative assignments, internships, and capstone projects (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). Coaches also support accountability and self-efficacy (Alzen, Burkhardt, Diaz-Bilello, Elder, Sepulveda, Blankenheim, & Board, 2021). Students who reviewed their ePortfolios realized that once they stopped highlighting as much and read the text, they were able to understand it more and recall more information (Conefrey, 2021; 2018).

Students who can collaborate with peers and interact with faculty members on projects are able to build connections that help them persist (Tinto, 1993). Students feel a sense of connectedness and higher self-efficacy through completion of assignments (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). It also helped students form accountability for their work by setting goals and monitoring their progress. Instructors must use techniques to engage the students and have open communication (Glazier, 2016). Information on high-impact practices was based on the social cognitive and social cognitive career theory. It suggested that learning is both cognitive and social (Conefrey, 2021; 2018).

Students also found that the writing courses helped prepare them to read journal articles and literacy that was more complex than the assignments they had in high school. Some students did not feel that they were prepared for college and had a false sense of confidence when starting college (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). Academic advising has been one of the most used practices to assist students in higher education. Academic coaching is a recent strategy developed to provide an interactive process that focuses on helping the identified student and helps them build a relationship with their coach (Alzen et al., 2021).

Academic coaching consists of setting academic and non-academic goals. It helps students build trust and relationships with the academic community. The coaches also help guide the development of academic skills among students. Students who received coaching had higher

GPAs, student retention, and credits earned (Alzen et al., 2021). Academic coaches help students to feel connected to their institution and persist (Tinto, 1993).

Coaches help students by providing academic advice and encourage them to become more self-aware of their responsibilities (Alzen et al., 2021). Students who had good academics found they had unrealistic expectations for college studies. This lowered their self-efficacy and self-esteem (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). Institutions will need to invest in new and innovative programming to engage students and increase their institutional commitment. Therefore, instructor immediate research responses will help aid in how to plan professional development for staff. Students need online course work to be engaging and have good relationships with their instructors (Glazier, 2016).

Music plays an important role for all students, and it is critically important to first-generation students. A study was conducted to see how and why first-generation college students use music. The data was collected through surveys during a two-week period in a classroom setting. Participants were asked to identify the type of music they listened to and what motivated them to listen to it. Most of the students in the study were white and the results of the first-generation students were like those of the non-first-generation students (Glazier, 2016; Whittinghill, Smith, & Aiken, 2021).

Music did not affect either of the student's grade point averages. However, first-generation students listened to music for more hours in a day than non-first-generation students. More white students were in the non-first-generation group of participants. First generation students were more likely to listen to music to express their feelings/emotions. They were more likely to listen to music to relieve stress and reduce loneliness (Glazier, 2016; Whittinghill et al., 2021).

First generation students were also more likely to listen to music to be creative and to create a self-image. For all students listening to music brought enjoyment. They also had top responses that music helped them relieve stress and to help get through difficult times. Female students used music to get through hardships, whereas males used it to become creative (Glazier, 2016; Whittinghill et al., 2021).

High-impact practices did increase metacognition and self-regulated learning through feedback and goals. Studies found that students who participated in high-impact practices were more likely to have a higher self-efficacy and persistence in college (Conefrey, 2021; 2018). There is a lack of literature on qualitative research pertaining to nontraditional students' sense of instructor rapport and immediacy in online courses at community colleges (Glazier, 2016).

Student Support Services

Individuals' environment, their interactions with others, and their behavior affects their self-efficacy (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Tinto, 1993). Researchers also found that friends and parents can become helpful support in college, but they can also be a distraction. They provide emotional support but can also add their own problems to burden you. While a strong support system is important in college, student engagement and connectedness seem to yield better outcomes (Conefrey, 2021; 2018).

Student support Services at colleges provide nontraditional students assistance to help their retention rates (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Tinto, 1993). It helps students with academic advising, degree planning, financial assistance, mentoring, study skills assistance, tutoring, and cultural activities (U.S. Department of Education, 2015). There have been studies conducted to analyze nontraditional students' perceptions of these students and how they impacted their

academics. There is little research on this topic, and it leaves administration with little information to make decisions that can positively impact their retention rates.

The researchers have had focus groups and conducted interviews to gather information on their perceptions and experiences with the program. The data was transcribed and then coded for themes. Quantitative data regarding retention rates, GPAs, and graduation rates was collected and analyzed (Bennett et al., 2021; Sallee & Cox, 2019; Tinto, 1993). The results showed increases in retention rates, graduation rates, and GPA's. The students said that the support services helped them feel accepted and like a real college student. However, they also mentioned that they need additional academic support (Bennett et al., 2021).

Community colleges have many student-parents (Sallee & Cox, 2019). The students have more responsibilities than traditional students. They have a substantial amount of responsibility by managing their academics, finances, and family responsibilities. Researchers conducted interviews with student-parents to see how campus-based resources contributed to their persistence (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). They also identified obstacles these students may face in hopes of preparing to navigate through them (Sallee & Cox, 2019).

Stanton-Salazar's (1997, 2001, 2011) network-analytic framework was used to guide this study. This framework suggested that social networks are the key to activation of institutional resources. Students need strong relationships with family and community-based networks (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). The study findings were that students had issues activating resources that would help their persistence. They also were not able to get childcare and it left them in a conflicted role as a parent. Only a few students had access to a campus agent, and they had more marked experience than the others. Most students were not aware of most of the resources available to them (Sallee & Cox, 2019).

Students seemed to get redirected to different departments when seeking help in support services which deterred them from seeking further assistance. Some students referred to student support services as "hoop jumping" (Sallee & Cox, 2019). Students said that you must go through all these obstacles to get to the services and then they provide you with little assistance. One student also suggested that the campus be more child friendly. One student commented that they did not use the support services since due to her parental responsibilities, she has become self-reliant. Therefore, the student was able to navigate through college without the help of college agents (Sallee & Cox, 2019).

Tinto's (1993) theory focuses on relationships and support groups within the college setting. He focuses on college graduation rates and how parental support helps increase graduation rates. The study indicated that the first year in college is very critical to being successful. Tinto found that around 75% of dropouts occur in the first year; therefore, it is important to have a successful first year (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000).

Tinto's (1993) theory discusses academic and peer relationships within their degree area. It says that students who reject their prior community's beliefs, including families, are more successful in their first year of college. This is very different from other theories which state a positive correlation between parental involvement and instilled values of resilience. The students' commitment to the institution plays a big part in their success. Students who have parents who do not value college have a harder time rejecting their beliefs and committing to their education (Elkins et al., 2000). Tinto (1993) also theorized that students from ethnic/racial minorities had a lower chance of rejecting their parental views.

Students who had poor grades in high school also have less parental support due to parents assuming they will do poorly in college as well. Parents' educational level did not seem

to influence college attendance (Elkins et al., 2000). Parental support positively correlated with college attendance. All the rejections of the values and views are the separation process that is Tinto's (1993) theory.

The students must separate themselves from their family and peers to become themselves working towards their own goals. This helps them properly transition into the college community. His three stages are separation, transition, and incorporation (Elkins et al., 2000). A study was conducted with twelve participants who were nontraditional students enrolled in a community college. All twelve students stated that they felt parental support was effective in aiding their retention during the study (McCulloh, 2022).

There are not a lot of studies conducted on the perspectives of the practitioners who work with nontraditional students in counseling and academic advising. One study included interviews with 43 practitioners at 17 different colleges in Israel. The theoretical approach used in this study was Lave and Wenger's (1991) situated learning theory. It involves situated learning in communities of practice. This requires groups of people bound together by a sense of belonging, mutual engagement, and shared communal resources. One practitioner stated that student resilience was determined by their economic background and personal judgment (Sapir, 2021).

Practitioners use score charts to monitor student performance and look for warning signs that could trigger a conversation that needs to be had with that student. This chart is a tool to measure academic success. Through collaboration and sharing knowledge, practitioners can learn from each other to better help students (Sapir, 2021). Student support services aim to assist students in outreach activities, induction and orientation, emphasis on support in the first semester, continued support in their educational journey, and in their transition to employment (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Tinto, 1993). However, practitioners were concerned about foreign

students' knowledge gap of academic requirements and admission routes. Israel has performance-based funding policies in place to adopt strategies to prevent student withdrawal (CHE, 2012).

The support services have a centralized organizational structure like the Deans of Students Office. Some practitioners go outside the limits of their role to assist students in need. Practitioners were also able to achieve more effective collaborations with other staff members when they adjusted their services to meet the needs of the students (McCulloh, 2022; Sapir, 2021).

Summary

The main purpose of this study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. Nontraditional students have experienced issues with connectedness to their institution, financial barriers, and psychological concerns. This group of students thrive off high impact strategies that help with their self-efficacy. Academic coaching has been a high impact practice that helps students become connected to their institution, build relationships with academic staff, and provides them with a support system. There are so many factors that contribute to student success.

Socio-economic statuses, institutional satisfaction, language barriers, and cultural differences are a few. A main area of concern is the connectedness of the student to their institution and academic support systems. College plays many roles in the success of these students. This study aimed to discover ways to support these students and uncover barriers the students may face. These barriers were expected to be a combination of personal and institutional origins. Over the years there have been several studies conducted to determine the barriers in

student success rates in these institutions. However, there has still been little to no change in the retention and completion rates of community colleges.

This topic is important since after the current pandemic concludes, there will be an economic recession followed by inflation. Professors and administrators at these institutions will need professional development to meet the needs of the students with these new changes in our education system. Completion rates affect college funding and accreditation; therefore, it is imperative that we find ways to assist these institutions with this ongoing challenge. The target population was nontraditional students. College completion is a problem that community colleges have been faced with for years. There is a need to further investigate the actual causes so that actions can be taken to increase the completion rates at community college and essentially decrease retention rates. A gap in literature exists in nontraditional students and higher retention rates.

Researchers have yet to be able to drastically increase these rates. Researchers have continuously studied college retention of nontraditional students. It is not yet known the exact causes of this dilemma or concrete ways of supporting these students. Students at community colleges lack motivation and encounter structural barriers. There is a demand for socialization at these institutions and school pride. Along with connectedness, parental involvement and support are scarce as well. There needs to be more engagement with parents at the institution and possibly more events where parents are invited to participate with their children.

The gap in communication between local college and high school employees also contributes to the lack of student success. Teachers need to be in sync with professors to understand how to prepare students for secondary education and professors need to understand the need to help the transition for incoming students to be as smooth as possible. Student support

services need to be in place to assist students and the community needs to be involved more at these institutions as well, building relationships and their reputation.

The curriculum, teaching strategies, and programs offered need to be revised to meet the current economic demands in the community. Institutions should also include weekly virtual sessions in their online courses. This study sought to interview nontraditional students to examine the factors that contributed to their success or lack thereof. One of the main issues nontraditional students face is the lack of institutional support and resources to accommodate their busy lifestyles. Considering our recent pandemic, nontraditional students could face more economic struggles that could hinder their persistence rates in higher education. Therefore, due to the lack of successfully and consistently raising these rates, there was a need for this study.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODS

Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to explain the methodology of this study. The problem was that there is a low retention rate among nontraditional students in community colleges and the student support services offered may not help them feel connected to their institution. The three methods of data collection included interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires.

This chapter will cover the qualitative case study research design for this study and the research questions related to the personal experiences of selected students to develop strategies and resources to improve the low retention rates of nontraditional students in community colleges. It will also describe the setting, participants, and procedures of the research study. The data analysis is included. The researcher's positionality, philosophical assumptions, interpretive framework, and researcher's role will be discussed in detail. The trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study will be addressed in this chapter.

Research Design

The qualitative approach was utilized in this study. The perceptions of nontraditional students enrolled in community college were examined through the case study research design. Creswell and Creswell (2018) stated that the historical origin for qualitative research comes from anthropology, sociology, the humanities, and evaluation. Case studies help researchers get information on participants' personal experiences related directly to the research questions (Yin, 2003).

The data collected through this study was viewed through the lens of the theoretical framework of Tinto's (1993) integration framework and student connectedness. Understanding the barriers in nontraditional student retention in community colleges may improve retention

rates. Analysis of the interview data commonalities may have found perceived influence of academic needs that affect college completion of nontraditional students. This personal approach helped researchers understand the students' academic needs through the perception of the students.

Case study research was a qualitative design that is comprehensive and incorporates multiple sources of data to provide detailed accounts of complex research phenomena in real-life contexts (Yin, 2018). This exploratory case study addressed perceived needs of nontraditional students and focused on increasing nontraditional students' retention rates in community colleges. It aimed to find the nontraditional student's perception of the support services offered and how it affects their retention rates. The data was analyzed for academic and social connectedness (Tinto, 1993). The research in this study was conducted through interviews, journal prompts, and a questionnaire with a sample of fifteen nontraditional students that were previously enrolled in a community college, successfully completed community college or courses, and be considered a nontraditional student.

The research was directly associated with social science and the factors that contribute to the success of nontraditional students. The interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires will be analyzed. The questions gathered information about the background of the participants, support systems, interactions with the staff, interactions with their peers, institution satisfaction, personal and academic barriers, and emotional help during their college experience. The data was coded and compared to Tinto's (1993) integration framework for possible trends.

Most students who do not live on campus have less social interaction. They commute to campus and their college interaction is limited to the classroom. These students tend to leave immediately after class (Karp, Hughes, & O'Gara, 2010). Therefore, researchers should examine

how nontraditional students can persist through the challenges of connectedness in institutions. The study used Tinto's (1993) integration framework to analyze student connectedness. Bean (1980, 1982) claimed that student success was based on their institutional satisfaction and the student perceptions will assist with that. This study investigated the institution more than the individuals' responsibilities unlike Tinto's (1993) framework (Yin, 2018). It also discovered the nontraditional students' institutional satisfaction.

Research Questions

Exploratory research seeks to explain a phenomenon in real-world context (Yin, 2014). This case study aimed to discover possible reasons for low retention rates among nontraditional students at community colleges. The data was collected through addressing a central research question and four sub questions. These questions helped address student connectedness and how the nontraditional students' perceptions of the institution's student support services relate to their retention rates.

Central Research Question

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution?

Sub Question One

What are nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services?

Sub Question Two

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of connectedness to their institutions?

Sub Question Three

What could student support services offer nontraditional students to increase their retention rates?

Setting and Participants

The setting and participants for this study were selected for convenience due to the location of the researcher. The location was in eastern North Carolina. The institution was a community college that has several different programs of study. This community college serves a variety of students that range in ages and nationalities. Permission was granted by the institution to conduct the study. The 10 to 15 participants were carefully selected, and all procedures were followed correctly in obtaining their cooperation in this study. Participants must have had one of the following nontraditional student characteristics: older than typical age (above 24), part-time, full-time, attendance, being independent of parents, working full time while enrolled, having dependents, being a single parent, and being a recipient of a GED or high school completion certificate (Nontraditional Undergraduates / Definitions and Data, n.d.).

Setting

The site of this study was in eastern North Carolina at Institution X which is a pseudonym for the community college being examined. It offers over 70 credit programs and college transfer options. The college administration includes a president, senior executive assistant to the president, vice president, and a public information officer. This site was chosen because it has increased its student retention rate by 40% since 2012. In 2019, its retention rate was 78.7% for all students. This institution could have provided positive data on how to help increase student retention rates of nontraditional students. It also houses many nontraditional students and is conveniently located to the researcher.

The institution is a public college that has over 4,000 students enrolled each year. In the 2020-2021, there was an enrollment of 4,228 students. In 2019-2020, there were 128 nontraditional students enrolled and only 4.7% of them were still enrolled at any institution in a six-year timeframe. In fall of 2021, the average student age was 24 years old and 73% of the student population receive financial aid. The enrollment by race and ethnicity is 56.9% White, 19.4% Black or African American, 16.4% Hispanic or Latino, 2.88% Two or More Races, 2% Asian, 0.204% American Indian or Alaska Native, and 0.17% Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islanders. The first-year programs did not meet their goal of a retention rate of 71% with 68.1%. The institution did not meet their baseline goal if 2,881 students to be retained in 2021.

Participants

The researcher collected a sample of 12-15 participants. All participants were attending Institution X (pseudonym). The sample was all nontraditional students who successfully completed one-year worth of college courses in this case study. This will ensure the students are good candidates for the study (Yin, 2014). These community college students will be above the age of 24. Students over the age of 25 are considered nontraditional students (Baugus, 2020). Participants must also have been enrolled at least part-time, which is a minimum of 6 course hours per semester. The sample consisted of a collection of varied ethnicities and genders due to the student demographics. The participants were all volunteers and selected free of bias.

Researcher's Positionality

As a nontraditional student, I struggled to complete college and was a working mother of two small children. My circumstances caused me to live off a low income like most nontraditional students, and I had a small support system. In college, there was access to a financial advisor who usually had long waits and only went over what your financial aid award

was for the year. There was no other financial assistance and a limited childcare service with limited space. It was very hard to find time to meet with academic advisors or get tutoring due to my work schedule.

Unfortunately, I was unaware of a lot of the support services offered at my college since I was older and not connected socially to my intuition. There were challenges with childcare, finances, and understanding assignments. Factors that are related to the low retention rates of nontraditional students will be identified. I want to identify strategies and resources that will help nontraditional students preserve, especially single mothers. There is a lack of resources and communication available at institutions for nontraditional students.

I suspected that nontraditional students who did not receive adequate student support services at the college or feel connected to their school did not have good retention rates.

Colleges need more student support services geared towards nontraditional students to increase their satisfaction, which will ultimately increase retention rates and completion rates of programs. Student support services and their accessibility to them could contribute to their success.

Interpretive Framework

Conservative social constructivism was the framework used in this study. This framework focuses on teaching and learning being dependent on interpersonal interaction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). I believe that student support services can offer more accommodations to benefit nontraditional students like text messages to remind or inform them of current events, children friendly learning settings, virtual meetings with professors, workshops, and support groups.

Nontraditional students are supported when they have a connection to their institution (Tinto, 1993). Conservative social constructivism will help me understand the perspectives of the individuals involved in the study that is associated with the problem of nontraditional student retention being researched.

Philosophical Assumptions

Researchers have their own set of beliefs that guide their study (Guba, 1990). There are ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions in this study. The study used these assumptions to guide the research. My philosophical assumptions were grounded in my experience as a nontraditional student. I believe that nontraditional students can thrive where they feel connected and have proper student support services in place to meet their diverse needs. Student connectedness is key to increased retention rates (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

Ontological Assumptions

Ontological assumptions deal with reality and what is there that could be known (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). Ten students participated in the study to ensure the data represented nontraditional students' perspectives of the student support services offered. I believed that there was a need to find out how the student support services can help nontraditional students feel connected and preserved in community colleges. I thought the resources currently offered at community colleges were not designed to meet the needs of nontraditional students. I also believe that the retention rates are low for nontraditional students because of the lack of student support services and accessibility that connect them to the institution.

Community colleges have growing numbers of nontraditional students; therefore, helping them persist can increase the institution's retention rate (Knapp et al., 2012). I believe that this research can help institutions develop support services that can better the needs of nontraditional

students which should improve their retention rates at community colleges. The population of nontraditional students is growing at these institutions (Knapp et al., 2012). However, at Institution X (pseudonym), there was a decrease. In the 2020-2021 academic year there were 312 enrolled nontraditional students and in 2021-2022 the enrollment dropped to 135 students (Workbook: Enrollment, 2022).

Epistemological Assumptions

Guba and Lincoln (1994) stated that epistemological assumptions are concerned with how knowledge can be created, acquired, and communicated. Data obtained on the nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services offered could help find possible causes of student retention in efforts to increase it. Through interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires, I was able to gather data that can give personal insight on the causes on low retention rates among community college students. The relationship between the researcher and the results of that data are connected to epistemological assumptions. My experience as a nontraditional student at a community college helped me understand the need for student support services to be modified to meet the growing population of nontraditional students (Knapp et al., 2012).

Nontraditional students need to feel connected to their institution socially and academically to persevere (Tinto, 1993). Some nontraditional students are parents, fulltime workers, commuters, and need support services for financial needs (Troester-Trate, 2019). Nontraditional students need to participate in activities at their institution and be proud to be of their institution to build a sense of belonging and connectedness (Hutto, 2017). Students also need to feel institutional satisfaction through the support services provided to persist (Bean, 1982).

Axiological Assumptions

In qualitative research, researchers make the value, or the study known (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). Axiological assumptions are values, beliefs, and bias that the researcher brings to the study along with their value for the study's data that is gathered (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Improving the nontraditional students connected to their institution can potentially increase their retention rates. Tinto (1993) stated that all students need to feel connected to their institution socially and academically to preserve. When students are connected to their institution, they value it more and can make it an external commitment.

Student support services should be able to meet the unique needs of nontraditional students who are struggling to balance more responsibilities like commuting, finances, and parenthood. I was able to construct interview, journal, and questionnaire questions that I felt would appropriately address the needs of nontraditional students. Hopefully, the data collected will be used by community colleges to help nontraditional students persevere. More nontraditional students are entering community colleges, but their retention rates are still low (Knapp et al., 2012).

Researcher's Role

The study was conducted bias free and incorporated all the regulations set by the IRB. There was no prior experience or relationship with the participants. I do not supervise any participants, and my sole role is a researcher in this study. The researcher is the human instrument of the data collected. I set aside my experience as a nontraditional student to ensure this study was bias free (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study's integrity was kept through accessible disclosures that are accurate and meaningful (Grundy, Dunn, & Bero, 2020). Grundy

et al. (2020) wrote that researcher bias and conflicts of interest can lead towards a breach in the honor system and violation of trust.

Procedures

Several procedures were followed to ensure the trustworthiness of the study. I gained permission from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A) and Institution X prior to conducting the study (see Appendix B). The participants were educated on all the aspects of the study and provided consent forms. All ethical considerations were followed throughout this study. All participants were asked to complete an interview, two journal prompts, and a questionnaire. All data was securely stored and analyzed free of bias.

Permissions

I submitted the proper documentation for approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) (see Appendix A). Then, I gained site permission from the institution. The site permission form was provided to the institution via email, and it had a description of the study (see Appendix B). Once IRB approval and site permission had been secured, the search for recruiting participants began. Institution X, a pseudonym, was asked for assistance with recruiting by providing emails of prospective participants that are nontraditional students.

Recruitment Plan

Ten students who successfully completed one year of college at the designated institution were selected through a criterion sampling method and the snowball method. They were screened and asked to respond to the email if they chose to participate. The sampling criteria was: (a) considered a nontraditional student and at least 24 years of age, (b) have successfully completed at least one year of college, (c) have been enrolled full time with a minimum of 12 semester hours when they attended, and (d) was enrolled in college in the past

five years at the designated institution. I used the purposeful sampling and snowball method to ensure information-rich cases for in-depth study (Patton, 2015). I sent emails to elicit participants.

The emails contained a description letter of the study, then the consent form was emailed through DocuSign (see Appendix C) accompanied with a reply message asking for available times to meet for the interview. I gained permission from the institution prior to recruitment (see Appendix B). Participants were asked to complete consent forms prior to any data collection, and it contained information on the study being conducted (see Appendix C). Participants who meet the sampling criteria shared their experience of the phenomenon of study and the researcher was able to analyze their perceptions (Patton, 2015).

Data Collection Plan

This qualitative exploratory case study focused on the low retention rates of nontraditional students at community colleges and analyzed potential connections between the nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services offered at the community college, their connectedness to their institution, and their institutional satisfaction. Case studies should use more than one source of evidence (Yin, 2014). There was triangulation of data through the collection methods, member checks conducted, confirmability audits, a thick description of the study provided, and it will be bias free (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Therefore, the researcher is using three methods to collect data for this research for the purpose of triangulation: interviews, journal prompts, and questionnaires. This order was chosen so that the interview could spark the interest of the participants and develop rapport to the study.

Next, the participant responded to the journal prompts. The final step in the data collection process was for the participants to complete a questionnaire created through

SurveyMonkey. All IRB regulations were followed, and consent obtained prior to interviews.

After all the data was collected, it was analyzed, and findings were recorded.

Interviews

The data in this research was collected by the researcher through audio recorded interviews to gain the life experiences of nontraditional students in community colleges. Memos were used to record any thoughts or assumptions during and after the interview. The interviews consisted of 11 questions created by the interviewer. The interviews helped gain in-depth insight on personal accounts of nontraditional students to help increase their retention rates in community college (Patton, 2015). The interviews took place at the college in the library during a designated time frame that was convenient for the participants or virtually through Google meet. They were conducted on an individual basis. See Appendix E:

Standard Open-Ended Interview Questions

- 1. Please provide me with a brief narrative about your college experience. Include your current academic status and if you took any online courses. SQ1
- 2. If you could suggest three resources that you wish the college could provide for you, what would they be? SQ3
- 3. What was your biggest challenge in college that affected your success and how did you overcome it? SQ1
- 4. What resources at the college were you aware of? SQ2
- 5. Explain how you think the college could have better assisted you? SQ1
- 6. Describe your relationship with your academic advisor. SQ2
- 7. Describe your relationship with your school counselor. SQ2
- 8. How would you describe your relationships with your prior instructors? SQ2

- 9. Did you feel that they were supportive and accessible to you? SQ2
- 10. How could student connectedness be improved at your school? SQ2
- 11. How do you suggest the college inform you of the services available? SQ2

Questions one through six gave the researcher background information on the participants. This helped gather themes that related to the theory being tested and find ways to increase nontraditional student retention rates. They are straightforward and not meant to be harsh. They served as indicators for the causes of lower retention rates. They also showed indicators of higher retention rates.

Tinto's 1997 student retention model suggested all students persist when they are academically and socially integrated into their intuition. I used this model to compare how the participants' satisfaction with the support services offered and that of the institution compares to their success. Tinto (1993) stated that all students should have accessibility to retention programs. This served as justification for how the support services and the institution's commitment can help nontraditional students succeed. It ultimately created data for researchers to use to modify the services available to better assist the student by successfully completing college through effective services provided by the college.

Questions seven through 12 provided data on the participants' college experience. They questioned the students' knowledge and utilization of resources available. The data gave insight on the challenges that college students encounter. It also demonstrated their knowledge of the resources available to them and how they utilize them. The questions provoked conversations that provided detailed information on success strategies and provided the researcher with information to better understand the mindset of the nontraditional students. Tinto's (1993)

integration framework helped understand how the students persist by using the resources allocated to them.

Questions 13 through 15 were related to the connectedness of the students. Students persist when they are connected to the school. Text messages can help students feel connected and this question analyzed their opinion of the helpfulness of them. It also described how the students interacted with the institution (Bean, 1980).

Individual Interview Data Analysis Plan

The researcher audio recorded all the interviews and took memos during the interviews. After the interview, they watched the interviews and made notes. The notes were coded for themes experienced by each of the participants. The codes helped the researcher determine the commonalities and differences in the life experiences of the students in college (Yin, 2014). The coding was completed manually and documented by the researcher. The themes were compared to Tinto's (1993) integration framework for possible trends.

The open coding method was utilized as described by Saldaña (2013). Each theme was color coded and placed in a matrix. The information was tabulated and then placed into different arrays. A table was created with the findings. The researcher started the coding process by listening to the interviews and conducting preliminary jotting. Then the researcher wrote down important phrases and resources mentioned. Then the researcher pre-coded important phrases and common responses by highlighting them. Related phrases and quotes were color coded. Important quotes were placed in bold print.

A list was made of all the resources that the students felt were beneficial, the challenges they faced, and the recommendations for the future. The themes were created after the coding was completed. Each interview was coded as they were conducted then coded again to compare

to the other interviews for commonalities. The researcher conducted member checks by contacting some of the participants to verify their responses (Saldaña, 2013).

After the interviews were coded, the researcher analyzed the journal and questionnaire responses according to the participant's satisfaction of each component. Those responses were compared to the interviews for common themes and color coded based on satisfaction and dissatisfaction. The researcher continued to complete memos and compare the data. The data was color-coded for all the phrases, services, challenges, and recommendations listed by the participants in their responses for commonalities (Saldaña, 2013).

Journaling

The participants were asked to complete a journaling activity based on their college experience. They answered two essay questions: (a) describe three resources you felt were most beneficial in college and how did you utilize them? (SQ2) and (b) describe three challenges you face in college that could have affected your success and explain how you think the college could have better assisted you (SQ1 & SQ1). The questions were answered in at least six sentences each and the participants had two weeks to complete them. The journal questions were sent to the participants in an email through SurveyMonkey to complete. Journal responses served as documentation to corroborate and augment evidence from other sources (Yin, 2014).

Journal Data Analysis Plan

There was a thematic analysis as described by Saldaña (2013). The participants were asked to complete two journal prompts as a final task. They were allowed two weeks to complete the task. The researcher wrote memos as they analyzed the data. The responses were color coded by resources and challenges. Themes were created through the analysis of the responses. A matrix of responses was created, and information will be placed in arrays. The researcher

conducted tabulation as they code the responses. The data was finalized and placed in a table for review (Yin, 2004).

Questionnaire

Once interviews were conducted and journal prompts completed, the participants were emailed a questionnaire to complete. SurveyMonkey was used to create the following questionnaire. The participants were given a link in the email to complete it. The responses were automatically sent back to me via email.

Questionnaires are generally used in case studies and can produce qualitative data that will be evidence to support or discredit the researcher's assumptions (Yin, 2014). All questions on the questionnaire were aligned with the research questions. The questionnaire results were analyzed and coded for recurring themes. The results were then compared to the interview and journal prompts for similarities in findings. The questionnaire had ten questions and took 10-15 minutes to complete. Participants were allowed additional time if they needed. A copy of the responses was sent to the participants. This questionnaire was useful in supporting the data previously collected from the participants by the researcher. The following are the questions found on the questionnaire and in Appendix G:

Questionnaire Questions

Background

- 1. What is your age?
- 0 18-24
- 0 25-34
- 0 35-44
- 0 45-54

0	55-64
0	65+
2.	What is your gender?
0	Male
0	Female
3.	What is your race?
0	White or Caucasian
0	Black or African American
0	Hispanic or Latino
0	Asian or Asian American
0	American Indian or Alaska Indian
0	Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
0	Another race
SQ2	
4.	How helpful would it be to receive text messages from your institution about academic
	reminders and available resources? SQ2
0	Extremely helpful
0	Very helpful
0	Somewhat helpful
0	Not so helpful
0	Not at all helpful
SQ1	
5.	How satisfied are you with your college experience? SQ1

	0	Very satisfied
,	0	Satisfied
,	0	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
,	0	Dissatisfied
	0	Very dissatisfied
SQ2	2	
(6.	How satisfied are you with the support services offered? SQ2
	0	Very satisfied
	0	Satisfied
,	0	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
,	0	Dissatisfied
,	0	Very dissatisfied
,	7.	How satisfied are you with the support services you received? SQ2
,	0	Very satisfied
,	0	Satisfied
,	0	Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied
,	0	Dissatisfied
	0	Very dissatisfied
SQ2	2	
;	8.	How connected did you feel using the student support services at your college? SQ2
,	0	Not connected at all
,	0	Somewhat connected
	0	Connected

Very connected

SQ2

- 9. How responsive are the student support services available to you at your institution? SQ2
- o Extremely responsive
- Very responsive
- o Somewhat responsive
- o Not so responsive
- Not at all responsive
- 10. Which if any of the following student support services would you wish you had known about or had more information about? SQ2
- Counseling
- Open computer lab
- Online tutoring
- Writing Center
- Achievement coach
- o None

Questionnaire Data Analysis Plan

The researcher used SurveyMonkey to develop a questionnaire with 10 questions that had multiple choice questions and a Likert Scale. The participants had two weeks to complete the questionnaire. Descriptive statistics were used to identify patterns in the data through graphs and charts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The automatic charts and summary tools were used to create bar graphs and pie charts of the data trends. The relative and percentage frequency graphs were

compared and analyzed for academic and social connectedness (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). SurveyMonkey used filters to create crosstab reports for tabulating purposes.

The researcher reviewed each survey individually and placed evidence into categories in a matrix. The matrix included the following categories: satisfaction, connectedness, helpfulness, and responsiveness. The researchers' analysis was compared to the charts created by SurveyMonkey and color coded for patterns. Grouping was done according to race and gender.

The researcher wrote memos during the data analysis. The memos provided suggestions and clues to help interpret the data (Yin, 2014). The findings were then compared to Tinto's integration framework (1993) to see the connection in nontraditional student retention rates in community colleges and how they perceive the student support services. A table was created to show the results.

Data Synthesis

Researchers should use multiple sources of evidence, create a database for evidence, maintain a chain of evidence, and exercise care when using electronic sources when collecting data (Yin, 2014). Once the researcher implemented these four principles during the data collection process, they were able to begin the data synthesis process. The researcher reviewed the data analysis for each data collection method, memo, and field notes for triangulation purposes.

The notebook of field notes and memos were typed and placed into categories. Field notes were organized according to major topics (Yin, 2014). The previously coded data, matrixes, and themes/patterns were compared to Tinto's integration framework (1993). A new matrix was created to categorize the common themes, phrases, and related quotes in the data collection.

The data was divided into two separate documents: the database of evidence and the researcher's report. This method ensured reliability of the data collected and allowed a peer to review it for validity. The chain of evidence did not only consist of documents and key phrases, but it also contained the circumstances in which the evidence was collected. It included the time and place of each interview.

Once all the evidence was reviewed, the researcher engaged in pattern matching. If the researcher's prediction is like the patterns identified in the study, then it can be assumed that there is some internal validity (Yin, 2014). Common themes, phrases, and responses were grouped, color coded, and then listed in a table. Qualitative research uses inductive data analysis to find meaning from the critical themes that emerge out of the data (Patton, 1990).

The next step taken consisted of the researcher engaged in is explanation building. The data was reviewed and compared to Tinto's integration framework (1993) to look for commonalities in retention rates among nontraditional students. Finally, the researcher compiled all the findings in a report and provided tables for an illustrative description.

Trustworthiness

The trustworthiness of this study was carried out through credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated these aspects of the study must be established to have trustworthiness in the study. Peer reviews were conducted to ensure it and all ethical practices were conducted. A peer reviewed the procedures to ensure it followed the guidelines of the IRB. The data was kept confidential and discarded after completion. There was minimal risk to participants and no bias was present. The interview questions were not invasive. The following information is provided to help ensure the researcher was following Lincoln and Guba's standards of trustworthiness.

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) stated that credibility is established through confidence in the truth of the findings. All the information gathered was recorded electronically and reviewed at least twice to confirm the information is accurate. Member checks were conducted to verify the responses' meanings by repeating the recording to ensure the recorded responses were accurate. All three data collection data were coded the same way for credibility and compared for accuracy. The researcher engaged in peer debriefing by reviewing the information with a peer to ensure the findings were not biased.

Triangulation occurred through the interview questions, journal entries, and questionnaire responses by examining them all to make sure each participant's responses were aligned (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The researcher made notes about the observations made while observing the participants in their normal environment. Facial expressions of participants were recorded in field notes, along with the tone of the participant during the interviews. The notes were compared to the data collected from the interviews on recordings and journal entries from participants to check for commonalities.

Transferability

The data was recorded then transferred into codes. It was compared to other findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) define transferability as the ability to be applicable to other contexts. I listened to the recordings and took notes. The notes were very detailed, and color coded to find themes. The data was peer reviewed, and codes will be compared to themes. The data was documented correctly, and all pseudonyms were provided. Thick rich descriptions were utilized to ensure transferability and deeper understandings. The information was compared to the

research questions to determine which student support services were helpful and what interventions can be put in place to bring student connectedness.

Dependability

Dependability is defined as having findings that can be repeated and are consistent (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Confirmability is when the study is free of bias and is neutral (Guba, 1981). I ensured the study was free of bias by selecting participants that I had no prior relationship with. All participants were given the same questions and interview stipulations. All participants were selected according to the same criteria and all the data was coded the exact same.

A peer reviewed the data and transcripts for confirmability. The literature review and theoretical framework guided the study. A committee was established to ensure the trustworthiness of this study throughout the audit trials. The researcher was straightforward when recruiting participants. A variety of data collection techniques were also used to ensure dependability. Systematic procedures were also followed.

Confirmability

Confirmability is related to how the findings of the research are shaped without bias and the motive for the study (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Audi trials were scheduled to ensure the confirmability of the study. Reflexivity is when your conversation with the participant influences their response. The researcher did not engage in a conversational nature that would allow the participant to know their perspective on the questions asked.

The researcher was aware of long interviews that can be a threat to credibility but also show sensitivity by not having an extremely short interview. The interview time of each participant was monitored to show continuity in the research (Yin, 2014). The interview

questions, journal prompts, and questionnaire were aligned with the research questions to ensure triangulation. Peer reviews were also utilized to ensure accuracy and dependability.

Ethical Considerations

The researcher sought IRB and college approval before beginning the study. The participants were read the consent form prior to the interview and allowed to ask the researcher questions. All participants were over the age of 18 and will be provided pseudonyms to protect their identity in the case study. The site of the study has a pseudonym as well to protect its identity. The recordings were stored in a lock box that only I will have access to, and the filmed material will be erased after 3 years after the review board approval to reduce breach of confidentiality. That includes interview, journal prompt, and questionnaire data retrieved from the participants.

Field notes were stored in a locked box and will be discarded as well in three years. There was minimal risk to all participants in this study. The researcher had no bias and no personal gain from the study. Participation in the study was voluntary and they can withdraw at any time with no obligations. The researcher used a self-reflection strategy to ensure the study was conducted ethically. All data collected was factual and there will be no plagiarism of information.

Summary

The intention of this chapter was to familiarize the reader with the reasoning behind the method selection. It also explains the researcher's role in the study and provides the background information as well. The data collection, sample, and data analysis were discussed to ensure that the reader has a concise understanding of the research process and procedures. It explains the qualitative design and the case study approach used to discover themes in student retention rates of nontraditional students. I then used this data to make connections with Tinto's integration

framework (1993). The trustworthiness and ethical considerations for the study were mentioned as well.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

Overview

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. This chapter contains descriptions of the participants and the findings of the study conducted. Data was analyzed and categorized into themes. The findings were used to create tables and charts to illustrate the data collected. This was followed by the research question responses.

Participants

The participants in this study were chosen through random sampling and the snowball method. All participants attended Wayne Community College and were older than 24 years of age. There were seven full-time and three part-time student participants. Pseudonyms were used to protect the participants' identity.

Eighty percent of the participants were female and 80% were full time students. Sixty percent were between the ages of 35 to 44. Fifty percent were White or Caucasian, 40% Black or African American, and 10% were Hispanic or Latino (see Appendix K). Table 1 contains demographic information on the participants in this study collected through the questionnaire.

Table 1College Student Participants

Student Participant	Age	Ethnicity	Gender	Part-time or Full-time
Amy	35-44	Black or African American	Female	Full-time
Karen	45-54	Black or African American	Female	Part-time

Joey	35-44	Hispanic or Latino	Male	Part-time
Tina	35-44	Black or African American	Female	Full-time
Mike	35-44	White or Caucasian	Male	Full-time
Hanna	25-34	White or Caucasian	Female	Full-time
Dina	35-44	Black or African American	Female	Full-time
Kate	25-34	White or Caucasian	Female	Full-time
Sara	35-44	White or Caucasian	Female	Part-time
Macy	25-34	White or Caucasian	Female	Full-time

Amy

Amy was a full-time student who worked over 50 hours a week and is a single mother. She is African American and in her early forties. Most of her classes were online. She graduated the previous semester and obtained an associate degree. She failed the same online biology course several times before she took a seated version. She was unaware of most of the student support services offered. Amy stated, "You don't know, what you don't know." Amy wishes she had known about the services offered and feels they could have helped improve her college experience.

Amy stated that online students are "forgotten, out of sight, out of mind", "No one sees you, not even the teachers." The students found it hard to find time to meet with professors during work hours, how to find out where to go, and who to speak with. It was an inconvenience and caused her to lose pay. Everyone bounced her to the next person. She never found the right

answer to your questions. Amy felt that the college should, "send emails to personal emails due to students not utilizing school emails as much."

Karen

Karen was a fulltime student who was working on her third associate degree. She was in her fifties and African American. She ran her own business from home and was a proud grandmother. Her age, early 50s, was her biggest challenge in school with the online material and lack of technology knowledge. She enjoyed her college experience overall.

Karen wishes the college advisors knew more about their students' capabilities going into classes to help them register for courses where they have a chance to succeed. She stated, "No need for an advisor if they do not know their students." Karen also felt that some of her instructors were not as helpful as they could be if they were more familiar with the content they teach. She would get redirected to technical support for content area questions. She commented, "What help can they be"?

Joey

Joey was Puerto Rican and in his late thirties. Joey graduated the prior semester with an associate degree in cyber security. He took the bulk of his classes online. He was in seated classes but when he began his degree program, COVID occurred and then he was placed in all online classes. This was a very difficult challenge for him to overcome due to not having access to his teacher in person for course work assistance. However, he did by putting in extra work to learn the material. He is currently enrolled in another degree program at the college. He is a business owner and works full-time during the day and he has a family he supports financially.

Joey enjoyed his college experience and just wished the college had more ways to connect the students socially. Joey made several comments on how to improve student

connectedness, "We live in a small town, and it would be good to see the college have more student activities and meet and greets for likeminded people who can get their story out there and when you meet people you learn." He also felt, "having more programs like that it would go a long way."

Tina

Tina had a "pretty good" college experience. Tina was African American and in her forties. She was a full-time online student, had a full-time job, and is a mother of 6. Tina felt that colleges should offer "more affordable classes and books to people who really want to take college courses and cannot get financial aid."

Tina often found it difficult to purchase all her textbooks at the beginning of each semester. "I paid for school out of pocket so trying to buy my books on time was difficult between pay days and I did not want to miss any assignments," Tina stated. She was pregnant while completing her coursework and it made it difficult for her to "get into the swing of things." She often had to stay up at night to complete assignments. She stated, "I fixed it by making sure I wrote everything down and stayed on top of my work."

Mike

Mike graduated this past spring and took all his classes online full time. He said he had a "good overall experience" in college. Mike was Caucasian and in his late thirties, early forties.

Mike worked full-time and was a father. His biggest challenge was "balancing life and classes."

He "overcame it by putting in more time." Mike felt there was "No way they could improve it," when asked about student support services. When Mike was asked about his relationship with his prior instructors he commented, "Most of them, 90% were readily available to provide answers and support; others were not as available and made it difficult to complete some of the courses."

Hanna

Hanna is Caucasian and in her late twenties, early thirties. She was a full-time student, mother, caretaker of her sick mother, and held a job. She lost her mother a month prior to the interview and the conclusion of her spring semester. When she was asked about her biggest challenge in college she stated, "I was homeless in September of 2021. I had to do my homework in the parking lot of the college." The only resources Hanna was aware of when she was homeless was, "the free Wi-Fi in the parking lot." Hanna also felt "The achievement coach should be checking on you periodically, I had one assigned to me in August of 2021 and I have not heard from him since."

Dina

Dina was an African American female in her late thirties, early forties. She was a single mom who took most of her classes online. Dina enjoyed all her classes. She took some online and some seated classes. She said, "I loved her to death" when asked how she felt about her advisor. Dina felt all the resources at the college were sufficient. When asked about her relationship with her prior instructors, Dina stated, "very supportive, stayed in contact, emailed me if I missed an assignment or [reminded] to log in on time."

Kate

Kate is a Caucasian woman in her late twenties, early thirties. She owned a school and just completed her second associate degree this past spring. Kate was a full-time student. She took some seated, online, and hybrid classes. Kate struggled with finding academic support after normal daytime hours. Since she was a mother and business owner, she completed her work at night when no support was available. Kate stated that she wished there was "more availability other than the day."

She purchased her school while she was attending college and she prioritized her business over schooling. Kate would delegate tasks to her husband to free up her time to complete schoolwork. She also wishes there was more interaction with her peers in her class. She stated it was, "very frustrated and lonely" due to her not interacting with her peers and unaware of student support services offered. Kate felt "Discussion forums were very important" but some classes had none with no contact with other students in "multiple classes" the entire semester online. She felt more discussion boards and group projects would be beneficial in helping her connect to her peers in her classes. One of her prior teachers would, "in the first five minutes of class [have everyone] talk with your fellow classmates." Kate stated, "Having relationships with other students in your class makes you want to go to class" and "makes you want to grow."

Sara

Sara was a Caucasian student in her late thirties. She worked part time, went to school part time and was raising two small children full-time. Sara took mostly online classes but did take a few seated courses. When asked about her college experience, she stated, "It was difficult in the beginning since I was out of school for so long." Sara previously was in the military and recently separated from her husband.

Sara took a self-paid class that helps teach study skills and educate students on the resources available to them. She was unaware of these resources until she took the class. Sara stated, "Later, I found out I was in the wrong program and wrong classes than my desired career. I was in early childcare development versus teaching." She had no idea who her achievement coach was until then. Sara said, "They now touch base with me every month at least."

Macy

Macy was a full-time student who graduated the previous semester. This was her second degree with this college. The first time was in person and this time all her courses were online. Macy is Caucasian and in her late twenties, early thirties. Macy's biggest challenge was balancing work, home, two kids, and animals. She got an agenda and was able to see it all. That allowed her to "mix home, work, kids, and school all on the same page to help schedule a balance."

Macy wished she received, "more communication initiated from the college or instructors." She felt that the administration and admissions should have more communication with the students. Macy also believed their approach should be personalized with an increased level of communication to help you know what to expect in the beginning and how things will progress. Macy felt there should be Google meets to discuss any questions in the evenings to make it more personal.

Results

This qualitative exploratory case study involved the analysis of data collected from nontraditional student participants at the community colleges and potential connections between the nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services offered at the community college, their connectedness to their institution, and their institutional satisfaction. The case studies included data from interviews, questionnaires, and journal prompts. Triangulation of data was through the collection methods and member checks were conducted. Tinto's (1993) integration framework was used to code data, matrixes, and tabulating themes/patterns. The themes are supported through narratives and raw data. The identified themes were supported through participant quotes provided in listed tables.

SurveyMonkey responses are included to provide visuals of the data collected in the form of figures.

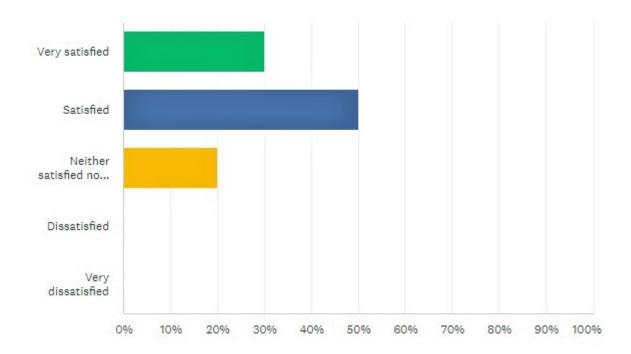
Questionnaire Results

Participants were asked to complete a questionnaire through SurveyMonkey to assess their perception of their college experiences and student support services offered. The questionnaire was not timed, and participant responses were anonymous. The following questions were answered by the participants (a) What is your age?; (b) What is your gender; (c) What is your race?; (d) How helpful would it be to receive text messages from your institution about academic reminders and available resources?; (e) How satisfied are you with your college experience?; (f) How satisfied are you with the support services offered?; (g) How satisfied are you with the support services at your college?; (i) How responsive are the student support services available to you at your institution?; (j) Which if any of the following student support services would you wish you had known about or had more information about?

Figure 2 shows the distribution of how satisfied the nontraditional students were with their college experience overall. The participants were asked "How satisfied are you with your college experience?" The bar graph below had color-coded responses of green, dark blue, and gold for the level of participants' satisfaction.

Figure 2

Participants' Satisfaction with their College Experience



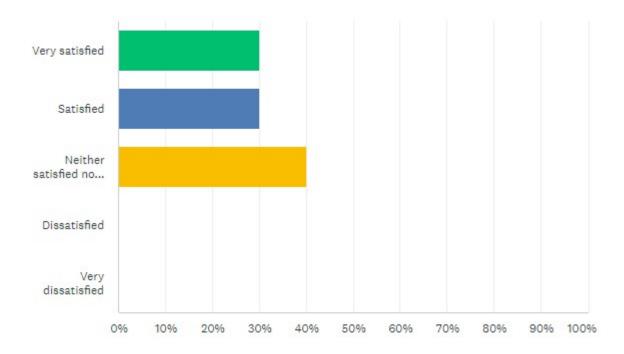
Thirty percent were very satisfied with their experiences at the institution. Half of the participants were satisfied with their experience and 20% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Student satisfaction with their institution helps them persist (Tinto, 1993). Spady's (1970) first undergraduate dropout process model suggests a link between institutional satisfaction and institutional commitment. This response is in alignment with Bean's (1980, 1982) theory that suggests student persistence is dependent on institution satisfaction.

Figure 3 illustrates the nontraditional students' satisfaction of the student support services offered. The participants were asked "How satisfied are you with the support services offered?"

The bar graph below had color-coded responses of green, dark blue, and gold for participants' satisfaction.

Figure 3

Participants' Satisfaction of Student Support Services Offered

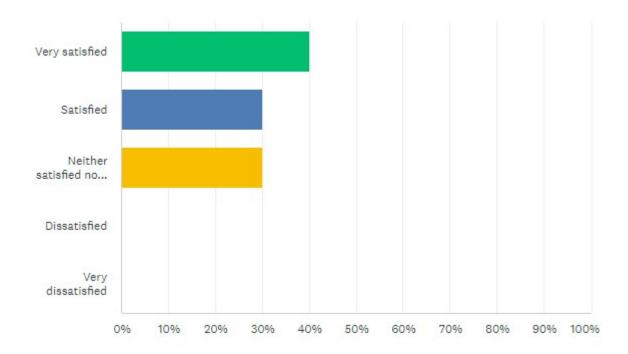


Thirty percent were very satisfied with the student support services offered at their institution. Half of the participants were satisfied with the student support services offered and 20% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Student support services help students feel connected to their institution and help them persist (Tinto, 1993). Nontraditional students need special resources that are aligned with their needs socially and academically (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Figure 4 shows how satisfied the nontraditional students were with the student support services they received at the community college. Participants were asked "How satisfied are you with the support services you received?" The bar graph below has green, dark blue, and gold color-coded responses for participants' satisfaction.

Figure 4

Participants' Satisfaction with the Student Support Services Received

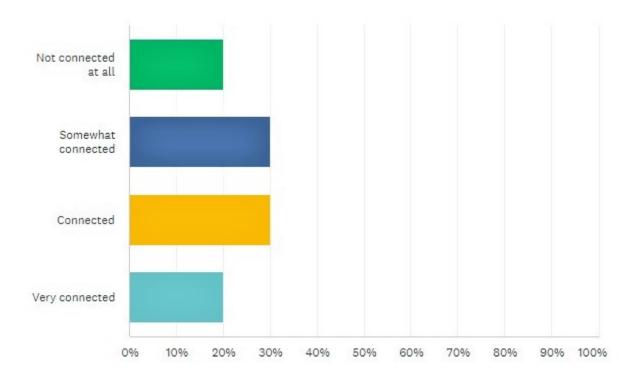


Forty percent of the participants were very satisfied with the student support services they received. Thirty percent were satisfied with them and the other 30% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the student support services they received. Nontraditional students have also had a need for additional academic support (Bennett et al., 2021). Student support Services at colleges provide nontraditional students assistance to help their retention rates (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Tinto, 1993).

Figure 5 shows how connected the nontraditional students felt when using the student support services offered by the community college. Participants were asked "How connected did you feel using the student support services at your college?" The bar graph below has green dark blue, gold, and light blue color-coded responses for participants' connectedness.

Figure 5

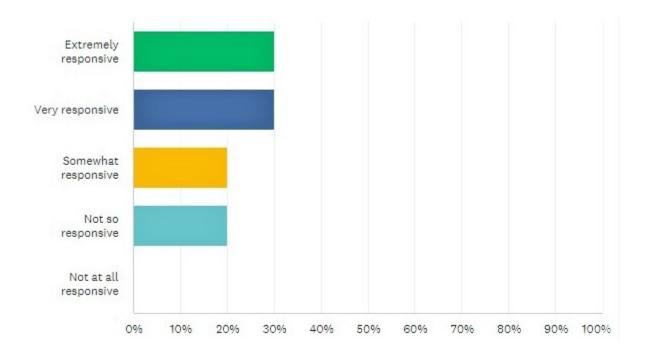
Participants' Connectedness



Twenty percent of the participants felt they were not connected at all. Thirty percent were somewhat connected and 30% were connected. Only 20% felt they were very connected to their institution through their student support services. Nontraditional students need special resources that are aligned with their needs socially and academically (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993). Student support services help students feel the connection necessary for successful degree completion (Karp et al., 2010).

Figure 6 provides information on how responsive the student support services at the college were to the nontraditional students at the community college. Participants were asked "How responsive are the student support services available to you at your institution?" The bar graph below has green dark blue, gold, and light blue color-coded responses for the responsiveness of the student support services.

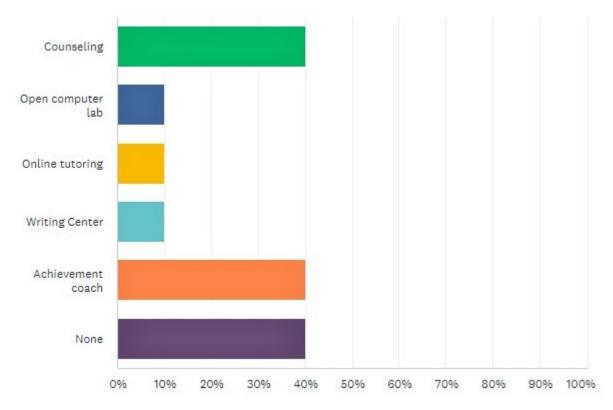
Figure 6
Student Support Services' Responsiveness



Thirty percent of the participants felt that the student support services offered at the college were extremely responsive and 30% felt they were very responsive. Twenty percent of felt the student support services were somewhat responsive and 20% responded they were not so responsive. Students can feel connected through student support services, and it can help them persist (Tinto, 1997). Berger and Braxton (1998) found that an institution's characteristics of the organization and the student's ability to interact with their academic environment impacts the retention rates.

Figure 7 is a graph of the student support services that nontraditional students wished they knew more about. Participants were asked "Which if any of the following student support services would you wish you had known about or had more information about?" The question listed all the possible student support services offered at the community college the participants attended. The bar graph below has green dark blue, gold, light blue, orange, and purple color-coded responses for the student support services the participants wanted more information on.





Forty percent of the participants wanted more information on the counseling services offered at the college and 10% wanted more information on the open computer lab. Ten n percent wanted more information on online tutoring and the writing center. Forty percent of the participants wanted more information on academic coaches and 40 % did not need any additional information on the student support services offered. Remenick (2019) mentioned that nontraditional students are not using available services due accessibility and nontraditional students have a host of other responsibilities that can hinder them from being aware of the student support services offered. Nontraditional students are unaware of all the student support services offered and utilizing them can increase their institutional satisfaction (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993).

Interview Results

Ten participants were interviewed at various times chosen by the participant. The interviews were recorded and transcribed. The following questions were asked in the interview (a) Please provide me with a brief narrative about your college experience. Include your current academic status and if you took any online courses.; (b) If you could suggest three resources that you wish the college could provide for you, what would they be?; (c) What was your biggest challenge in college that affected your success and how did you overcome it?; (d) What resources at the college were you aware of?; (e) Explain how you think the college could have better assisted you? (f) Describe your relationship with your academic advisor.; (g) Describe your relationship with your school counselor.; (h) How would you describe your relationships with your prior instructors?; (i) Did you feel that they were supportive and accessible to you?; (j) How could student connectedness be improved at your school?; (k) How do you suggest the college inform you of the services available?

Some participants felt disconnected from their institution. Several stated they were satisfied with their college experience due to their strong relationships with their advisor and academic coaches. Only a few participants knew who their school counselor was or knew one existed. There was a commonly expressed need for additional support in the means of late tutoring hours, financial resources, and childcare.

Journal Results

Links were sent to participants to complete their journal prompts through SurveyMonkey. They answered the following two questions (a) Describe your level of student connectedness at the college and (b) Describe three resources you felt were most beneficial in college and how did you utilize them? If you did not use any resources, why did you not use them? The most used

resources were academic coaches and advisors. Those who had positive experiences with their academic coaches and advisors were satisfied with their college experience. Several felt they were not strongly connected to their institution and felt a need for more communication between faculty and students.

Themes

Themes were found by analyzing the participants' interviews, questionnaires, and journal responses for triangulation purposes. Interviews were transcribed and then highlighted using a color-coding system of matching ideas and key terminology. The relatable data was then placed in a matrix with corresponding themes. That data was then compared to Tinto's (1993) social integration model for validity and discrepancies. The following sections discuss those findings in detail and are accompanied by detailed tables.

Theme 1: Nontraditional Student Connectedness is Not Strong within the College

Table 2 provides data collection in three different forms: questionnaire responses, journal prompts responses, and interview quotes. Evidence in this chart proves that nontraditional student connectedness is not strong within the community college and students need more knowledgeable, consistent faculty members. Students also want more interaction within online courses.

Table 2
Student Connectedness

Theme 1	Sub Themes	Questionnaire	Journal	Interview Quotes
		Responses	Prompt	
			Responses	
Nontraditional	Students Need	Student	Sara wrote,	Kate stated she felt
Student	More	Connectedness:	"Before	"very frustrated
Connectedness is	Knowledgeable	Not connected	taking an in-	and lonely."
Not Strong within	and Consistent	at all 20.00%	person class,	
the College	Faculty Members		however, I	Karen's quote,

Students Want More Interaction Within Online Settings	would have described it as not connected."	"Advisors should have training on how to meet the needs of their students", "no need for an advisor if
	"I'm decently connected. I can reach	they do not know their students."
	anyone through email. But very seldom does anyone reach out to me." Kate wrote, "I did my classes and that was it. I might have made one or two connections in each class. Usually not."	Joey commented, "to have more hands-on experiences and use resources they will be using in their career field, more one-on-one tutors, going to tournaments or having more clubs available to join." Sara stated, "Students meet in the beginning of class to do introductions."
		Macy said the college needed, "more
		communication initiated from the college or instructors."

Nontraditional students are somewhat connected to their institution; however, it could be improved. When asked how student connectedness could be improved at her school, Kate stated, "Discussion forums are very helpful, but some classes had none and no contact with other students the entire semester online" and she felt "very frustrated and lonely." Twenty percent of the participants felt they were not connected at all to their institution.

Students Need More Knowledgeable and Consistent Faculty Members

Academic advisors and coaches should be more familiar with the students and resources offered. Academic advisors and coaches should have consistent communication with their students. When Karen was asked to describe her relationship with her academic advisor she stated, "Advisors should have training on how to meet the needs of their students" and there is "no need for an advisor if they do not know their students." When Kate was asked about her relationship with her school counselor she replied, "The counselor reached out to check on me for the first time a month before my classes ended but I said I was fine and didn't need help."

Students Want More Interaction within Online Settings

Nontraditional students do not get enough interaction in online courses and do not feel as connected. When the participants were asked how to improve student connectedness at their school the following comments were made: Joey commented, "to have more hands-on experiences and use resources they will be using in their career field, more one-on-one tutors, going to tournaments or having more clubs available to join." This suggested interaction can assist students with connecting to their institution academically and socially. Sara stated, "Students should meet in the beginning of class to do introductions." Macy said the college needed, "more communication initiated from the college or instructors." Online students also need more interaction with their academic advisors and coaches. Faculty members can stream online through platforms like Microsoft teams, Google meets, and Zoom.

Theme 2: Nontraditional Students Need Additional Student Support Services

Table 3 contains information on theme two. It contains data collection responses that align with them for triangulation purposes. Nontraditional students need additional student

support services and flexible scheduling for these services in community colleges that align more with the nontraditional schedules.

Table 3Additional Support

Theme 2	Questionnaire Responses	Journal Prompt Responses	Interview Quotes
Nontraditional Students Need Additional Student Support Services	Student Satisfaction: Very satisfied: 30.00% Satisfaction of Student Support Services Offered: Very satisfied 30.00%	Tina wrote, "there should be more resources for affordable classes and books like a voucher to make it more cost efficient, it's pricey out of pocket." Amy wrote, "I didn't use tutoring because of my work schedule and my long commute. I would've needed tutoring outside of those hours." Hanna wrote, "The only two I feel are useful are the "ask Billy" section in noodle and the free Wi-Fi in the parking lot." Sara wrote, "the college accepts outside kids, so the daycare fills up with no spots available and it's expensive."	Amy stated, "Send emails to personal emails due to students not utilizing school emails as much." Karen stated, "Beginning the classes have a meet and greet on campus in a room for students to help with future discussion assignments since you don't know who you are talking with." Sara stated, "We need more events, to bring all the different people together and they can interact." Macy stated, "Online classes need frequent email communications, automated calls, and personal."

Nontraditional students need additional support to meet their work hours and individual needs. Thirty percent of the participants were very satisfied with the student support services offered and 30% were very satisfied with their Participants were asked to describe three resources they felt were most beneficial in college, how they utilized them, and if they did not use any resources, why did they not use them? Hanna wrote, "The only two I feel are useful are the "ask Billy" section in noodle and the free Wi-Fi in the parking lot." Amy wrote, "I didn't use tutoring because of my work schedule and my long commute. I would've needed tutoring outside of those hours."

When Sara was asked if you could suggest three resources that you wish the college could provide for you, what would they be? She stated, "The college accepts outside kids, so the daycare fills up with no spots available and it's expensive." Sara had two kids and there were no more spots left at the college daycare since children of parents who do not attend the college have their children enrolled there as well. Sara wishes that the college students received priority to enroll their children in childcare on the college campus. Tina said, "There should be more resources for affordable classes and books like a voucher to make it more cost efficient, it's pricey out of pocket.

Theme 3: Nontraditional Students with Strong Academic Relationships Were Satisfied with Their College Experience

Table 4 contains quotes that support this theme that nontraditional students with strong academic relationships were satisfied with their college experience. Strong academic relationships include those between students and advisors. Below the table is a detailed description of the theme comprised from questionnaires responses, journal prompts responses, and interview quotes collected from the participants.

 Table 4

 Academic Relationships

Theme 3	Questionnaire Responses	Journal Prompt Responses	Interview Quotes
Nontraditional Students With Strong Academic Relationships Were Satisfied With Their College Experience	Satisfaction of Student Support Services Received: Very satisfied 40.00%	Sara wrote "Achievement coach, having this resource has been a saving grace in my college experience so far. My coach helps me with planning my classes, has helped me enter the correct program of study, and helps monitor my progress." Kate wrote "My advisor was phenomenal. She really encouraged me and made me feel like I was capable of balancing school and life."	Macy stated, "I had two, [academic advisors] during the one degree. The second was decent and did what I needed. The first one asked about my goals, personalized experience, my plan, how many hours I wanted to take, let her know it was all online, listened to my plan and helped me determine how to fit my personal schedule and in an expedited way. She was able to help me map out my next year and a half." Sara stated, "my academic coach made a huge difference in my success."

Students who had positive relationships with their academic advisors and coaches were satisfied with their college experience. When Macy was asked about her relationship with her academic advisor she stated, "I had two during the one degree. The second was decent and did what I needed. The first one asked about my goals, personalized experience, my plan, how many hours I wanted to take, let me know it was all online, listened to my plan and helped me determine how to fit my personal schedule and in an expedited way. She was able to help me map out my next year and a half." Kate said, "My advisor was phenomenal. She really

encouraged me and made me feel like I was capable of balancing school and life." Kate had just graduated from college. When Sara was asked about her relationship with her school counselor she stated, "I didn't know her, but my academic coach made a huge difference in her success." Forty percent of the participants reported that they were very satisfied with the college support services they received.

Theme 4: Nontraditional Students Have Personal Factors That Challenge Their Success in College

Table 5 contains a list of personal factors and challenges those nontraditional students faced while attending community college. Participants' questionnaires, journal prompts, and interview quotes were combined to show the meanings of the theme found. The table is then followed by a narrative description.

Table 5

Personal Factors & Challenges

Theme 4	Questionnaire Responses	Journal Prompt Responses	Interview Quotes
Nontraditional Students Have Personal Factors That Challenge Their Success in College	Responsiveness of Student Support Services: Not so responsive 20.00%	Tina wrote, "paid for school out of pocket so trying to buy my book on time was difficult between pay days and I did not want to miss any assignments."	Kate stated, "I was purchasing a school" and she would have to "work at night when kids are asleep." Hanna said, "I am currently taking a summer break due to my mom passing" and she was "homeless" when she started college in 2021.
			Karen commented that her, "age was the biggest challenge."

Nontraditional students encounter financial hardships and have personal responsibilities that can challenge their success in college. Participants were asked, what was their biggest challenge in college that affected your success and how did you overcome it? Kate stated, "I was purchasing a school" and she would have to "work at night when kids are asleep." Karen commented that her "age was the biggest challenge." Tina wrote, "I paid for school out of pocket so trying to buy my book on time was difficult between pay days and I did not want to miss any assignments." Twenty percent of the participants reported that the student support services were not so responsive.

Outlier Data and Findings

Findings that were not expected by the researcher but important to the common good are considered an outlier. Some themes were developed based on the data collected that did not align with the original research questions. The researcher found the data collected important to the readers. These findings were considered outliers. Housing insecurities accounts for 14% of community college students (Soika, 2021).

Outlier Finding

Hanna was attending Wayne Community College in September of 2021. Hanna reported that she was homeless (see Appendix I). She said she "was unaware of any resources available other than free Wi-Fi." Hanna would complete her work in her car with the free Wi-Fi when she was homeless. Hanna also stated that, "The achievement coach should be checking on you periodically, I had one assigned to me in August of 2021 and has not heard from him since."

Research Question Responses

The following includes responses to the central research question and sub questions. Data were collected and analyzed according to the original research questions. Quotes and numerical

data were included in the responses to verify the validity of the study. Participant interviews, survey responses, and journal entries helped answer the research questions. The central research question and sub questions helped the researcher understand the nontraditional students' perceptions of the support services they received at the college and their overall satisfaction.

Central Research Question

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution? The participants' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution were either satisfied or indifferent. Thirty percent reported they were very satisfied, 50 percent were satisfied, and 20 percent were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied. Mike stated, "I had a good experience overall; I do not know how they could improve honestly." Mike had a good relationship with his advisor and was very satisfied with this college experience. Amy stated that when she went to the college to ask questions she would "get bounced around and not ever really getting the answer or the support you needed for whatever the situation, so then a lot of time you say forget it, I will figure it out on my own." Participants commented that student connection could be improved, and additional support would be beneficial.

Sub Question One

What are nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services? The study identified that 30% of the participants were very satisfied with the services offered and 40% were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the services they received. The data showed 30% of the participants felt the student support services were extremely responsive and 20% thought they were not so responsive. 40% of the participants wished they had known more about the counseling services offered and 40% of the participants wished they had known more about the achievement coach.

Sara was asked about which student support services she used and felt were beneficial. She wrote, "Achievement Coach. Having this resource has been a saving grace in my college experience so far. My coach helps me with planning my classes, has helped me enter the correct program of study, and helps monitor my progress." However, Kate commented that, "The counselor reached out to check on me for the first time a month before my classes ended but I said I was fine and didn't need help." She also stated that it was "frustrating" since she "had no idea about her until then." Karen stated when she asked for academic support, "I was always directed towards technical support and it wasn't that type of issue, it was an assignment issue." While several students had good experiences with the student support services offered, some students encountered difficulties.

Sub Question Two

What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of connectedness to their institutions? There was not a strong level of student connectedness at the institution among this research study's participants. Twenty percent of the participants reported they felt very connected, thirty percent felt connected, thirty percent were somewhat connected, and twenty percent were not connected at all. Amy wrote, "I attended college as an online student. This impacted my level of student connectedness. There were no small groups formed to study or just to hang out. That being said, my level of student connectedness was nonexistent."

Sixty percent of the participants felt that text messages would be beneficial for reminders and information on resources available to them (see Appendix J). Sara wrote, "I would describe it as 'connected' to 'very connected' [in seated classes]. Before taking an in-person class, however, I would have described it as not connected." Overall, online students felt less

connected than students in seated courses. Students with relationships with their advisors and instructors felt more connected.

Sub Question Three

What could student support services offer nontraditional students to increase their retention rates? Several participants suggested new ways student support services could assist them. Kate suggested a "24-hour helpline for online tutors." Sara stated that, "a separate orientation course for someone who hasn't been in school for a long time" would be helpful to nontraditional students. Sara also stated that she had a need for childcare. Several participants suggested that there be additional childcare services since the daycare on campus is open to the public and often full.

Tina commented that there should be "more affordable classes" or "funding for books" to assist students who do not qualify for financial aid and are self-paying. Hanna felt that there should be "more flexibility for those who work. Labs are during the day, but you must take the day off to attend." Several participants suggested that there be additional childcare services since the daycare on campus is open to the public and often full. Hanna also reported that she felt she needed, "more zoom meetings and discussion boards, and ways to communicate with each other." Joey suggested that students should be able, "to have more hands-on experience and use resources they will be using in their career field."

Summary

This chapter highlighted the key themes and findings in the research conducted on nontraditional students. Ten participants were selected to complete their studies at Wayne Community College. The interviews were transcribed and analyzed for themes. The researcher listened to the interviews recordings several times to ensure accurate transcriptions. Common

themes were highlighted, and color coded through tabulation. The surveys and journal responses were analyzed as well then compared to the themes.

The themes were categorized into matrixes with supporting quotes. The research questions guided the analytical process. The four main themes found in this study were:

Nontraditional Student Connectedness is Not Strong within the College, Nontraditional Students

Need Additional Student Support Services, Nontraditional Students with Strong Academic Relationships Were Satisfied with Their College Experience, and Nontraditional Students Have Personal Factors That Challenge Their Success in College. Only 20% of the participants felt very connected to their institution and 60% felt that text messages would be extremely helpful from the institution about academic reminders and resources available.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Overview

The purpose of this exploratory case study was to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. Tinto's integration framework guided this study to test the connectedness and its association with retention rates of the students. This chapter will discuss the researcher's interpretation of the findings and a summary of the thematic findings. The implications for policy or practice will be mentioned too. The theoretical and empirical implications will be explained followed by the limitations and delimitations. The conclusions, recommendations for future research, and summary are provided.

Discussion

A thematic analysis was conducted on the data collected. The themes were then compared to Tinto's (1993) integration framework, the literature review presented in chapter two, and current literature related to the themes found. Tinto's (1993) integration framework insists that students persist when they feel connected to their institution socially and academically. The data collected was in alignment with Tinto's theory. It provided the nontraditional students' perceptions of the student support services they received and their overall college experience. The following is included in this section (a) Interpretation of Findings; (b) Implications for Policy or Practice; (c) Theoretical and Empirical Implications; (d) Limitations and Delimitations; and (e) Recommendations for Future Research. The findings discuss the researcher's interpretations. Implications for policy and practice provide additional support for nontraditional learners in this research study. Empirical and theoretical implications sources were updated to align with the raw data in the findings. Limitations and delimitations of

this study are provided. Recommendations for future research and the conclusion completes this chapter.

Interpretation of Findings

Four research questions were addressed in this study: What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of their overall satisfaction with the institution? What are nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services? What are nontraditional community college students' perceptions of connectedness to their institutions? What could student support services offer nontraditional students to increase their retention rates?

Four themes were identified in this study: 1) nontraditional student connectedness is not strong within the college, 2) non-traditional students need additional student support services, 3) nontraditional students with strong academic relationships are satisfied with their college experience, and 4) nontraditional students have personal factors that challenge their success in college. One sub theme developed was nontraditional students need more knowledgeable and consistent faculty members.

Findings showed that students are more satisfied with their institution when they are connected socially and academically (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) framework suggests these connections helps students persist. Participant quotes support connectedness with academic support staff and students. These findings align with prior and current literature (Karp et al., 2010; Park & Robinson, 2022; Tinto, 1975, 1993). Data show a need for additional academic and social connections among nontraditional. Nontraditional students have personal responsibility that affects their connectedness at their institution (Baugus, 2020; Prashad, 2023; Shatila, 2023). Summary of Thematic Findings

Students want more interaction within online settings and within their seated classes. Communication needs to be increased among staff and students to ensure students are aware of the support services offered at the institution. Nontraditional students need additional resources. Childcare and additional financial assistance is needed as well to help nontraditional students persist. The findings gathered in this study prove correct to Tinto's (1993) framework. Students need to be connected to their school socially and academically to persist satisfactorily. When students have negative experiences within the institution, they tend to withdraw from the institution (Tinto, 1997).

Nontraditional students are not connected. Nontraditional students' perceptions of the support services they received at the institution were analyzed to determine the connection between their satisfaction and their success. Students connected to their institution and peers helps their persistence. Tinto's (1993) social integration model suggests that students persist when they are connected to their institution and satisfied. Social connectedness helps students manage their stress and motivate each other to keep going (Shatila, 2023). Social presence is especially important for nontraditional students in an online setting (Glazier, 2016; Jinhee et al., 2020).

General interactions with staff members help students become connected to their institution (Johnson, 2021). Twenty percent of the participants felt very connected to their institution and 20% felt not connected at all. Jinhee et al. (2020) wrote that their research confirmed that online course satisfaction was linked with the relationship the students had with their instructor and how often they communicated. Amy, an online student stated, "my level of student connectedness was nonexistent." Tinto's theory (1993) aligns with the theory that students need to be connected to faculty members to increase their retention rates.

Student support services interventions needed. The lack of teaching staff availability and limited hours for the student support services offered hindered the satisfaction of the nontraditional students at the community college. Students do not have enough exposure to support services offered (Gill, 2021). Only 40% of the participants were very satisfied with the support services offered at the community college. Forty percent were very satisfied with the student support services they received.

Additionally, only 30% of the participants felt the student support services available to them were very responsive. Kate stated she needed "more availability other than the day." Some students referred to student support services as "hoop jumping" (Sallee & Cox, 2019). DeShields et al. (2005) believed that student satisfaction is closely related to them having a positive experience in college and that this theory fuels a market-oriented institution to satisfy the wants and needs of its customers. Student support services need to be tailored towards nontraditional students to help them persist and information needs to be provided to these students to increase their institutional satisfaction (Bean, 1980; 1982; Burke, 2019; Spady, 1970; 1971; Tinto, 1975; 1993).

Academic relationships help persistence. Students with strong academic relationships were satisfied with their experience. Academic advisors and coaches help students obtain a positive college experience and persist (Park & Robinson, 2022). Dina, Kate, Joey, Tina, and Mike all had positive relationships with their academic advisors. Mike stated, "I had a very good relationship with her, she would respond and provide me with any help he needed." Forty percent of the participants wished they had known more about the counseling services and academic coach. Alzen et al. (2021) found that students who received coaching had higher GPAs, student retention, and credits earned.

Macy had two advisors during her college experience. Macy stated, "The second was decent and did what I needed. The first one asked about my goals, personalized experience, my plan, how many hours I wanted to take, let her know it was all online, listened to my plan and helped me determine how to fit my personal schedule and in an expedited way." Sara stated her academic advisor was "wonderful, a saving grace, she helped me apply for grants and financial aid", "great at following up." Sara said her advisor and academic coach were her "college angels." Students persist when they are supported and connected to their institution (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020). Six participants did not know who their counselor was. Sallee and Cox (2019) stated most students are not aware of most of the resources available to them.

Hardships and obstacles. Nontraditional students struggle with financial hardships, childcare, and personal obstacles (Baugus, 2020). Sara and Tina both had a need for financial assistance due to self-pay and lack of financial aid assistance. Tina wrote, "There should be more resources for affordable classes and books like a voucher to make it more cost efficient, it's pricey out of pocket." Troester-Trate (2019) conducted a similar study and reported that 25% of the students at a community college reported that they had experienced food insecurities and twenty-six percent of community college students were parents and did not have adequate childcare.

Studies have found the need for more student support services that are intended to support first-generation students (Conefrey, 2021; 2018; Lunceford, 2011). Sara wrote, "The college accepts outside kids, so the daycare fills up with no spots available and it's expensive."

Nontraditional students also must balance more responsibilities. Macy wrote she had to "balance

work, home, 2 kids, and animals." Kate said she just "purchased a school" and Tina was "pregnant" during her time in college.

Nontraditional students have many obstacles and outside responsibilities that affect their success (Prashad, 2023; Shatila, 2023). Students persist more when they have adequate financial aid for college (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993). Nguyen et al. (2019) conducted a study on the effects of grant aid on student persistence and degree attainment.

Nguyen et al. (2019) stated that their results confirm that grant aid improves persistence and degree completion conditional on enrollment. Financial assistance is a barrier for nontraditional students and community college persistence (Conefrey, 2021; Glazier, 2016; 2018; Tinto, 1993; Troester-Trate, 2020).

Implications for Policy or Practice

The findings from this study implicate the needs of nontraditional students for policy and practice. There are practices that can be carried out by the teaching staff and academic support staff. Administrations can also create policies to ensure certain practices take place. Both the suggested policies and practices are intended to help nontraditional students feel connected and successful in community colleges.

Implications for Policy

Administration could write a policy that states there are a minimum amount of discussion boards and video chats per course to ensure students have enough interaction with students and faculty in their courses to feel connected. The campus daycare should be for students at the college campus only or college students should receive priority. Financial aid should be based on the students' current circumstances and not the prior year. Students tend to cut back on work to focus on school and this makes the cost unaffordable without financial aid and change in their

work status. The administration should also host annual or semi-annual events at the college to help students meet other nontraditional students and build peer connections. Academic advisors should be required to check in with their students bimonthly.

Implications for Practice

Student connectedness is important for nontraditional students to help increase their college experience satisfaction and overall success. Encourage faculty hosting either on campus or a virtual meet and greet for online students at the beginning of the course. If there are work issues, the faculty can record the meeting and provide the link in the community section of a course. The teaching staff should have weekly discussion boards and virtual meetings to help engage the students within the course. The Administrator should also have annual or semi-annual events at the college to help students meet other nontraditional students and build peer connections. Clubs should also be in place with flexible meeting times for students to join to become a part of their college community.

Nontraditional students need flexibility in online classes and should also be able to meet with other students, staff, and faculty to work with software or anything related to their coursework. Online teachers should schedule optional course workshops to allow students the opportunity to collaborate with resources within the course at least once per semester. There should be evening office hours once a week for students who work through the day. The college should also provide book rentals at cheaper prices for those students who want to attend but cost is an issue. Text messages should be used to remind and inform students of academic services and social events held at the college. Lastly, the college should have evening tutoring sessions online until 10 pm to serve the students with families and who work.

Theoretical and Empirical Implications

Tinto's (1993) integration framework was used to explore how the student support services help increase the retention rates of nontraditional students in community college. Tinto's (1993) integration framework suggests students' persistence is attached to their social and academic connection to the institution. This exploratory case study explored nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. The findings were in accordance with Tinto's (1993) integration framework.

Participants who felt strong connections with their academic advisors and coaches had higher institution satisfaction. Tinto's (1993) integration framework suggests that students feel a stronger sense of institution satisfaction when they are connected to their institution academically. Those who did not have a close connection to their academic advisors and coaches did not have a strong sense of institution satisfaction. College interaction was mainly limited to the classroom, most came to class and left afterwards due to personal obligations (Karp et al., 2010; Prashad, 2023; Shatila, 2023).

Nontraditional students suggested they should be able to join clubs at the community college and have more social interaction with their peers in their courses (Tinto, 1993). Tinto's (1993) integration framework suggested that students feel more connected to their institution if they are engaged in extracurricular activities or clubs. This helps students connect socially to their institution. Participants wanted to meet other students at the beginning of each semester to build academic connections. Students not connected reported they felt "lonely and frustrated." Students can persist and show institutional satisfaction when they are connected socially and academically to their institution (Karp et al., 2010); Tinto, 1975, 1993).

Participants who had positive interactions with staff members and their peers were satisfied with their college experience. However, nontraditional students battled time constraints due to conflicting work schedules with their peers (Prashad, 2023; Shatila, 2023). Online students need additional support with creating these academic and social connections at their institution (Bernardin, 2023; Johnson, 2021). Previous research shows nontraditional students do not perform as well academically and socially when managing multiple responsibilities (Benner & Curl, 2018; Lee, 2018).

The results of this study did extend Tinto's (1993) integration framework by identifying outside factors that can affect student satisfaction and persistence at an institution. Participants reported they had many obstacles and hardships that affected their college experience.

Nontraditional students have personal obligations outside of school that hinder their academic and social connections at their institution. Due to nontraditional students' personal and family responsibilities, they can encounter financial difficulties as well. These personal factors also affect the nontraditional students' college experience and persistence (Johnson, 2021; Shatila, 2023).

New research on nontraditional students aligns with the findings of this study. Shatila (2023) conducted a study that found nontraditional students do not persist when they feel alone and stressed with personal responsibilities. Nontraditional students must manage their household duties, caretaking responsibilities, and school responsibilities (Johnson, 2021; Shatila, 2023). Results indicate that positive peer and academic relationships helped students persist academically (Johnson, 2021; Shatila, 2023). Johnson (2021) reported that students need positive staff interactions and communications for nontraditional students to persist.

Blake et al. (2023) found that nontraditional students persist when institutions cultivate campus services and activities to connect the students to the institution. Pearson (2019) recommended providing an engaging online platform to connect nontraditional students socially and academically. Academic coaches have been proven to help students connect to their institutions, become satisfied, and ultimately persist (Park & Robinson, 2022). Gill (2021) identified that students need support when transitioning into higher education.

Berdanier et al. (2020) developed the GRaD model out of six themes they discovered that dictates if a student will persist or drop out. Those themes were advisor role and relationship; support network; quality of life and work; cost (time and money); perception by others; and goals. Berdanier et al. (2020) stated that no single area of intervention will be successful unless all areas of need are addressed. In Johnson (2021) research, eight nontraditional student participants indicated that they dropped out of school due to personal reasons. Some reasons were career related and some were financial obligations not met. Baugus (2020) discovered that students struggle with food insecurities and inadequate childcare.

Limitations and Delimitations

There were a few delimitations and limitations in the research conducted. Delimitations are boundaries set by the researcher. Requirements were set for the participants and one institution was selected to solicit the participants. This narrowed the scope of the study.

Limitations are restrictions out of the control of the researcher and generally set by the type of study the researcher selected. Several limitations were identified as well due to the timing of soliciting participants and collecting data at the end of the summer courses which were circumstances that were beyond the control of the researcher.

Limitations

Qualitative studies tend to omit contextual sensitives and focus more on the experiences of the participants (Silverman, 2010). The studies sampling consisted of nontraditional students who attended the college, and their perceptions of the student support services they received. The participants were able to provide information on their experiences and circumstances, but college funding and staff obligations were not assessed. Small sample sizes in qualitative research makes it difficult to generalize the findings to the whole population (Lam, 2015). Data analysis and interpretations can be extremely difficult due to the amount of time it takes researchers, and it tends to focus more on thematic analysis (Richards & Richards, 1994).

Limitations in this study included timing and participant obligations. Summer semesters are generally a time when students take a break from school. This study was conducted during the summer semester; therefore, the bulk of the emails sent to solicit participants were not opened. Students also do not generally check school emails as often as they do their personal emails. Due to the various responsibilities of nontraditional students, there was an IRB modification to include part-time students versus just full-time students. Nontraditional students have time restraints due to personal obligations that hinder them from participating in studies.

Delimitations

Participant requirements were set by the research which created delimitations on the scope of the study. These requirements were intended to get a closer understanding of how nontraditional perceive the student support services at the community college. Participants must have had one of the following nontraditional student characteristics: (a) older than typical age (above 24), (b) part-time, (c) full-time, (d) attendance, (e) being independent of parents, (f) working full time while enrolled, (g) having dependents, (h) being a single parent, and (i) being a recipient of a GED or high school completion certificate (Nontraditional Undergraduates /

Definitions and Data, n.d.). Another delimitation was that participants had to have attended community college in the past five years.

The participant requirements were set to ensure the target population was aligned with the purpose of the study. The delimitations set by the researcher was to ensure the study's purpose was fulfilled by providing rich and relevant data. The location was convenient to both the researcher and participants. The institution selected also shared there was an issue of low retention rates among nontraditional students in community colleges.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study was intended to understand what would help the retention of nontraditional students in community colleges from their perspectives. Future research could be conducted to find whether additional and varied clubs with flexible times would encourage nontraditional students to participate and help connect them to their institution socially and academically. Researchers should also consider what types and schedules of events nontraditional students would attend at the college to find their interests. Some examples would include evening play dates for students who are parents that include refreshments or annual festivals for students to have the opportunity to connect with their fellow classmates that are parents as well. These recommendations could help connect students to their institution socially and academically; therefore, helping their retention rates increase.

Conclusion

Nontraditional students persist when they have strong academic and social connections within their institutions. Additional support in the form of social interaction among students and faculty is needed for nontraditional students to feel a sense of belonging and connectedness.

Positive relationships between students and their academic advisors and coaches are positively

correlated with their success and institution satisfaction. Nontraditional students encounter difficulties with college completion due to personal and work obligations, inadequate childcare, and financial hardships. Community college students need more interaction with faculty members and their peers. Student engagement academically and socially must be a priority among community colleges to increase the retention rates of nontraditional students.

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Appendix A IRB Approval

Date: 7-25-2023

IRB #: IRB-FY22-23-1196

Title: The Retention Rates of Non-Traditional Students in Community College: An Exploratory Case Study

Creation Date: 3-3-2023

End Date: Status: Approved

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Rodrigo Review Board: Research Ethics Office

Sponsor:

Study History

Submission Type Initial	Review Type Limited	Decision Exempt - Limited IRB
Submission Type Modification	Review Type Limited	Decision Exempt - Limited IRB

Key Study Contacts

Member Stephanie Rodrigo	Role Principal Investigator	Contact
Member Stephanie Rodrigo	Role Primary Contact	Contact
Member Jerry Woodbridge	Role Co-Principal Investigator	Contact

Appendix B Site Permission



To Whom It May Concern,

As the Associate Vice President of Institutional Effectiveness and Chief of Staff at

Ms. Rodrigo is a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University and is conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The title of her research study is The Retention Rates of Non-Traditional Students in Community College: An Exploratory Case Study. The purpose of her research is to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution.

will provide Ms. Rodrigo with a list of college emails of non-traditional students. Participants will be presented with information about the study and its requirements prior to participating in the exploratory case study. Research study participants will be asked to be interviewed, respond to journal prompts, and complete a questionnaire. The data will be used to better understand the causes of low retention rates in nontraditional students at

I believe this research will be beneficial to Ms. Rodrigo, as well as Liberty University and Warner one.

Should you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at

Respectfully,



Appendix C Site Permission Email

2/24/2023

Dorothy Moore AVP Institutional Effectiveness / Chief of Staff Wayne Community College 300 Wayne Memorial Drive Goldsboro, NC 27534

Dear Ms. Moore,

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The title of my research study is The Retention Rates of Nontraditional Students in Community College: An Exploratory Case Study. The purpose of my research is to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution.

I am writing to request site permission to conduct my research on nontraditional students at Wayne Community College. I am asking for assistance from the community college by providing a list of college emails of nontraditional students to this researcher for research participant recruitment purposes only.

Participants will be presented with information about the study and its requirements prior to participating in the exploratory case study. Research study participants will be asked to be interviewed, respond to journal prompts, and complete a questionnaire. The data will be used to better understand the causes of low retention rates in nontraditional students at your community college. Each research participant will be sent an informed consent form prior to taking part in the data collection process of the research study. Taking part in this study is completely voluntary, and participants are welcome to discontinue participation at any time.

Thank you for considering my request. If you choose to grant permission, please provide a signed statement indicating Wayne Community College's approval on an official letterhead and respond by email to srodrigo@liberty.edu. Attached to this email are my research study proposal and consent form for your convenience.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Rodrigo Liberty University Researcher

Appendix D Participant Email

Dear Recipient:

As a graduate student in the School of Education at Liberty University, I am conducting research as part of the requirements for a doctorate degree. The purpose of my research is to explore nontraditional community college students' experiences with student support services, their connectedness to the institutions, and their overall satisfaction with the institution. I am writing to invite eligible participants to join my study.

Participants must be over 18 years of age, must be attending Wayne Community College, must have been enrolled at least part-time which is a minimum of 6 course hours per semester, and be classified as a nontraditional student. A nontraditional student is a first-generation college student or anyone who did not attend college straight out of high school. The participants must also have successfully completed one-year worth of college courses. Lastly participants must have one of the following nontraditional student characteristics: older than typical age (above 24 years old), part time attendance, being independent of parents, working full time while enrolled, having dependents, being a single parent, and being a recipient of a GED, or high school completion certificate. Participants, if willing, will be asked to participate in an interview, respond to two journal prompts, and complete a questionnaire. It should take approximately an hour to complete the procedures listed. Names and other identifying information will be requested as part of this study, but the information will remain confidential.

To participate, please respond to this email with your phone number and a good time to contact you.

After your response is received, a consent document will be emailed to you. The consent document contains additional information about my research. If you choose to participate you will need to sign the consent document and return it to me at the time of the interview. Doing so will indicate that you have read the consent information and would like to take part in the study.

Sincerely,

Stephanie Rodrigo

Researcher

srodrigo@liberty.edu

Appendix E Consent

Consent Form

Title of the Project: The Retention Rates of Nontraditional Students in Community College: An Exploratory Case Study

Principal Investigator: Stephanie Rodrigo, Researcher, Liberty University

Invitation to be Part of a Research Study

You are invited to participate in a research study. To participate, you must be 18 years of age or older, a nontraditional student and completed at least one year successfully at Wayne Community College. Participants must be enrolled at least part-time, which is a minimum of 12 course hours per semester. Participants must also have one of the following nontraditional characteristics: older than typical age (above 24), part time attendance, being independent of parents, working full time while enrolled, having dependents, being a single parent, and being a recipient of a GED, or high school completion certificate.

Taking part in this research project is voluntary.

Please take time to read this entire form and ask questions before deciding whether to take part in this research.

What is the study about and why is it being done?

The purpose of the study is to analyze the perceptions of nontraditional students on the resources offered at community colleges, their connectedness to the institution, and their institutional satisfaction. The information gathered will be reviewed to understand the low retention rates of nontraditional community college students.

What will happen if you take part in this study?

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following things:

- 1. Participate in a thirty-minute in person or online interview through Microsoft Teams that consists of 11 questions, and it will be audio recorded.
- 2. Respond to two journal prompts in writing. It should take approximately fifteen minutes.
- 3. Complete a 10-question questionnaire on Survey Monkey. It should take approximately ten minutes to complete.

How could you or others benefit from this study?

Participants should not expect to receive a direct benefit from taking part in this study.

Benefits to society include helping researchers and educational institutions better understand how to assist nontraditional students in persisting in college.

What risks might you experience from being in this study?

The risks involved in this study are minimal, which means they are equal to the risks you would encounter in everyday life.

How will personal information be protected?

The records of this study will be kept private. Published reports will not include any information that will make it possible to identify a subject. Research records will be stored securely, and only the researcher will have access to the records.

- Participant responses will be kept confidential by replacing names with pseudonyms.
- Interviews will be conducted in a location where others will not easily overhear the conversation.
- Data collected from you may be used in future presentations. If data collected from you is reused or shared, any information that could identify you, if applicable, will be removed beforehand.
- Data will be stored on a password-locked computer that will be stored in a lockbox that only the researcher will have access. After three years, all electronic records will be deleted and all hard copy records will be shredded.
- Interviews will be recorded and transcribed. Recordings will be stored on a password locked computer for three years and then erased. Only the researcher will have access to these recordings.

Is study participation voluntary?

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with Liberty University or Wayne Community College. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time without affecting those relationships.

What should you do if you decide to withdraw from the study?

If you choose to withdraw from the study, please contact the researcher at the email address included in the next paragraph. Should you choose to withdraw, data collected from you, will be destroyed immediately and will not be included in this study.

Whom do you contact if you have questions or concerns about the study?

The researcher conducting this study is Stephanie Rodrigo. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact her at srodrigo@liberty.edu. You may also contact the researcher's faculty sponsor, Dr. Dorothy Moore, at dpmoore@waynecc.edu.

Whom do you contact if you have questions about your rights as a research participant?

If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher, **you are encouraged** to contact the Institutional Review Board, 1971 University Blvd., Green Hall Ste. 2845, Lynchburg, VA 24515 or email at irb@liberty.edu.

Disclaimer: The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is tasked with ensuring that human subject research will be conducted in an ethical manner as defined and required by federal regulations. The topics covered and viewpoints expressed or alluded to by student and faculty researchers are those of the researchers and do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of Liberty University.

Your Consent

By signing this document, you are agreeing to be in this study. Make sure you understand what the study is about before you sign. You will be given a copy of this document for your records. The researcher will keep a copy with the study records. If you have any questions about the study after you sign this document, you can contact the study team using the information provided above.

I have read and understood the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.
☐ The researcher has my permission to audio-record me as part of my participation in this study.
Printed Subject Name
Signature & Date

Appendix F Interview

Standard Open-Ended Interview Questions

- 1. Please provide me with a brief narrative about your college experience. Include your current academic status and if you took any online courses. SQ1
- 2. If you could suggest three resources that you wish the college could provide for you, what would they be? SQ3
- 3. What was your biggest challenge in college that affected your success and how did you overcome it? SQ1
- 4. What resources at the college were you aware? SQ2
- 5. Explain how you think the college could have better assisted you? SQ1
- 6. Describe your relationship with your academic advisor. SQ2
- 7. Describe your relationship with your school counselor. SQ2
- 8. How would you describe your relationships with your prior instructors? SQ2
- 9. Did you feel that they were supportive and accessible to you? SQ2
- 10. How could student connectedness be improved at your school? SQ2
- 11. How do you suggest the college inform you of the services available? SQ2

Appendix G Journal Prompts

Journal Prompts

- (1) Describe your level of student connectedness at the college?
- (2) Describe three resources you felt were most beneficial in college and how did you utilize them? If you did not use any resources, why did you not use them? (SQ2).

Appendix H Questionnaire

Questionnaire Questions

Background

- 1. What is your age?
- 0 18-24
- 0 25-34
- 0 35-44
- 0 45-54
- 0 55-64
- 0 65+
- 2. What is your gender?
- o Male
- o Female
- 3. What is your race?
- White or Caucasian
- O Black or African American
- Hispanic or Latino
- Asian or Asian American
- American Indian or Alaska Indian
- o Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- Another race

SQ2

4. How helpful would it be to receive text messages from your institution about academic reminders and available resources? SQ2

o Extremely helpful Very helpful Somewhat helpful Not so helpful Not at all helpful SQ1 5. How satisfied are you with your college experience? SQ1 Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied SQ3 6. How satisfied are you with the support services offered? SQ3 Very satisfied Satisfied Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied 7. How satisfied are you with the support services you received? SQ3

Very satisfied

Neither satisfied nor dissatisfied

Satisfied

Dissatisfied Very dissatisfied SQ2 8. How connected did you feel using the student support services at your college? SQ2 Not connected at all Somewhat connected Connected Very connected SQ2 9. How responsive are the student support services available to you at your institution? SQ2 Extremely responsive Very responsive Somewhat responsive Not so responsive Not at all responsive 10. Which if any of the following student support services would you wish you had known about or had more information about? SQ2 Counseling Open computer lab Online tutoring Writing Center

Achievement coach

None

Appendix I Sample Interview Transcript

All right. Please provide me with a brief narrative about your college experience. Include your current academic status and if you took any online classes.

Well, right now I'm taking a summer break because my mom passed away. I kind of dropped my classes for summer.

But generally I'm a full-time online student.

Okay. And if you could suggest three resources that you wish the college could provide for you, what would they be?

It would be some more flexibility for class times for people who work.

They like to have labs in the middle of the day and then you have to take a day off work to do that.

Okay.

Definitely, I know we have a childcare center out there but definitely a little bit more resources in the way of getting childcare while you're at school.

Okay.

And that's pretty much it. I mean they do a pretty good job at Wayne.

All right. Thank you.

What was your biggest challenge in college that affected your success and how did you overcome it?

I became homeless in September of 2021 and I had to do my online school at the college in the parking lot.

Wow.

So that was, yeah, that was interesting.

Okay. And what resources are the college were you aware of?

Whenever I became homeless, absolutely not except for the free Wi-Fi in the parking lot.

Oh, wow.

Explain how you think the college could have better assisted you.

I think that the achievement coaches that they assign us should be checking on us periodically since they're supposed to be helping with our success.

I had a new achievement coach that was assigned to me in August of 2021 and I've not heard from him since he's been assigned to me.

Oh, wow. And you said that was August of 2021 now?

Of 2021.

Okay.

Describe your relationship with your academic advisor.

Oh, I love Miss Joey.

She answers me when I need her to answer me.

She answers me quickly.

Any questions I have.

I know I can just text her and email her after. So she's pretty good.

Awesome. Describe your relationship with your school counselor.

I don't even know who it is.

Okav.

How would you describe your relationship with your prior instructors?

I mean, we pretty much did online stuff.

They answered all my questions pretty well whenever I was in an online class.

Okay.

Did you feel that they were supportive and accessible to you?

Most of them are.

I only had one or two that really weren't.

Okay.

How could student connectedness be improved at your school?

Um, I think, you know, most of us are online now since COVID.

I think if we would do more like Zoom meetings, more discussion boards, and be able to have a chance to actually communicate with each other.

Okay.

Um, how do you suggest the college inform you of services available?

Um, they could do it through email.

They could post it around the campus.

They could, you know, put it in their text messages that they text everybody.

Okay.

I didn't know. No, they text messages. That's good.

Yeah.

They only use it whenever like inclement weather is happening.

Oh, okay.

Oh, yeah.

So when some big events happening, like graduation.

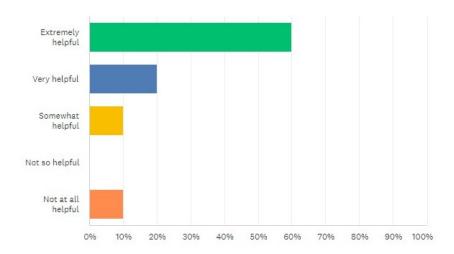
Gotcha.

Cause like you said, it'll be helpful if they, you know, did the automated text about it.

Appendix J Sample Survey Responses

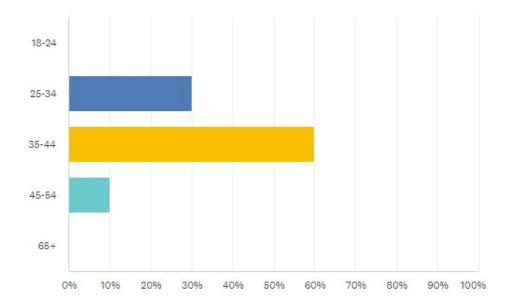
How helpful would it be to receive text messages from your institution about academic reminders and available resources?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0



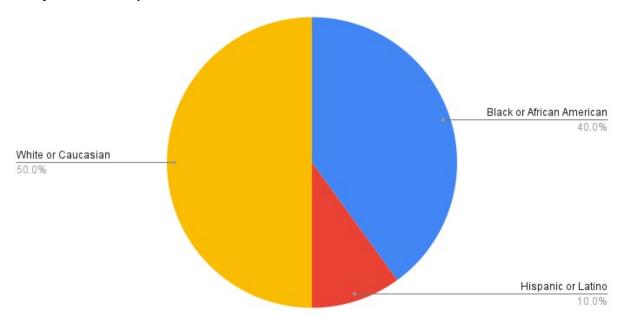
What is your age?

Answered: 10 Skipped: 0

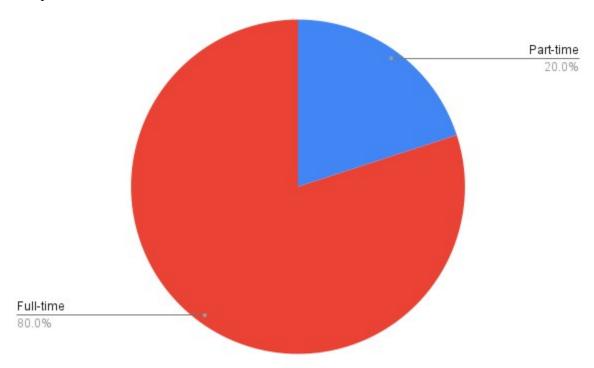


Appendix K Sample Data Analysis

Participants' Ethnicity



Participants' Enrollment Status



Appendix L Sample Journal Responses

Q2

Describe your level of student connectedness at the college?

I would describe it as "connected" to "very connected". Before taking an in-person class, however, I would have described it as not connected. Luckily I took a class, where the instructor of the class helped point me in the right direction. Also, this class did a WONDERFUL job at incorporating teaching students about the resources available at the college.

Q3

Describe three resources you felt were most beneficial in college and how did you utilize them? If you did not use any resources, why did you not use them?

1.) Achievement Coach. Having this resource has been a saving grace in my college experience so far. My coach helps me with planning my classes, has helped me enter into the correct program of study, and helps monitor my progress. This has been extremely beneficial, especially since she is able to reach out to other services or departments at the college, even if she doesn't have the answer for a question I have, or to see if a resource is available for me. 2.) Writing Center. I have not used this resource yet, but I plan to during the fall semester when I take my English Writing & Inquiry class. I have looked into what this resource offers, and I think it is very helpful, especially for someone like me who has been out of school for so long, and may need help with the different types of papers certain classes will expect you to write. 3.) Financial Aid. This resource has been extremely helpful, especially when I switched classes last minute (in order to get in the correct program of study), and needed help getting a book for my class when I didn't have the funds on my own to purchase it. They have been very helpful, and also have done a great job following up with me if I was not able to get ahold of someone, and needed to leave a message.