EXPERIENCES OF HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY GRADUATES' TRANSITION TO COMMUNITY

COLLEGE POSTSECONDARY COURSEWORK

by

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ABSTRACT

Transition of adult learners to college has become a growing interest for education policy makers and leaders over the past two decades. The emphasis on increasing adult student success and college completion stems from several factors including equity gaps in educational attainment and a changing workforce and global economic needs. The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of high school equivalency (HSE) graduates who enroll in postsecondary coursework at a community college. This dissertation documents the perspectives of college students who completed high school equivalency classes at the college, achieved their HSE credential, and whose educational background is defined by a nontraditional path towards postsecondary education. By exploring the experiences and perspectives of HSE graduates who have transitioned to college classes, this study gives a voice to these students and shares the challenges they face in persisting in and completing a college credential.

Through a qualitative case study approach, this research focused on nine participants' stories to capture their experiences as nontraditional students with an HSE credential who successfully transitioned to college. Methodology included a case study approach and interviews were the primary source of data collection with observation and document analysis as secondary sources.

From the data analysis process, several themes emerged about the factors that have a positive and negative impact on the participants' transition to and persistence in postsecondary classes. Factors outside the community college included educational and career goals/

aspirations, overcoming past barriers, individual characteristics, family support, and work. Factors within the community college included a network of pathway to postsecondary support, financial support, college faculty and advisors, and socio-academic integration. Additional findings included institutional barriers such as college culture and lack of information about college enrollment.

This study gave voice to an often "invisible" population on college campuses in order to help inform college administrators, adult education faculty and staff, and other decision makers about the factors that support or deter HSE graduates in their transition to and persistence in college.

KEY WORDS: adult learners, non-traditional college students, barriers, persistence

DEDICATION

To the nine students who graciously took time out of their busy schedules as college students, parents, workers, and family members to participate in this study: this work is about and for you. Thank you for sharing your stories of your journeys to college—your challenges, goals, epiphanies, humor, and many words of wisdom for practitioners and students. I am grateful for your time, honesty, and trust with the process and your willingness to help other students successfully transition to college like you. I admire and appreciate your tenacity to persist towards achieving your educational and career goals. I dedicate this dissertation to you and to other adult students who have the goal to further their education with the support of community colleges. My hope is that this study will help break down the barriers that high school equivalency students face in their journey to better their lives through the pursuit of higher education.

To my father, William R. Bell, retired English faculty professor who also dedicated his life work to helping community college students achieve their goals: wherever you may be, I would not be doing the work I am today without your influence.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Patterson provided the kindness and encouragement that I needed as I worked through my final chapters.

Finally, thanks to my mom, Lynne O. Bell, and my son, Owen W. Gomez, for being my small, but dedicated family. To my son: you can do anything you set your mind to do. Don't give up on your educational and career goals—find the support you need to succeed, especially when times get tough. At the point you feel like giving up is exactly the point you have to keep going.

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INTRODUCTION

Adult students have become increasingly important over the past two decades as educators, policymakers, employers, researchers, and foundations seek opportunities to improve retention and completion rates across U.S. higher education institutions (Bailey, Smith Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Kinzie & Kuh, 2016). The emphasis on increasing adult student success and college completion stems from several factors including equity gaps in educational attainment, changing workforce and global economic needs, and the overall democratic concern about the quality of postsecondary education (Kinzie & Kuh, 2016). Community colleges have tackled the challenge of increasing student goal attainment and postsecondary completion through many reform efforts including analyzing student and institutional performance data, developing intervention strategies, implementing guided pathways, and establishing an infrastructure to support systematic improvements (Kinzie & Kuh, 2016). Completion initiatives undertaken by community colleges include Achieving the Dream, Complete College America, Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025, and Guided Pathways to Success, among others (O'Banion, 2010). The Lumina Foundation's Goal 2025 set the goal for 60% of Americans to obtain a post-secondary degree or high-quality credential by the year 2025. Within that goal, the Lumina Foundation and others provided various metrics including awareness of the importance of higher education, increasing enrollment, increasing persistence from first to second year of college, and advancing of the completion rate.

Yet community college leaders, policymakers, and researchers are still focused primarily on the access and success of the traditional college students directly out of high school, leaving out the increasing adult population of students for whom a higher education is not a luxury but a necessity for individual economic opportunity (Blumenstyk, 2018; Finch, 2016). Furthermore, community colleges face a new federal mandate as of July 2015 with the newly updated Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) which now governs adult education programs under Title II (U.S. Department of Education, 2014). The new WIOA mandate requires colleges to utilize their adult education programs by creating workforce partnerships with career programs, local one-stop providers, and local industry and employers (Bird, Foster, & Ganzglass, 2014). The target market of Title II adult education under WIOA especially is concerned with the lowest-skilled and educationally underprepared students. This educationally and economically disadvantaged population has historically been neglected due to the focus on transfer education and traditional-age students (Bird et al., 2014).

Although colleges face enrollment declines of both traditional-age and adult students nationwide, the number of adult students aged 25-35 who have a high school diploma but have not attended college is projected to rise through 2030 (Grawe, 2018; Pearson, 2018). This rise in adults without a college degree means an opportunity for community colleges to focus on enrolling and helping their adult students to succeed. Although postsecondary institutions are beginning to recognize the importance of serving adult students with the decline of their traditional student populations, they often do not know how to design programs and services to meet the needs of these students or how to prioritize the future investments in serving this emerging pipeline of students (Council for Adult and Experiential Learning [CAEL], 2018).

One way that community colleges can improve their overall student success and completion target is by analyzing their recent high school equivalency (HSE), formerly known as General Education Development or GED, graduates' transition to college patterns. Furthermore, community colleges need to learn about the experiences of HSE graduates transitioning into college, including the factors that influence them to enroll and persist in college. By understanding HSE graduates' transition experiences, persistence factors, and barriers to success, community colleges can implement transition strategies for HSE graduates as well as fulfill the WIOA mandate to increase postsecondary access and success for low-skilled adults.

ADULT STUDENT POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION TRANSITION AND PERSISTENCE

One of the primary missions of community colleges has been to provide adult learners access to postsecondary education and training (Pfahl et al., 2010). A growing majority of today's community college students are adults, and adult and nontraditional student enrollments are the highest at community colleges (Kasworm, 2003). Of the 17 million undergraduate students in two-year and four-year colleges, 27% were over the age of 24 (Blumenstyk, 2018). Even though the improved job market has decreased enrollments across the board at two-year and four-year colleges, the number of adults who could be in college is compelling. Nearly 44 million Americans ages 25 to 64 (26% of the adult population) completed only high school or a high school equivalency (Blumenstyk, 2018). Another 21% of adults have attended some college, but not earned a degree. In total, prospective adult students number about 95 million nationally (Blumenstyk, 2018). Adult students, including HSE earners, represent an opportunity for community colleges to boost enrollment and serve their

communities. By transitioning more high school equivalency graduates into postsecondary education, these students represent an untapped human resource with great potential for both community colleges and to serve their communities (Patterson, 2014).

Almost two-thirds of adults who passed their high school equivalency test reported that further education was the reason for taking the high school equivalency examination, and over 55% of these adults specified that they planned on entering a two-year or four-year postsecondary institution (American Council on Education [ACE], 2011). Although adult undergraduate students tend to earn higher GPAs than traditional students, they are also less likely to persist, take longer to earn degrees, and are more likely to drop out or take breaks due to various life barriers including job loss, health issues, and financial problems (Capps, 2012). Supporting these adult students as they navigate the enrollment process and persist in postsecondary education is the key to successful transition of nontraditional students to postsecondary education (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

The benefits of postsecondary education are clear. As former President Barack Obama noted in his congressional address in 2009,

> In a global economy where the most valuable skill you can sell is your knowledge, a good education is no longer just a pathway to opportunity—it is a prerequisite. … I ask every American to commit to at least one year or more of higher education or career training. This can be community college or a four-year school, vocational training or an apprenticeship. But whatever the training may be, every American will need to get more than a high school diploma.

Each year, over two million adults participate in adult education programs. Adult education programs offer coursework in basic skills, English-language acquisition, HSE/GED, and college- and career-readiness training; yet, few of these students transition successfully into college even when the students complete an adult education program within the community

college (Jenkins, Zeindenberg, & Kienzl, 2009). By not supporting the transition into and persistence of their adult education students in postsecondary education, community colleges limit the opportunity for adults in their community to earn higher wages and develop skills and training necessary to be successful in the 21st century global economy.

Although there are efforts led by national foundations, the federal government, and educational organizations which focus on developmental students and first-generation college students in promoting their persistence and success in college, there is little research about the successful transition interventions for HSE graduates (US Department of Education, 2010). Guison-Dowdy and Patterson (2011b) found that although HSE graduates pursue postsecondary education more than high school dropouts, they enroll in postsecondary education at lower rates than traditional high school graduates by 20 percentage points (42.9% versus 63.9%).

Transition of high school equivalency graduates to college has become a growing interest for education policy makers and leaders over the past two decades (Wachen, Jenkins, Belfield, & Van Noy, 2012; Zafft, Kallenbach, & Spohn, 2006). Approximately one in six American adults lack a high school equivalency and face limited life and economic success without furthering their education (Quigley, Patterson, & Zhang, 2011). Understanding the success factors and barriers to success of HSE graduates can help community colleges build supportive, academic, and institutional interventions to help support HSE transition to and success in postsecondary coursework.

PROBLEM STATEMENT/BACKGROUND OF STUDY

Historically, community colleges have provided access and affordability for underrepresented and low-income students (Cohen, Brawer, & Kisker, 2013). Community

colleges also provide adult, part-time students with opportunities to gain basic skills, including basic English literacy acquisition (ESL) and math skills, and to gain access to higher levels of education and workforce training to gainful employment (Jacobs, 2009). Another lesser known community college mission in the shadow of transfer education and career training is community education, including adult basic education (ABE), also referred to as adult education (Cohen et al., 2013). Adult education programs include coursework in basic skills for adults with less than a high school diploma, HSE certificate classes, English as a second language, and integrated education and training (IET) classes to help transition adult students into postsecondary education (Cohen et al., 2013). Given the importance of and limited research of nontraditional, adult students' transition to college, this study focuses specifically on students who achieved their HSE certificate after completing community college adult education classes.

According to Patterson and Paulson (2016), 29 million adults lack a high school diploma which is approximately one in seven people aged 16 to 65 or 18% of young and working-age adults. Adult education programs in the United States, many of which are located within or connected to community colleges, serve only 1.5 million adults per year, or 4% of the 36 million adults who need basic skills before beginning postsecondary education (Patterson & Paulson, 2016). Of those students who complete their HSE certificate, approximately 60% indicate that they do so to begin postsecondary education; however, data show that of approximately 43% of HSE certificate passers who enroll in postsecondary education, only 12% of enrollees graduate college within six years (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011b).

Community colleges face financial and political challenges in maintaining their multiple missions while also fostering successful degree completion. With declining enrollment,

especially of the high school graduate-to-degree completion pipeline, why are state and institutional efforts not focused on the potential of their adult education and high school equivalency graduate population? Perception is part of the problem in that society and institutions think of college students as young, 18-22-year-old students coming directly from high school (Finch, 2016). Another perception issue is financial. Adult education programs are publicly funded through federal and state grants through Title II (the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act) of the 2014 WIOA. Federal funding is administered through the U.S. Department of Education, Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education (OCTAE). The amount each state receives is based on a formula established by Congress (Commission on Adult Basic Education [COABE], 2018). The funding is distributed to local eligible providers of adult education services by grants which are monitored closely. Current levels of funding often do not meet the local need, so many community colleges like Harper College rely on supplemental funding by state and philanthropic funds (COABE, 2018).

Because adult education students do not pay college tuition until they transition to the college, this population is often seen as a financial drain even though focusing more efforts and resources on the adult learner pipeline could assist colleges in increasing not only their enrollment, but also persistence and credential attainment (Finch, 2016).

Political and cultural issues also contribute to the lack of focus on the nontraditional student pipeline (Finch, 2016). In addition to serving high school equivalency students, adult education programs serve low-literacy students, many of whom may not be transitioning into higher education right away; rather, they are trying to gain skills to improve their immediate

lives (Quigley, 2017). Adults with low-literacy levels and the adult education programs which serve them face historical marginalization from society (Quigley, 2017).

Finally, marketing efforts, institutional success programs, and scholarship programs have historically been directed to traditional students aged 18-24 (CAEL, 2018). As a "shadow college" with limited resources, academic advising, and transitional support, adult education programs and their students are often marginalized within their own institutions (Capps, 2012; Mertes & Jankoviak, 2016; Zacharakis, Haiyan, Patterson, & Andersen 2015). Systemic problems and changing an institution's culture and structure to focus on a nontraditional student population is an unspoken challenge in attracting and serving the changing demographics of community colleges (Finch, 2016). Fortunately, there are growing resources and tools to help guide institutions improving efforts to serve their nontraditional, adult student populations (CAEL, 2018).

As community colleges continue to focus on completion, student success, and retention, there is a need for community college leaders to look more closely at the pipeline of Educationally disadvantaged, lower-skilled, and diverse adults in the community. The needs of the American labor market are well-documented that the demand for further education and training is a necessity, and that the lack of workers with postsecondary training is hampering economic development (Carnevale, Smith, & Strobl, 2013; Finch, 2016). Furthermore, under the new WIOA act, community colleges are required to partner more closely with their adult education programs to increase job and career specific opportunities to bridge low-skilled adults into living-wage career programs to serve a growing adult, foreign-born population, many of whom are low-income and lack a high school diploma (Bird et al., 2014).

Harper College's need for more adult and nontraditional student research was examined in a recent Harper College (2015) Strategic Enrollment Management Task Force Final Report. This report provided demographic and retention data indicating the need to develop recommendations which focus on the persistence rate of the adult student market due to the decline of younger, traditional students and growth of a diverse community. Harper College, like many community colleges, has a unique opportunity to increase education and career training for low-income, diverse community residents to reduce poverty levels. For example, by training local adults for postsecondary career certificates, Harper College may be able to increase adults' earnings by 20% (Carnevale, Rose, & Hanson, 2012). Additionally, in the Harper College 2017 *Environmental Scan,* both small and large employers in the Harper district reported having difficulty in filling positions due to a low number of applicants, applicants' lack of relevant work experience, and applicants' lack of occupational skills (Clarus Corporation, 2016). Opportunities are abundant for community colleges to create better programming, partnerships, and support services to transition adult education students into postsecondary education.

As community colleges focus on student success, they cannot forget the mission of access and to help the most disadvantaged adult students' transition into postsecondary education (Humpherys & Acker-Hocevar, 2012). Finally, Levin (2007) discusses the idea that community colleges need to move away from their "rhetorical commitment" to underserved populations, such as adult, nontraditional students, and focus resources and institutional support to accommodate adult, disadvantaged students who come to the community college (p. 199).

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The Population: Adult Educational Development Students
and Department

Harper College Adult Educational Development (AED) department serves adult students

in the Harper district ages 16 years and older who are not currently enrolled in school with less

than a secondary school completion. Additionally, the AED department serves adults in the

Harper district who are in need of English language acquisition services. The AED department

serves approximately 1200-1500 students per year. For fiscal year 2019, the total potential

adult target population for the Harper College district is 57,249 (Harper College, in-house

document). The same census reports that the number of adults needing English language

acquisition services is 168,342, and the number of unemployed is 11,182. In spite of these

numbers, Harper AED program only serves 5.5% of the potential adults needing adult education

services and only 1.28% of adults needing English acquisition (Harper College, in-house

document).

Adult education students from the Harper College community attend classes within the

AED department on the main campus and four community satellite sites. The AED department

offers classes in adult basic literacy, high school equivalency (GED), English literacy acquisition,

college and career readiness, and integrated education and training (IET) programs in

collaboration with certified nursing assistant; office assistant; heating, ventilation, and air

conditioning; and supply chain management career programs. The mission of AED is to prepare

adult learners for college, career, and civic responsibility to meet the challenges of the 21st

century. Similarly, AED's vision is to become the foundation of accessible education and career

pathways that prepare and support adult learners for economic self-sufficiency and active

participation in a global society. AED students include adults ages 16 to 80 who may be low-

income, low-skilled, unemployed, underemployed, limited-English proficiency, single parents, displaced homemakers, and individuals with disabilities and/or multiple barriers.

The AED department is funded partially by a federal and state grant called the Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) Adult Education and Literacy grant, falling under the new Title II of the WIOA (Illinois Community College Board, 2016). According to the Harper College budget to actual report for 2018, the ICCB grant fund total was $835,005, and the Harper College Education Fund matches the ICCB grant at $1,092,032 for a total of $1,927,037 in combined funding sources. Harper College has administered these grants for over 25 years. Staffing includes one adult education director, five full-time faculty, two student support specialists, approximately 35 adjunct faculty, one assessment specialist, one technical support assistant, one program assistant, and one program operations assistant. AED students do not pay tuition for their classes; however, after completing their HSE certificate and English Literacy Acquisition (ELA) coursework, students transition into academic English as a Second Language (ESL), career and technical programs, and academic transfer degree programs.

PURPOSE OF STUDY

The purpose of this research was to understand the experiences of HSE graduates who enroll in postsecondary coursework at a community college. This dissertation documents the perspectives of HSE graduates who completed adult education classes at the college, achieved their HSE credential, and whose educational background is defined by a nontraditional path towards postsecondary education. This dissertation adds to the limited research available in understanding the experiences of HSE graduates' transition to and persistence in community college. By exploring the experiences and perspectives of HSE graduates who have transitioned

to college classes, this study gives a voice to these students and shares the challenges they face in persisting in and completing a college credential. An additional purpose of this study is to develop recommendations for supporting the transition and retention of adult education/HSE graduates in postsecondary coursework. Given the importance of increasing enrollments and success of nontraditional and adult students, this study provides insights as to how community colleges can increase the transition of their adult education students to postsecondary coursework while also providing the necessary support for persistence and successful completion.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided this exploration of the experiences of HSE graduates who have transitioned to community college postsecondary coursework:

1. What factors contribute to the decision of HSE graduates to enroll in postsecondary coursework?

2. What factors do GED graduates report influence their persistence and success in community college?

3. In what ways do GED graduates describe the college as helping or hindering their transition to community college?

DEFINITION OF TERMS

The following terms are used throughout this document.

Adult learner or adult student. In the past, the adult learner was defined as age 24 or 25 and older, or the age when traditional young adults were no longer dependent on their parents financially. However, age is no longer sufficient in defining the complexities and barriers faced by many nontraditional young adults over the age of 18. Now, adult students are defined as not enrolled full-time, not entering college directly out of high school, not free of dependents or financial obligations, or a combination of these factors. The adult student and nontraditional student definition often refer to the same student population (CAEL, 2018).

Adult education* or a*dult basic education (ABE). Adult education is academic instruction designed to increase individual basic academic skills in preparation for achieving a high school equivalency and higher-level instruction. Students in adult education programs generally enter the program at one of three points: a) English literacy acquisition (ELA) for students who have limited English reading, writing, and speaking skills; b) adult basic education (ABE) for students whose reading level on the Test of Basic English Skills (TABE) is below the 9th grade reading level, and c) High school equivalency (HSE), also known as the General Education Development (GED) certificate for students whose reading levels are above the 9th grade level on the TABE. Adult education programs also have college and career readiness bridge-to-college classes and integrated education and training (IET) or integrated education and basic skills (I-BEST programs) to help transition adult education students to college.

At-risk. According to the *Glossary of Educational Reform* (Great Schools Partnership, 2014), at-risk is a term used to describe students who have a higher probability of dropping out of school or underperforming academically. Risk factors may include limited education, low-income status, domestic violence, transiency, health problems, and learning-related factors which may affect a student's ability to succeed in school. Quinnan (1997) discusses at-risk students as adults over 21 and who are marginalized by institutions due to the culture bias that places institutional, organizational, and instructional barriers in achieving persistence and success.

Completion. A student who obtains any credential from an institution of higher learning. Credentials include certificate, associate, bachelor's degree, or higher.

Developmental education student. Students must demonstrate competency to enroll in college-level class. At Harper College and many other community colleges, placement tests are required to determine if students are eligible to take college-level English and math. If they are not prepared, they are placed in developmental education courses to strengthen their skills.

Disadvantaged college student. Disadvantaged students are those whose family, economic, social, and other circumstances may hinder their persistence and success at school.

First-generation college student. First-generation applies to both community college and four-year college students whose parent or parents did not complete postsecondary education. The parent may have taken coursework but did not complete a degree.

General Education Development (GED) certificate. Developed first in 1942 for returning World War II veterans to provide an avenue to complete their high school education and attend college. The exam consists of four subject area tests: reasoning through language arts, mathematics, social studies, and science. The exam was reduced to four tests in

2014. This term GED is being phased out due to multiple high school equivalency exams developed after 2014.

High School Equivalency credential (HSE). HSE is a more commonly used term for the various tests which enable individuals who lack a high school diploma to demonstrate knowledge and skills equivalent to a high school graduate. Since the GED test redesign in 2014, there are now two alternatives to the GED test including the High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and the Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) created by McGraw Hill Education. Students in Illinois may take any of the three examinations to obtain their HSE credential (ICCB, 2018a).

Nontraditional college student/post-traditional student. According to research conducted by Horn and Carroll (1996) with later discussions by Kim (2002) and CAEL (2018), nontraditional/post-traditional refers to students if they meet one or more of the following characteristics:

- is age 24 or older;

- is enrolled part-time;

- lacks a high school diploma;

- is financially independent;

- does not enroll in college immediately after completing high school;

- works more than 35 hours per week;

- has dependents other than a spouse, or is a single parent.

Persistence. Persistence refers to a student's success in college coursework and continued enrollment in postsecondary classes towards a goal or degree. Persistence can be measured from semester to semester or year to year (Tinto, 2012).

Retention. The words persistence and retention are often used interchangeably. According Tinto (2012), retention is the institutional view of students continuing enrollment and progress in postsecondary coursework.

Student success: academic achievement, engagement in educationally purposeful activities, satisfaction, acquisition of desired knowledge, skills and competencies, persistence, attainment of educational objectives, and post-college performance such as completion of a certificate, degree, or job placement.

Traditional college student. A traditional college student is defined as a student who transitioned to college directly after graduation from high school. Traditional college

students are generally between the ages of 18 to 22, attend college as full-time, and are not financially independent.

Transition. Transition refers to a student moving from one stage of education to another, for example, from high school to college or high school equivalency to college. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) state that transition is "any event or nonevent that results in changed relationships, assumptions, and roles" (p. 39). For this study, transition refers to recent high school equivalency graduates transitioning to postsecondary educational career or degree programs.

Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA). Signed by President Barack Obama in 2014, WIOA is a federal public law that replaced the Workforce Investment Act of 1988 as the primary workforce legislation to bring about coordination among workforce development, adult education and literacy programs, employment and training services for adults, and other workforce development programs.

THEORETICAL FOUNDATION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The theoretical foundation and conceptual framework facilitate the understanding of data, concepts, and variables and builds new knowledge and understanding of psychosocial, theoretical paradigms to provide a deeper understanding of the research. The process of adult students' transition into and success in postsecondary education draws from many disciplines including psychology, socioeconomics, and education. The theoretical frameworks used in this study include Bean and Metzner's (1985) conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition, Schlossberg's transition theory (Anderson et al., 2012), and Cross's (1981) theory of adult learning and barriers to adult participation in higher education.

The Center for the Study of College Student Retention lists ten theoretical retention concepts and models from 1937 to the present:

1. McNeely's (1937) "College student Morality";

2. Summerskill (1962), who examined personality attributes as the main reason for student persistence;

3. Spady's Model (1971) examined the interaction between student characteristics and the environment;

4. Kamens's studies (1971, 1974) compared the size and complexity of different institutions and impact on retention;

5. Witt and Handel (1974) examined the person and environment fit of college;

6. Tinto's model (1975; 1993) examined academic and social integration within colleges' academic and social systems;

7. Astin's theory of involvement (1977, 1985) examined the connection between student involvement and retention;

8. Bean's model of work turnover to student attrition (1989, 1983) used concepts from organizational studies which examined how organizational rewards and structures impacted student persistence;

9. Bean and Metzner (1985) developed a conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition; and

10. Seidman in 2003 and 2012 developed a retention model including early identification with intensive and continuous intervention (Seidman, 2016).

While many of these researchers focused on college student retention and persistence, of these ten theories, only the Bean and Metzner's (1985) conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition specifically focuses on adult student retention.

Since this study is focused on the complexity of transition, it looks through the lens of Schlossberg's transition theory which describes how adults adapt to various transitions in life based on support, personality factors, motivation, and coping techniques (Anderson et al., 2012). Schlossberg, Lynch, and Chickering (1989) stated the transition model allows practitioners to understand a student's needs through a structured approach to predicting, measuring, and modifying reactions to change. According to Schlossberg et al., the transition theory can be applied to students of different age groups, socioeconomic background, and life circumstances. When an adult contemplates returning to school, returns, and then leaves, he or

she is considered in transition (p. 13). Schlossberg examined factors that influence a person's coping abilities, as well as how individuals move through transitions.

Finally, this research relies on the research of Cross (1981) which identifies the institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers that adults face in their success in postsecondary education. Institutional barriers include procedures or policies such as lack of financial support or flexible scheduling which can discourage or even prevent adults from learning. Situational barriers include obstacles arising from a student's life circumstances at the time such a job or family commitments. Finally, dispositional barriers include personal characteristics such as feeling "too old" to learn (Cross, 1981).

An integrated theoretical framework model allows for different lenses from the student to the institutional perspective. Although there is a multitude of research involving student success and completion of traditional and first-generation college students, research on nontraditional, HSE graduates' transition is lacking.

LIMITATIONS

The research population is located at Harper College, a large, suburban community college in the Chicago suburbs which can result in limitations in generalizing the results across a broad range of community colleges such as rural or urban colleges. Due to the research being conducted at one college, the individual characteristics specific to this college may influence the research results as well as not be applicable to other institutional models. Since this research was conducted with one population at one college, while the internal validity will be higher, the external validity will be reduced. Although examining a large number of institutions would provide breadth, by targeting one college, the research can provide more depth. Research

targeting a specific population can be beneficial in assessing the data and detail of one college. Other institutions may decide to conduct their own in-depth examination or identify a need for future research on a larger scale and scope.

The rich data provided by this qualitative study provides important information about not only student perspectives of transition and persistence, but also an analysis of the institutional supports or lack of supports required to help students transition and succeed in postsecondary education. While not largely generalizable, the preliminary findings can provide considerations for further research as well as improvements in institutional transition support and structures.

ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY

The first chapter provides an introduction to the topic of the experience of HSE graduates' transition to and persistence in postsecondary education and to the background, population, conceptual framework, and purpose for the research.

Chapter 2 provides a literature review regarding the adult student in higher education, adult education, HSE testing, the adult educational development department, transition, political mandates such as the WIOA, and barriers to success.

Chapter 3 reviews the methodology of this study. Beginning with an overview of research design, this chapter outlines the research questions and demonstrates the various methods used to investigate the research questions. Additionally, the time frame and setting for the study is explained. The survey and interview questions are examined as well as the setting and outline for data collection. The process for developing the data analysis methods are outlined, and finally, the limitations are reviewed.

Chapter 4 presents the findings and results of the research beginning with a review of the demographic data from the student information forms. Responses from the background forms were analyzed. Finally, interview data is presented providing the meaning of transition, and what they believe are the factors that influence successful transition to and persistence in postsecondary education, or the failure to transition and succeed.

Chapter 5 examines the data presented in Chapter 4 and makes connections to analysis and interpretation of the results. In Chapter 6, using supporting evidence from the research, reflections about the significance of the data within the community college setting are presented and discussed along with recommendations for further study.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this study was to explore the experiences of high school equivalency (HSE) graduates who transition to postsecondary coursework at a community college. By understanding the experiences and perspectives of recent HSE graduates who enroll in postsecondary coursework at a community college, colleges may be able to better serve this growing population of adult students who seek postsecondary education to achieve economic and personal success.

A review of the relevant literature and theoretical frameworks is necessary to form the foundation for research on HSE graduates and their transition to postsecondary education. This literature review begins with a history of community colleges, the adult student, and the history of adult education which includes the history of high school equivalency testing. Barriers to adult student persistence and retention issues are explored. The theoretical frameworks of nontraditional student attrition, adult transition, and barriers to participation in higher education are reviewed. Finally, a review of adult education funding and transition programs under the recent WIOA and other initiatives to increase the transition of adult students to postsecondary education is outlined.

Although there is a growing concern for adult and nontraditional students returning to college, there is little research found which addressed high school equivalency credential

completers and their transition to community colleges and/or postsecondary education. One of the most prevalent studies about high school equivalency (GED) earners to transitioned to college was a project by the American Council of Education (ACE) and the GED Testing Service (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a, 2011b; Quigley et al., 2011; Zhang, Guison-Dowdy, Patterson, & Song, 2011). In this study, researchers analyzed data from the 2004-2009 Postsecondary Students Longitudinal Study about both high school equivalency and high school graduates' characteristics and experiences in postsecondary education. Many conclusions were made including factors related to the older age of GED earners, higher poverty level, and full-time working status. The authors posed many questions about future research including investigating the outcomes of students who work full-time, the influence of the family's influence on educational outcomes, and what institutional factors help students persist versus drop out (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

The literature reviewed included several doctoral dissertations addressing the experiences of GED graduates in their transition to college classes. Harris (2012) identified how the life and family experiences of GED graduates impacted their decision to enroll and persist in college. Harris (2012) found both negative and family influences, the importance of education, and the relationship between the advising specialist and GED instructors as having the biggest impact on transition and persistence. Harris's (2012) study did not focus as much on other institutional factors such as college culture nor on the impact of students' work status. In a quantitative study, Medina (2014) addressed the transition of 1,620 ABE/GED students who participated in ABE/GED programs during 2008-2009 and were tracked through 2013. Medina (2014) used binary logistic regressions to predict the likelihood of transition to postsecondary

education. She found that age had a significant impact on the students' likelihood to transition to postsecondary education. Students who were between the ages of 16-24 at the time of enrollment in the ABE/GED program were more likely to transition, as well as students who had had higher academic levels and had spent more than 16 hours preparing for their GED test. (Boykin, 2015) used qualitative inquiry to examine how GED graduates experience the academic demands of community college and what role student involvement and personal characteristics have in GED recipients' experiences in college. Boykin (2015) discovered that the experiences of GED graduates can be improved by providing students with better academic preparation as well as responding to financial, family, and employment barriers.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITY COLLEGES

Since the early 20th century, community colleges have provided affordable access to educational opportunities, adapting to the global economy and the changing workforce and societal needs of the students in the community that they serve (Vaughan, 2006). When community colleges began in the early 1900s, the social changes at the time included a need for trained workforce for a growing industrial nation, a desire for more social equality, and increased access to educational opportunities beyond high school (Cohen et al., 2013). First known as junior colleges because they offered the first two years of college-level instruction, the term "community college" became common by the 1970s as community, city, and county colleges throughout the nation became comprehensive, publicly supported institutions (Cohen et al., 2013). Community colleges did not begin as the democratic, comprehensive model they are today which are often viewed as a vehicle for increasing social mobility and increasing access to underserved and underrepresented students. In fact, the first junior colleges were the

result of efforts by three university administrators, William Rainey Harper, president of the University of Chicago; David Starr Jordan, president of Stanford University; and Alexis F. Lange, dean of the School of Education at the University of California in Berkeley who created separate institutions that would focus on basic teaching while the universities could focus on what they considered were higher levels of scholarship and research (Brint & Karabel, 1989). These institutions came to be known as Joliet Junior College (1901), and the first junior college in California in 1910.

Despite its elitist beginnings, the community college movement broadened to serve the workforce and education needs of the local community with a new vision influenced by Alexis F. Lange, Walter Crosby Eels, Leonard V. Koos, and Doak S. Campbell (Brint & Karabel, 1989). This vision of the community college as a multipurpose institution was first created in California during the depression and become fully realized after World War II (Brint & Karabel, 1989). The Serviceman's Readjustment Act, commonly known as the GI Bill was passed in 1944. The intent of the GI Bill was to support the retraining and education of returning veterans to prepare them for reentering the workforce and civilian life. The GI Bill thus jump-started the growth of community colleges which helped to expand the mission of community colleges to include vocational and workforce training (Vaughan, 2006). This was also the same time that the general education development (GED) was developed since many of the returning veterans lacked a high school diploma.

The growth of community colleges in the 20th century is parallel to the growth of higher education as a result of increasing numbers of high school graduates, the rise of statewide systems and support, and the belief in the open door or access to higher education for all

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Americans. (Vaughan, 2006). With the increase in community college enrollments came a dramatic increase in the number of students entering community colleges who were academically unprepared, returning adult learners, and English language learners (Pfahl et al., 2010). In the 1960s, community colleges began to offer developmental education to students who were underprepared for college-level and vocational instruction. The passing of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 and Adult Education Act in 1966 authorized college work-study programs for low-income students, work and vocational training programs, and the expansion of educational programs for adults which fit well into the mission of the open-door concept of the community college (OCTAE, n.d.). Building on the Workforce Investment Act of 1988, the WIOA passed in 2014 makes community colleges a vital component in preparing adults with the skills and training needed to be successful in a global economy (Campbell & Love, 2016). The term "community college" was popularized in the 1950s, emphasizing the historical main purpose of community colleges in providing community and continuing education (Cohen et al., 2013). Community education at community colleges includes a variety of categories including adult education, lifelong learning, continuing occupational and workforce training, entrepreneurship training, community services, and community-based education (Cohen et al., 2013). In this study, only students in the adult education program were considered since it is the primary program at the college that transitions first-generation adult college students into postsecondary education and training.

OVERVIEW OF THE ADULT EDUCATION AND HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY STUDENT

Nearly 39 million adults over the age of 16 lack a high school diploma or equivalency and are not enrolled in an educational program (GED Testing Service, 2012). These numbers

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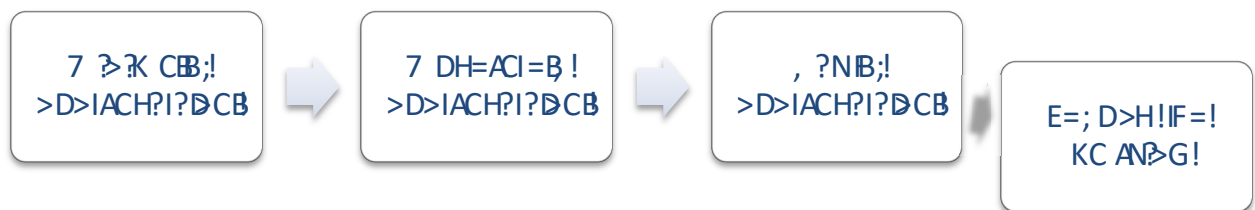
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According to Blumenstyk (2018), adult students make up about 27% of the undergraduate population with the majority at community colleges. Spellman (2007) estimates that more than 47% of students in U.S. higher education can be classified as adult learners. A National Center for Education Statistics (2007) report states that adult participation in formal education programs at universities and colleges has increased over the past three decades. Approximately 44 million Americans ages 25 to 64 have only a high school diploma or equivalency which is 26% of the adult US population (Blumenstyk, 2018). According to the Lumina Foundation, only 46% of adults between the ages of 25 to 64 have some college education but have not completed a degree or postsecondary credential (Johnson & Bell, 2014).

According to data reported by the GED Testing Service, the average high school equivalency test taker is in their mid-20s and has completed a 10th grade level of education (GED Testing Service, 2012). Of the adults who take the high school equivalency test nationally, 65% indicate that they do so to begin postsecondary education; however, data from two cohorts of students in a longtitudinal study from 2003 and 2004 indicates that of the 43% of high school equivalency graduates that enrolled in postsecondary education, only 12% graduated within six years (Zhang et al., 2011). Even though over 65% of high school equivalency graduates desire to enroll in further education, 56.7% of HSE graduates who enrolled in community college were no longer enrolled within two years of starting college (Mullin, 2014). Adults pursuing an HSE credential have a variety of reasons including pursuing postsecondary education and gaining better employment with the most prevalent reason to pursue further education (Patterson, 2014).

OVERVIEW OF ADULT EDUCATION

Adult education or adult basic education is defined primarily as the academic instruction to assist people over the age of compulsory schooling in attaining the basic literacy and numeracy skills in preparation for higher level instruction and to meet their personal and employment needs (St. Clair & Belzer, 2010). Adult education serves a population of widely varying ages and experiences; however, in general, adult education students are adults who have interrupted school for a variety of reasons including work, taking care of children, personal issues, or because of other disruptions (U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Students can enroll in adult education at traditional programs (community colleges or public schools), compulsory education programs (workforce development or welfare-to-work programs), or community-based programs which are more learner-centered programs focused on students' needs of achieving personal self-improvement or other personal goals (St. Clair & Belzer, 2010). Students can enter an adult education program in several areas including a) literacy and adult basic education for students who are below literacy level (below sixth grade); b) adult education/HSE preparation for student preparing for their high school equivalency or GED exam; c) English language acquisition for students who have limited or no reading, writing, or speaking skills in English; and/or d) workforce adult education and preparation activities which may include college and career readiness training or integrated education and training (IET) programs to develop both literacy and career training skills (U.S. Department of Education, 2018). Since the term "adult education" is used for a variety of education programs geared towards nontraditional, returning adult students, the researcher uses the term "adult education" to refer to students enrolled in the adult education programs listed above with a

specific focus on adult students who obtained their high school equivalency certificate while being enrolled in an adult education program.

There are over 30 million adults in the United States who do not have a high school equivalency, and 20% of adults with a high school diploma have only beginning-level literacy skills (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2013). Adult education programs operate as free-standing departments and/or organizations as a part of community colleges, school districts, libraries, workplaces, faith-based organizations, correctional centers, and other community-based organizations. Adult education programs offer educational and college- and career-readiness programs for adults with limited skills and education, including ABE and HSE or GED preparation for adults who have not completed high school, and ELA for students with limited English proficiency. Instruction is mostly provided by adjunct faculty with the exception of community colleges such as Harper College which have full-time faculty. While approximately two million students enroll each year in state and federally funded adult basic education programs, few of these adult education programs are successful at advancing students to postsecondary education and training, even when the program is housed within the community college (Jenkins et al., 2009; U.S. Department of Education, 2014).

History of Adult Education

In 1966, Lyndon Johnson signed the Adult Education Act, a landmark legislation committing the United States to invest in basic education for adults (Rose, 1991). The Adult Education Act of 1966 was actually an amended version of the Economic Opportunity Act of 1964 which was concerned with employment, productivity, poverty, and national security of the time (Sticht, 2002). However, the roots of adult education go back more than 400 years

beginning with religious instruction, vocational apprenticeships, and the common schools of the

original thirteen colonies in the United States as well as a federal provision to provide adult

literacy education for troops fighting in the Revolutionary War (Sticht, 2002).

Organized efforts to address adult illiteracy followed with a movement to educate

blacks in former slave states after the Civil War (Chisman, 2002). After emancipation, blacks had

acquired economic, legal, and civil rights; however, due to the withholding of educational

opportunity under slavery, most freed slaves were illiterate (Chisman, 2002). During the 1860s,

a federal government agency, the Freedmen's Bureau, established schools for blacks and

provided protection and financial support to help give blacks economic opportunities (Chisman,

2002). By 1869, almost 3,000 new schools were created to serve more than 150,000 freed

slaves (Chisman, 2002).

The U.S. military continued to have a great influence on adult education when, in 1917

during World War I, the U.S. Army became interested in developing standardized intelligence

tests to determine the literacy levels of new recruits. It was determined after administering

these tests that many soldiers, both native-born and immigrants, were not literate or functional

in the English language and needed adult education services. The military continued to be

involved in using standardized tests to determine what kinds of educational or occupational

opportunities would be best for soldiers. This process led to the development of the tests of the

General Educational Development (GED) during World War II in 1942 to give military veterans

the opportunity to use their experience in the military to qualify for a high school equivalency

certificate (Rose, 1991). Tens of thousands of armed service members took advantage of this

chance to earn a high school equivalency certificate and also used the GI Bill to pursue postsecondary education and training (Sticht, 2002).

The passage of the Adult Education Act of 1966 was the result of an increasing focus on both professionalizing and expanding adult education programs and services (Rose, 1991). Beginning in the 1920s, professional organizations such as the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) in 1926 and the Adult Education Association of the United States, formerly under the National Education Association in 1951, were created to promote the professionalization of adult education.

In the early 1900s, as immigration to the United States increased, there was a growing concern among federal and state policymakers to Americanize immigrants using adult education programs which expanded adult education programming locations to public schools, libraries, and other settings (Sticht, 2002). At the same time, there was a movement, led by Cora Wilson Stewart, superintendent of Roward County schools in Kentucky, to eradicate adult illiteracy by opening up "Moonlight Schools." Moonlight Schools operated only on evenings when the moon was visible to help adult students find their way to and from school safely. These schools were especially designed for adults, and Stewart insisted that these schools use adult materials and focus on building self-esteem (Sticht, 2002). Unfortunately, during World War I, the efforts of Stewart's focus on native-born illiterates declined and, as a result of economic issues related to post-war economic challenges, ended with the beginning of the Great Depression of the 1930s.

During the Great Depression of the 1930s, New Deal programs such as the Civilian Conservation Corps were initiated to develop educational and vocational programs for

unemployed and undereducated men (Sticht, 2002). The Works Progress Administration was

created to employ unemployed teachers to teach more than one million illiterate adults (Sticht,

2002). As was first noted during World War I, during World War II, the military discovered that

hundreds of thousands of American adults were functionally illiterate or not able to read above

a fifth-grade level (Sticht, 2002). Thus, in 1957, the National Commission on Adult Literacy was

organized under the U.S. Office of Education to find a solution to the adult illiteracy problem

(Sticht, 2002). In the early 1950s, adult education took on a Conservation of Human Resources

project with its focus on the connection between employment and illiteracy. During the 1950s

and early 1960s, contrasting views of the goals of adult education continued to fragment the

adult education movement as a whole as some members of adult education community

believed in the focus on liberal education and helping the least literate in society, while other

branches focused on enhancing adult education's goal of increasing economic security and

industrial productivity (Sticht, 2002). Adult education programming was not federally legislated

until the early 1960s when the military stepped in to examine why so many young recruits were

failing the Selective Service System's entrance screening exam (Sticht, 2002). A task force was

created and discovered that half of the young men who took the entrance exam were

unqualified and a third did not meet the standards for education (Sticht, 2002). This resulted in

more interest in exploring the issues of employment, poverty, and productivity of the nation,

resulting in the Economic Opportunity Act of 1966 which included the Adult Education Act of

1966. (Rose, 1991; Sticht, 2002).

Since the enactment of the Adult Education Act of 1966, several amendments followed

to expand the number of adults served (Rose, 1991). In 1970, the age of adult education

services was lowered from 18 to 16 and provisions were added to include English as a second language and adult secondary education and high school equivalency classes. In 1978 and 1988 amendments expanded services to include high school graduates who lacked functional literacy skills as well as permitting partnerships with businesses and non-profit organizations to provide workplace and English literacy programs (Sticht, 2002).

The field of adult education continued to expand the number of professional associations advocating for adult literacy programs. This movement helped pass the National Literacy Act (NLA) of 1991 which was housed under the U.S. Department of Education (Sticht, 2002). However, the focus on adult education in the direction of human resources development and workforce development shifted the focus on adult education to boost the U.S. economic competitiveness and preparing workers for a global economy (Sticht, 2002). As a result, the Workforce Investment Act (WIA) of 1998 was enacted, and the Adult Education and Family Literacy Act (AEFLA) replaced the NLA under Title II of WIA (Sticht, 2002). The new WIA/AEFLA system was guided by federal rules and regulations determining which states, local, and community-based organizations received federal funding for adult education. This was the beginning of a system that focused adult education programming on workforce development with strict accountability and quality improvement measures (Sticht, 2002).

In 2014, Congress reauthorized the Workforce Innovation Opportunity Act (WIOA) representing a continued, significant federal investment in adult education (National Skills Coalition, 2016). Under Title II of WIOA, more than $550 million is provided nationwide to support adult education, high school equivalency, English language acquisition, and college- and career-readiness skills development (National Skills Coalition, 2016). Under the new WIOA

mandate, adult education providers, including community colleges, are required to coordinate

with local workforce development boards to ensure alignment and seamless services for adults

seeking educational and employment services (National Skills Coalition, 2016). Additionally,

WIOA requires that adult educators be active participants in the development of each state

plan that describes the strategic priorities and operational activities and adult education's role

in achieving adult education, workforce, and career pathways goals (National Skills Coalition,

2016). Under the new WIOA law, adult education now plays a crucial role and partnership with

community colleges, employers, and one-stop career and employment centers in providing

adults with the foundational skills needed to access career pathways and postsecondary

education opportunities.

BACKGROUND OF THE HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY CREDENTIAL

The HSE credential, formerly known as the GED credential, was developed in the 1940s

to assist in the reintegration World War II veterans who needed to complete high school to

enter college or other work training programs (Tyler, 2003). The limited prior educational

background of these veterans posed a challenge to the government and the military which

viewed postsecondary education as an important tool to reintegrate veterans. According to

military estimates, nearly ten million World War II veterans had not completed high school

(Tyler, 2003). Although half of these men had some high school education, half had not gone

beyond eighth, and another half million had completed less than fourth grade (Lynde, 1945, p.

14).

As postsecondary education is now required today for many careers, in the 1940s, a

high school credential was often all that was necessary for college enrollment and licensure in

many occupations. Eventually, a five-test battery including language and writing skills, interpretation of literary and non-fiction texts, interpretation of reading in natural sciences, interpretation of reading in social studies, and mathematics was developed which came to be known as the GED (American Council on Education, 1945). In 1947, the American Council on Education (ACE), with the support of the New York Education Department, offered the GED test for the first time to civilians who had not served in the military (Quinn, 2003; Tyler, 2003). Since neither the military nor the American Council on Education could grant high school credentials, it was necessary to convince state departments of education of the value of the GED alternative to high school completion. Within a year, 22 states were offering the GED to provide HSE credentials to non-veterans ages 18-22 (Quinn, 2003).

The GED was adopted quickly and became a legitimate measure of high school equivalency not just for veterans, but any civilian over the age of 17 who dropped out of high school, providing a second opportunity for Americans to build their academic skills and transition into postsecondary education (Quinn, 2003). By the 1960s, the GED exam was available nationwide, and the percentage of GED recipients relative to traditional high school graduates rose from less than 2% in 1954 to more than 14% in 1986 (Cameron & Heckman, 1993). The GED test is used by all 50 states, Puerto Rico, the District of Columbia, Canadian provinces and territories, and federal correctional institutions as a way of awarding a high school equivalency credential. More than 800,000 GED tests are given each year (American Council on Education & GED Testing Service, 2011).

During the early years of the GED test, a high school equivalency was sufficient to secure many types of jobs. However, in the mid-1970s, changes in attitude about education required

various updates to the GED test (Quinn, 2003). The GED test was updated and revised in 1972, 1988, 2002, and most recently in 2014. The new GED test consists of four tests: language arts (combined reading and writing), social science, science, and math. The latest transformation of the GED test resulted from a business collaboration between the American Council on Education (ACE) and Pearson, building on the goals of the GED 21st Century Initiative to:

1. Create a more rigorous test which aligned with Common Core Standards and College and Career Readiness Standards, assuring that GED graduates were prepared for postsecondary education and to compete and succeed in a global economy;

2. Develop a national, accessible test preparation program including personalized learning, online learning resources; and

3. Create a transition network which connects students to adult education and postsecondary educational resources (American Council on Education, 2014).

The new GED 2014 test, developed by ACE and Pearson, was initially criticized due to its higher cost and singular computerized version. Since current federal legislation allows states to select their own high school equivalency testing and award option, two new high school equivalency testing alternatives were developed in 2014. The High School Equivalency Test (HiSET) was developed by the Educational Testing Service (ETS) and The Test Assessing Secondary Completion (TASC) was developed by McGraw Hill Education. Both the HiSET and TASC offer paper versions, while the GED test is only computer-based. The most common test is still the GED test. However, adults in Illinois have the option of taking any of the three tests. All of the three HSE tests offered are consistent with the emphasis on high school common core curricula and meeting the college and career readiness standards for adult education.

The majority of high school equivalency candidates today report that they are seeking the credential not just as evidence that they have completed high school, but also as a stepping

stone to postsecondary education (Quinn, 2003). In 2013, more than 816,000 adults attempted

the GED high school equivalency examination, and 541,000 of these individuals were awarded

their high school equivalency credential (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). In

2015, 111,218 individuals took the HiSET or TASC high school equivalency tests, and 53,378 of

these individuals earned their HSE credential (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

Earning a high school equivalency credential is just the beginning to help transition adults into

postsecondary education and training. By 2020, 65% of all jobs will require skills and education

beyond a high school level (Carnevale et al., 2013). This means that achieving institutional and

national goals of increasing postsecondary education attainment will require all high school

graduates, including HSE holders, to be prepared for college and careers and have accessible

transition and support services to enter and be successful in postsecondary education. In spite

of the increase in high school graduation rates in the U.S., nearly 40,000 adults in the U.S. lack a

high school equivalency (Zhang et al., Song, 2011). To reach these adults, the American Council

on Education developed the GED 21st Century Initiative which focuses on a national multi-

platform, accelerated approach, equivalency testing aligned with common core and college and

career readiness standards, and a post-credential college transition network to guide students

to career pathways and postsecondary education (Zhang et al., 2011).

CHARACTERISTICS OF HIGH SCHOOL EQUIVALENCY GRADUATES TRANSITIONING TO COLLEGE

As the U.S. economy continues to recover and educational attainment becomes a

central component of social mobility and economic success, adults who did not earn a

traditional high school diploma can no longer set their end goal as an HSE credential (Maralani,

2011). The HSE credential, especially for traditionally disadvantaged groups such as racial and

ethnic minorities and people from economically-disadvantaged backgrounds, has become a gateway to postsecondary education (Maralani, 2011). A majority (65.1% in 2009) of adults who pass their high school equivalency test indicated that their goal was to enter postsecondary education (Zhang et al., 2011). However, in spite of the GED 21st Century Initiative and importance of an HSE to enter postsecondary education, there is very little data about HSE credential holders and their transition to and success in college. Furthermore, the studies of HSE credential holders' college enrollment behavior vary depending on the study.

Current research reports that approximately 30% of HSE recipients had entered college by age 27 compared to 69% of students with a traditional high school diploma (Murnane, Willett, & Tyler, 2000). Reder (2007) found that 27% of the national HSE population had transitioned to college compared to 63% of traditional high school diploma graduates. However, Sum, Khatiwada, Trubskyy, Palma, and McHugh (2012) found that only 17% of GED passers aged 18-29 had enrolled in college. In a longitudinal study of approximately 150,000 GED test passers. Zhang et al. (2011) found that 43% of 2003 and 2004 cohorts of GED test passers enrolled in postsecondary education. However, only 28.7% of all postsecondary enrollees persisted from their first year to second year of college, and by 2010, 62% were no longer enrolled in postsecondary education (Zhang et al., 2011).

Maralani (2011) found that high school dropouts who later earn an HSE are three times more likely to enter postsecondary education than adults who do not earn an HSE credential. Regardless of the conflicting research, all of the studies confirm that HSE test passers do not enroll in and persist in college at the same rate as their traditional, high school graduating peers (Reder, 2007; Maralani, 2011; Sum et al., 2012).

In terms of age, gender, and ethnicity demographics, the 2004 cohort report found that of HSE credential holders, the majority (79%) who enter postsecondary education are between the ages of 16-24 (Zhang et al., 2011). Only 14.6% were between the ages of 25 and 34 years old, and 6.4% were older than 35 years old. The data has shown that the postsecondary enrollment rate decreased as the age of the high school equivalency test passers' age increased (Zhang et al., 2011). The vast majority of HSE test passers transition to large, inexpensive two-year public colleges (Reder, 2007; Zhang et al., 2011). More than two-thirds of HSE test passers enrolled in postsecondary education within the first three years of passing their test, and 40% enrolled full-time while 31.8% enrolled half-time (Zhang et al., 2011). The percentages of male and female HSE test passers were about the same for enrollees in the 2004 cohort; however, female HSE test passers (49.7%) had a higher enrollment rate in postsecondary coursework than male HSE test passers (38%). African-American and Hispanic HSE test passers were no less likely to transition to postsecondary education than were white test passers; however, Asian HSE test passers had the highest rate of transition to college at 59% (Zhang et al., 2011). For other groups, the enrollment rate was 47.3% for African American, 40.3% for Hispanic, and 42.3% for white HSE test passers.

In terms of academic status, research has indicated that HSE test passers who have completed more education prior to taking the HSE test and who score higher on the actual HSE test are more likely to enroll in postsecondary education (Zhang et al., 2011). Another factor that has shown that HSE credential holders will enroll in classes is their indication that they intend to pursue postsecondary education as a reason for taking the high school equivalency test (Reder, 2007; Zhang et al. 2011). In fact, Zhang et al. (2011) found that 59.6% of students

who indicated "enter a four-year college" as a reason for taking the HSE test later enrolled compared to only 39% of HSE test passers who indicated employment reasons or interest in trade/technical programs as their primary reason for taking the HSE test.

TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

While the majority of high school equivalency credential holders indicate that they do so to transition to postsecondary education, approximately one-third actually enroll in postsecondary education, and only 12% actually earn a degree or certificate within six years (Zhang et al., 2011). This corresponds to data query from Harper College institutional research from 2016 and 2017 that only approximately one-third of students who achieve their HSE at Harper College actually transition to college classes at Harper (Coy, 2018). However, the benefits of a postsecondary degree for adults are compelling. For adults who complete their HSE credential, a postsecondary education leads to jobs with higher wages and career advancement potential. Illinois adult education programs serve approximately 81,000 students annually. This represents a penetration rate of only 4-8% of the adult students in need of services (ICCB, 2018b). For most workers, an HSE is not sufficient to succeed in today's economy, and workers with only a high school diploma or equivalency earn 44% less than those with some postsecondary education (Anderson et al., 2017).

Although community colleges have focused efforts on assisting traditional-aged college students to and through postsecondary education, there is limited rigorous research on college transitions of adult, nontraditional high school equivalency test passers (Tinto, 2012; U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Adults with limited academic preparation, interrupted schooling, low-income status, first-generation status, and other disadvantages face barriers in

making the transition to and through postsecondary education (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). According to the literature, adults face individual, institutional, and policy barriers in transitioning to and succeeding in postsecondary education (Spellman, 2007; U.S. Department of Education, 2010).

THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS

John Bean and Barbara Metzner's Conceptual Model of Nontraditional
Undergraduate Student Attrition

Bean and Metzner (1985) introduced a model of the persistence and dropping out process for nontraditional, adult college students who were defined as commuter, part-time, and/or older than 25 years. Their model indicates that a student's decision to leave or continue in postsecondary education is directly influenced by background variables (demographics, enrollment status, educational goals), academic variables (study habits, connection to faculty, advising, course availability), environmental factors (economic situation, hours worked, family encouragement), academic performance (grade point average, GPA), and psychological factors (goals, satisfaction).

Bean and Metzner's (1985) model posited that environmental variables, or pull factors, can support or decrease nontraditional students' retention. The positive impact of environmental support, such as family encouragement or a less stressful work schedule, may compensate for the negative impact from academic variables. In other words, nontraditional students who receive strong, positive environmental support are more likely to persist in postsecondary education even if academic support is weak. On the other hand, strong academic support may not compensate for a lack of environmental support. For example, if the

student has difficulty making childcare arrangements, adjusting their work schedule, or cannot afford to pay for college, then they will not continue in school regardless of positive academic support or advising. Bean and Metzner's (1985) model does not rely on social engagement and posited that nontraditional, older students are not as influenced by the social environment of the institution as they are by external factors outside the campus. Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition provides an understanding of the reasons why adults persist or drop out of college based on their academic behaviors and integration with the academic system of the institution rather than their interaction with the social environment of the institution (Bean & Metzner, 1985). Bean and Metzner argued that nontraditional students, especially students over the age of 24, were more likely to persist if the institution helped them reach their academic goals rather than steering them towards the social environment of the campus. This is in contrast with Tinto (1975) who suggested that students are more likely to drop out if they are unable to integrate socially into the college's community.

Schlossberg's Transition Theory

The transition theoretical perspective focuses on life events that involve change. The discussion of the transition model posited by Nancy Schlossberg (2011) includes an understanding of the concept of transitions, coping with the change that accompanies transitions, and the application of the model to work and life transitions. The transition model allows the researcher to better understand the process adults experience as the move from a reaction to a planned or unplanned event (transition) to incorporating the event into their life (adaptation).

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Schlossberg (2011) presented a transition model that incorporated three types of transitions:

1. Anticipated transitions, or scheduled, expected events that can be anticipated and prepared for by individuals such as graduating from high school or college, becoming a parent, or changing careers;

2. Unanticipated transitions, or nonscheduled/disruptive events that are not predictable nor easily prepared for, for example, an unexpected health issue, a surprise promotion, or loss of job; and

3. Nonevent transitions, or unexpected events that fail to occur such as not getting married, not getting the promotion one expected, or not having enough money to retire.

Understanding the ways that the various transitions alter adults' lives is important because transitions change relationships with family, alter routines in life, and affect an adult's assumptions about their self, routines, relationships, and role in life (Schlossberg, 2011). Even anticipated transitions can cause stress, and the coping with the transition of leaving one set of roles, routines, and relationships and entering into new ones takes time. Sometimes adults will cope well with one transition, but they have a more difficult time coping with another (Schlossberg, 2011).

Schlossberg's model also provides a way of assessing an adult's coping resources. There are four sets of variables that influence an adult's ability to copy with transition. Referred to as the Four S's, they are situation, self, support, and strategies (Anderson et al., 2012; Schlossberg, 2011). The Four S's can help the researcher understand the adult's 1) situation at the time of the transition, including any other environmental stressors; 2) inner coping mechanisms and personality characteristics, such as resilience and optimism; 3) support system that is available

during the transition; and 4) coping strategies used to change or adapt to the situation (Schlossberg, 2011).

The last component of the transition model involves the idea that adults move through their transitions by three phases termed *moving into, moving through*, and *moving out* (Anderson et al., 2012). Each of these phases of the transition process for adult students demand different responses and supports from higher education administrators and faculty.

Moving into involves the initial adjustment to the transition and movement into a new role. For example, transitioning to college would involve familiarizing oneself with the role, routines, expectations, and relationships of this new environment. The moving into phase requires learning new skills as well as learning new ways of using old skills. This can result in adults feeling marginalized and insecure if they do not have the proper support, orientation, and guidance during this phase (Anderson et al., 2012).

The moving through stage involves day-to-day management and the confusion and distress that comes with the conflicting "middle period" of one's new role environment and self. For example, the college student begins to adapt to the transition of the college student. Finally, the moving out phase is the end of the transition that leads an individual to contemplate even future changes. This phase involves a separation from one's prior role as the individual transitions into another role. Figure 2 shows the stages of transition; the arrows represent the cyclical and ongoing flow of transition for adults. Although the middle moving through phase is the most stable, adaptation and transition are not permanent. Transitions can take years, and they are always in motion.
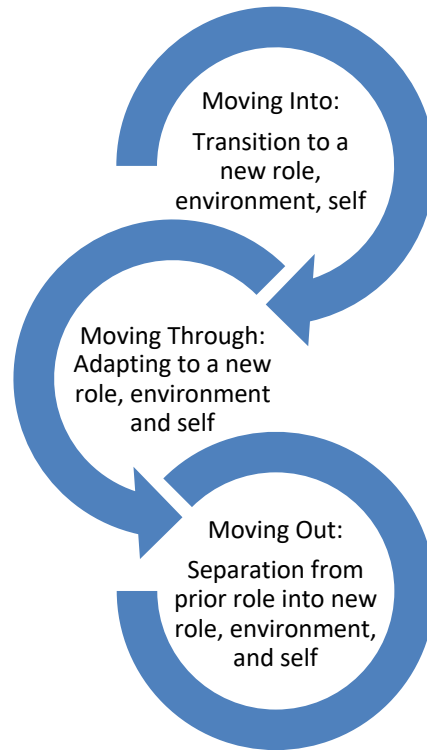
Figure 2. Schlossberg's Phases of Transition.

Finally, in transition theory, the concepts of mattering and marginality play a role as adult transition to college (Anderson et al., 2012). The term "mattering" was coined by sociologist Morris Rosenberg to describe a universal and critical motive in adults to believe that adults count in other's lives and that adults are making a difference (Rosenberg & McCullough, 1981). The term "marginality" refers to feeling peripheral to a group rather than feeling central to a group or a sense of belonging (Anderson et al., 2012). In Schlossberg's transition theory, it is important for the adult student in an institution to feel appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged, especially in the moving in phase of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012). In her work as a clinical psychologist and researcher focused on adult transitions, Schlossberg found that people often feel marginal when they undergo a transition, regardless of whether

the transition was planned or not (Schlossberg, 1989). This is because when one has to take on

a new role, the larger the difference between the new role and old role can cause feelings of

marginality due to the uncertainty, especially if there are no norms or support for the new roles

(Schlossberg, 1989).

Cross's Adult Learner Barriers to Participation in Higher Education

Previous research on adult students' return to school has revealed several classifications

of barriers that adults face when enrolling and persisting in postsecondary education (Osam,

Bergman, & Cumberland, 2017; Patterson, 2017). In addition to the internal and external

factors that affect transition, barriers can impact the circumstances that influence an

individual's perception of a situation or transition (Anderson et al., 2012). Furthermore, barriers

help to inform the complexity and dynamics that adults face in incorporating higher education

into their lives (Kasworm, 2008). In her seminal book, *Adults as Learners: Increasing*

Participation and Facilitating Learning, Cross (1981) described adult learner barriers to

participation in higher education, categorizing barriers as situational, institutional, and

dispositional.

Situational barriers include all of the obstacles that arise from the individual's current

life situation (Cross, 1981). For example, adults face situation hurdles such as finances, family

responsibilities, health issues, transportation, work schedule conflict, and lack of family

support. Of these situational issues, financial issues are one of the primary situational barriers

for adult students (Goto & Martin, 2009). Financial issues have an especially high impact on

adults due to increasing costs of higher education. Furthermore, adult students have financial

burdens for both themselves and families making it difficult to afford attending college (Hardin,

2008). Financial needs for adults often include extra costs such as housing, childcare, health care, and other financial responsibilities (Hardin, 2008). Adult HSE graduates are often in lower-paying jobs and are worried about taking on additional debt. To further escalate the financial burden, adult students returning to school often do not seek out the loans or financial help available to them; instead, they continue to work full time which makes attending full time and persisting in postsecondary education a challenge even for the most motivated student (Cross, 1981).

The second biggest situational barrier is lack of time due to family and job responsibilities, especially for adults between ages 25-44 (Cross, 1981). Situational barriers may also include childcare and parenting responsibilities and financial obligations to maintain a household. Nontraditional students are often working more than part time, and in many cases full time, while trying to go to school. This is particularly an issue for male students who have family responsibilities and are pressured to work full time to provide for their families (Osam et al., 2017). Similarly, literature suggests that financial barriers to enrolling in college impacts women more than men due to the multiple roles women play including working, attending to family responsibilities, and going to college (Osam et al., 2017).

Institutional barriers are the policies and procedures within the college structure and culture that prevent adult students from participating in educational activities (Cross, 1981). Institutional barriers are categorized in five areas: the scheduling and availability of classes, location or transportation issues, lack of relevant and practical course/program offerings, procedural problems or time requirements, and lack of communication and information about programs, policies, and procedures (Cross, 1981). Adults have reported, for example, that the

lack of information about enrollment, financial aid, and other support can make it difficult to understand the process for enrolling in college classes, choosing a program, and obtaining financial aid (Cross, 1981; Hardin, 2008). Adults are less likely to tolerate institutionally imposed barriers than traditional students and will often just drop out rather than challenging the system (Hardin, 2008). Many colleges marginalize adult students, and adults are often invisible to college administrators due to a lack of data collection and dissemination about this population (Mullin, 2014; Sissel, Hansman, & Kasworm, 2001). Colleges need to provide better resources and implement support systems for their adult students to succeed. The challenge of institutional barriers on top of their situational barriers can be emotionally draining and frustrating for adult students.

Dispositional barriers include those obstacles related to an individual's self-perception and attitude about oneself as an adult student (Cross, 1981). Dispositional barriers can also include an individual's perceptions of school based on prior experiences (Cross, 1981; Hardin, 2008). Since many returning adult students had negative educational experiences in the past, they are more likely to alienate themselves and often do not seek out or know how to seek out support and guidance (Hardin, 2008; Kasworm, 2008). Often for these adult students in transition, if there are too many changes and stressors at the same time, the student often feels that their only option is to drop out of school (Hardin, 2008).

In spite of the increase of adults on college campuses, college campus culture is focused more on 18-22-year old traditional students. Due to this complex and deep-rooted culture, adults have reported a feeling of impostership, or that they do not have the intelligence or aptitude to be college students (Brookfield, 1999). Due to limited postsecondary and academic

experiences, adults may have lower self-confidence about their ability to learn, and they also feel that they are too old to learn (Cross, 1981).

Dispositional barriers are probably underestimated in survey data due to social norms (Cross, 1981). Generally, it is easier for an individual, for example, to blame external factors for not enrolling in school such as lack of time or finances than internal factors such as lack of interest or low self-esteem (Cross, 1981). Further research about individuals who are not interested in pursuing postsecondary education would uncover dispositional barriers (Cross, 1981).

ADULT STUDENT TRANSITION TO POSTSECONDARY EDUCATION

Transition Programs

In addition to the theoretical models, this research is informed by the literature on transition programs and models. Over the past two decades, institutions of higher education, especially community colleges, have experienced a growth in the number of adults pursuing higher education (Blumenstyk, 2018; Hardin, 2008; Karmelita, 2017). The National Center for Education Statistics (2017) reported that adult student enrollments increased by 35% from 2000 to 2012, and Blumenstyk (2018) reports that students over the age of 25 now constitute about 27% of the undergraduate population. Unfortunately, the transition and success rates of adults transitioning to college are lower than traditional aged students, and adult students have reported that the enrollment process for postsecondary institutions is often complex and frustrating (Hardin, 2008; Karmelita, 2017).

Transition-to-postsecondary-education programs are a growing and promising trend in helping adult students, especially HSE credential holders, personally in their transition to college, provide college- and career-readiness training, and help students overcome the complexities of enrolling in postsecondary education (Karmelita, 2017; Office of Vocational and Adult Education [OVAE], 2010; Zafft et al., 2006). The primary goal of transition programs is to promote adult student persistence and retention in higher education as well as alleviate the barriers to enrollment and persistence (Karmelita, 2017; Zafft et al., 2006). Transition programs are similar to the concept to the first-year experience (FYE) programs which help to support first-generation and new college students acclimate to college. Unlike FYE programs, transition programs are specifically designed for adult education students. Students participate in transition programming prior to enrollment in postsecondary education and support may continue throughout the students' first semester or year of postsecondary education (Alamprese, 2005; Zafft, et al., 2006). Transition programs generally provide the following services to help support adult students' transition to and overcome barriers in persisting in postsecondary education:

- Academic preparation: instruction in math, reading, writing, computers. Newer models utilize integrated and contextualized basic skills instruction with technical content with team teaching;

- Counseling and advising: providing information about financial aid, career and academic pathways advising, time management, study skills, and case management for personal crises; and

- Mentoring: helping orient students to college activities, support services, offering encouragement and support, networking within and outside the college (Alamprese, 2005; Wachen et al., 2012).

In a more recent study on the effectiveness of adult transition programs in Texas, Kallison (2017) discussed that postsecondary transition programs for adult students typically include the following components or characteristics: a) managed enrollment and accelerated instruction, b) college-readiness curricula, c) student-directed pedagogy, d) career guidance and exploration, e) college knowledge activities, f) learning framework instruction, g) enrichment activities such as tutoring and academic advising, and h) connections to higher education institutions.

Transition Program Models

In an analysis of U.S. adult education to college transition programs, Zafft et al. (2006) found that there are five models of transition programs: advising, GED-Plus, English for speakers of other languages (ESOL), career pathways, and college preparatory.

1. The advising model generally is found at colleges and universities. This model focuses on raising adult students' awareness of postsecondary academic and career options, admissions processes, and financial aid. This model primarily uses existing workshops and presentations to disseminate information.

2. The GED-Plus model focuses on the acceleration of learning for HSE students to facilitate their transition to postsecondary education. This model aligns college- and career-readiness skills with the high school equivalency test preparation. In some programs, students are concurrently enrolled in HSE and postsecondary classes. This model is also found at colleges that have in-house adult education programs since the model aligns the adult education and postsecondary programs.

3. The ESOL model is focused on accelerating English language learners' academic and language skill development to prepare students for college-level coursework.

4. The goal of the career pathways model is to provide contextualized and integrated academic and technical skills training to prepare for living-wage, high-growth careers. This model is often referred to as the Integrated Basic Education Skills and Training (I-BEST) or Integrated Education and Training (IET). In Illinois, this model is also referred to as Integrated Career and Academic Preparation System (ICAPS) which developed from the Accelerating Opportunity (AO) initiative in Illinois (Anderson et al., 2017).

5. Finally, the college preparatory model is designed to prepare students to enter directly in college-level classes or at the upper-level of developmental classes after taking their HSE exam. The goal of this model is to emphasize a college-like learning environment and structure to reflect the demands and expectations of college-level classes. Other features of this model include a comprehensive counseling component and cohort-style learning communities (Zafft et al., 2006).

Although these five models of transition programs emerged in the literature, there is little research about the effectiveness of each model, and there is a lack of knowledge of adult students' perspectives on their participation in these models (Karmelita, 2017; Valentine et al., 2009). One recent study examined a grant-funded pilot which established accelerated transition programs for HSE graduates at twelve Texas adult education programs from 2010-2014. Results from this study showed meaningful improvement in reading, writing, and math skills; however, the majority of students did not reach the college readiness benchmarks in one or more subject areas, especially in math (Kallison, 2017). More research is needed to determine if adult students need more instructional time in subject areas due to their lower-level skills in reading and math (Kallison, 2017). In terms of matriculation, the study showed positive results that 65 to 72% of participants transitioned to postsecondary education after completing the transition program. These figures are higher than the 43% of the 2003 and 2004 national cohorts of GED passers who enrolled in postsecondary education within five years of obtaining their HSE diploma (Zhang et al., 2011).

Career Pathways, State, and Federal Initiatives Affecting Adult Education

The development of transition programs has been encouraged by career pathways, and state and federal initiatives (Mageehon, 2013). The goal of these initiatives has been to address policy, program, and systems gaps to increase the numbers of adults with significant

educational and skills gaps to advance from adult education programming into high-demand, technical occupational areas which provide family-sustaining wages (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018).

Adult education programs nationwide are developing career pathways programs which are viewed as an important strategy in enabling low-skilled and underprepared adults to obtain a postsecondary education credential leading to employment in in-demand occupations. While increasing adults' academic and employment skills has always been an objective of adult education, the creation of seamless pathways for adults in need of basic skills and postsecondary education has taken on a new emphasis with the 2014 passage of the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (Bird et al., 2015). WIOA requires community colleges to enhance education and training in adult education, provide integrated options for students to move more quickly into career pathway programs, and strengthen relationships between education, the community, and employers (Bird et al., 2015). In sum, the WIOA mandate requires community colleges to focus student success on not only the college-ready and the underprepared, developmental students, but also the student success efforts at the adult education or pre-college level.

Prior to the enactment of WIOA, Congress authorized the U.S. Department of Labor's Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) grant program as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 to help community colleges increase their capacity to meet local and regional labor demand for a skilled workforce (Ulvin, 2018). From 2011-2014, the Department of Labor provided nearly $2 billion in funding to institutions of higher education offering programs of study that could be completed in two

years or less. The grants were designed to help colleges develop innovative programming to help accelerate adults through career pathways and the provision of strong student support systems (Ulvin, 2018).

One example of a state-level initiative is the Transition to College and Careers (TCC) demonstration project by the National College Transition Network (NCTN) at World Education in New England (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). This project had six pilot sites in four New England states and was built on the successes of New England ABE-to-College Transition Project from 2000 to 2007. The goal of the TCC project was to help transition high school equivalency graduates and other nontraditional, underprepared adults to postsecondary education by addressing both academic and non-academic barriers (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). The TCC program used a framework of college and career readiness areas to foster students' skills in personal, career, academic, and college readiness and knowledge (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). In their findings of almost 400 students in six programs, 50% of the students who completed the transition program transitioned successfully to postsecondary education, and 33% were in the process of transitioning. The researchers found that students who completed the TCC program had increased self-confidence and efficacy skills. A sense of belonging and community and the availability of a strong support person at the college were major factors that students reported as reasons for their successful postsecondary transition (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). Other important variables that contributed to successful student transition and persistence were academic skills instruction, blended online and classroom instruction in a cohort model, career education and planning knowledge building, clarity of purpose and preference for long-term goals, and college knowledge such as financial aid, study skills,

enrollment process, and academic requirements (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). Due to the success of the ABE to College Transition and TCC projects, four states—Maine, Connecticut, Rhode Island, and New Hampshire—institutionalized their transition programs with state funding.

Another state-level initiative, Accelerating Opportunity (AO) was launched in 2011 to invest in supporting integrated career pathways opportunities for underprepared, adult learners. AO was created and supported by a consortium of philanthropic, nonprofit, and educational organizations including Jobs for the Future, the Washington State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, the National Council for Workforce Education, the National College Transition Network, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and others. AO's goal was to address policy, programmatic, and systems gaps in supporting students from federally funded adult education programs to postsecondary education and training. Between 2010 and 2014, the AO initiative included seven states and 85 colleges, including Harper College. Over 10,000 students enrolled in integrated career pathways programs in manufacturing, healthcare, business, and other technical trades. Over 12,000 credentials were awarded with more than 3,500 students earning 12 or more credits.

In a rigorous study, AO was found to increase the likelihood that adult students would earn a credential than non-AO students (Anderson et al., 2017). The final AO report demonstrated the importance of community colleges' successful creation of strong internal and external partnerships to provide targeted support services for students (Anderson et al., 2017). AO lessons learned also included the value of having a college "navigator" outside the classroom as an essential resource in supporting students. Additional lessons learned included

targeted team teaching (adult education and career program faculty), cohort education models, a supportive learning environment, integrated pathways model, and labor market connections. Finally, comprehensive student support systems were imperative to success including academic and non-academic advising, counseling, and access to a dedicated college navigator working with a team of college faculty and staff (Anderson et al., 2017).

Adult Education and Transition to Postsecondary Education Funding in Illinois

As represented in the initiatives and projects above, adult education and transition programming for adult students is often connected to federal, state, and philanthropic funding (Zafft et al., 2006). How a program is funded impacts the program design, curriculum, assessment, and target audience. Illinois receives both state and federal funds to support its adult education and literacy programs. The Division of Adult Education and Literacy (DAEL) under the Office of Career, Technical, and Adult Education administers the funding and grants to states for their adult education and literacy programs which includes transition, workforce preparation, and integrated education and training (IET) activities (OCTAE, 2018). Each state then distributes funds to eligible programs and agencies such as adult education programs housed in community colleges or community-based organizations. The state is allowed to set its own requirement regarding funding; however, these requirements must comply with the WIOA and the National Reporting System (NRS) which is the federal outcome-based accountability system for federally funded adult education programs (OCTAE, 2018). Established in 1998, the NRS collects data including postsecondary enrollment and employment status after participation in adult education programs (Zafft, 2008). Using these reporting measures requirements, states select adult education and transition models that will best advance

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students into postsecondary education and employment (Zafft et al., 2006). Each state has

opted for a transition program model to best meet workforce needs.

In response to WIOA legislation that required states to submit a unified plan that

encompasses core workforce development programs including Title II-Adult Education, the

Illinois Community College Board (ICCB) convened an adult education task force which created

the strategic plan Expanding Career Pathway Opportunities in Adult Education: Strategic Plan

2018-2023 to integrate adult education programming into the WIOA system and provide

strategic direction for adult education in Illinois. The vision statement of the new strategic plan

states:

> In partnership with other stakeholders, we will create learning opportunities that align
> with statewide education, training, and employment strategies to ensure all adult
> learners have access to and success across services that are cohesive, coordinated, and
> innovative to promote better economic opportunities, greater equity, and sustainable
> career pathways. (Illinois Community College Board, 2018b)

The primary focus of the Illinois new adult education plan is to expand and scale

comprehensive career pathways to transition more underprepared adults into postsecondary

training and education leading to skilled, family-sustaining jobs (ICCB, 2018b). In order to do

this, adult education programs, in collaboration with their community colleges, need to

increase postsecondary transitions, strengthen college and career readiness, and provide

comprehensive academic and non-academic support (ICCB, 2018b).

The Need to Support Nontraditional HSE Graduates Transition
to Postsecondary Education

Adults moving from adult education and HSE preparation programs into higher

education face considerable challenges beyond academics (Alamprese, 2005; Guison-Dowdy &

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Patterson, 2011a). Barriers to participation in postsecondary education are situational, institutional, and dispositional (Cross, 1981; Patterson, 2017). Situational deterrents result from life circumstances as nontraditional students balance multiple roles including work, family, and personal goals (Patterson, 2017). Situational barriers may include work schedule issues; working full time to pay for housing, family, and personal needs; childcare issues; and health issues (Patterson, 2017). Institutional barriers include policies, procedures, and practices which may deter or prevent students from enrolling in or persisting in higher education (Cross, 1981). Examples of institutional barriers include lack of information about enrollment and registration processes, lack of communication between advisers and students, lack of information about financial aid and scholarships, and lack of support for navigating situational barriers. Dispositional barriers relate to students' self-perceptions and attitudes about learning or their role as a college student (Patterson, 2017). Examples of dispositional barriers include low self-confidence and previous negative experience in school environments (Zhang et al., 2011).

Due to complex and multiple deterrents to enrolling into and persisting in postsecondary education, nontraditional HSE graduates need additional support as they navigate the college system from recently completing their HSE credential (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a). Successful support programs and features that colleges can offer include clear information about financial aid and scholarships, counseling and advising in academic and career planning and goal setting, and transition programming with multifaceted services which include academic supports, counseling, and mentoring (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a). The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) recently developed a set of ten principles to effectively serve and support students that includes financing, life and career planning,

outreach, strategic partnerships (both internal and external), student support systems, and

transition programming (CAEL, 2018).

Nontraditional students entering postsecondary education from adult education

programs generally have the goal to enter postsecondary education for personal fulfillment,

career preparation, and a better life for their children (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

Research shows that comprehensive, wrapround student support and career planning/advising

before and during their transition to postsecondary education is critical for helping students

manage nonacademic issues while navigating the complex process of transitioning to college

(Alamprese, 2005; Guison-Dowdy & Patters, 2011a).

CONCLUSION

Even with emerging research on adult transition and persistence in postsecondary

education and continued support of adult education programs to transition adults to

postsecondary education, additional research is needed to better understand the experiences

of adult students attempting to transition to and succeed in college. As described in this

chapter, the history of community colleges and adult education programming are central to the

role serving underprepared adults to improve skills to successfully enter postsecondary

education and training. As presented, Bean and Metzner's (1985) conceptual model of

nontraditional undergraduate student attrition, Schlossberg's (2011) transition theory, and

Cross's (1981) discussion of adult student barriers to participation in postsecondary education

provide a theoretical basis for further exploration of the narratives of HSE graduates who

transitioned to postsecondary education. Finally, supporting nontraditional adult learners

through the college transition process by providing early and consistent wraparound support

services and career and academic planning is critical to effectively serve this untapped

population at community colleges. New approaches, cultural shifts, and policy changes in

prioritizing adult students should be considered as community colleges attempt to serve the

needs of this growing, underserved population.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the research methodology used to explore the experiences of

HSE credential holders who transition to and persist in postsecondary coursework at the

community college. The structure of this chapter explains the design of the study and the

rationale for the chosen approach. It includes the research design, data collection methods,

data analysis procedures, validity and reliability, research limitations, the role of the researcher,

and ethical considerations.

RESEARCH DESIGN METHOD

Paradigm and Methodology

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of GED graduates as they

transition to and persist in postsecondary coursework. This study was designed to answer three

driving questions:

1. What factors contribute to the decision of HSE graduates to enroll in postsecondary coursework?

2. What factors do GED graduates report influence their persistence and success in community college?

3. In what ways do GED graduates describe the college as helping or hindering their transition to community college?

The research questions helped to guide the researcher in exploring the experiences of recent high school equivalency credential graduates in their transition to postsecondary coursework at Harper College.

THE QUALITATIVE PARADIGM

A qualitative research paradigm was used based on a review of literature about qualitative research and design. Qualitative studies focus on gathering data to acquire deep insights about the qualities and characteristics of a small sample, in this case a sample of HSE graduates within the community college setting. The first rationale for using the qualitative paradigm is that this study incorporated the five typical features of qualitative research:

1. The study of meaning of participants' situations under real world conditions,

2. The representation of the views and perspectives of the participants,

3. A specific, contextual environment,

4. A contribution of insights into emerging or lesser known concepts which may help to enlighten others, and

5. The utilization of multiple sources of evidence or data (Yin, 2010).

First, the qualitative research paradigm encourages a focus on understanding how participants interpret their experiences and observe how meaning is constructed from their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, the researcher examined how participants define their experiences transitioning to and enrolling in postsecondary coursework and what factors contribute to their persistence and retention. Because this study involves a naturalistic setting and specific, contextual setting of the community college, purposeful sampling HSE graduates who attended the adult educational development (AED) department were selected.

The qualitative paradigm allows for rich description of the participants' perspectives (Hays &

Singh, 2012).

Stake (2010) writes that when using the qualitative paradigm, the research question is

more important than the method; furthermore, he states that new researchers should choose a

topic that people know a lot about, but then look for connections and interpretations of the

topic to help readers understand complexities they had not considered before. Although the

topics of persistence and retention have been studied in other contexts of nontraditional

students, the qualitative paradigm allows for a more focused study on the experiences of HSE

graduates specifically within the community college setting. The qualitative paradigm allows

the researcher an insider's perspective to achieve an understanding of how people make sense

of their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Smith, 1978). Finally, because research about

community colleges is very limited, the qualitative paradigm design helps the reader develop an

in-depth understanding of the complex and pertinent issue of the experiences of adult,

nontraditional students transitioning from adult education to postsecondary education. A

qualitative approach enables the researcher to acquire information about the topic of transition

and persistence based on the participants' first-hand accounts and experiences.

CASE STUDY METHODOLOGY

After determining the paradigm for the study, the researcher must identify the best

approach and design to answer the research question. Yin (2010) compares the research design

to the logical blueprint of the study in which the researcher considers the connection between

the research question, data collection, and data analysis. A qualitative case study encourages a

focus on individual interpretation, the social construction of meaning, and an "in-depth

description and analysis of a bounded system" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016, p. 37). For this study, the recent HSE graduates in the community college are the case or bounded system. This study did not include students who did not complete their HSE, nor returning adult students who already have a high school diploma or equivalency.

This case study was intrinsic for the researcher. In other words, it was the researcher's interest and intent to gain a better understanding of the topic (Stake, 2010). Yin (2010) reinforces using a case-study approach for studying institutional environments because institutional and other every day settings provide real world, naturalistic situations where how and why questions are posed by the researcher (Yin, 2010). Furthermore, Yin (2010) recommends the use of the case study when one wants to gain important insights and understanding of how people interact and thrive in their environment as well as study a topic which has been overlooked or not well understood such as the topic of this investigation: experiences of a specific nontraditional student population. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), there are not only many approaches to doing qualitative research, but there is also no agreement as to how to classify all the design approaches. Finally, the term case study is often used synonymously with the term qualitative research and is the most common type of approach taken by new researchers (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Site and Participant Selection

The intent of this study was to develop an in-depth understanding HSE graduates who transitioned to college-level courses after completing adult education coursework and passing the complete HSE test. A purposeful sampling was used to select the representative students. Purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to examine the experiences of a specific population

of participants; specifically, the study allowed the researcher to give voice to participants and gain a rich description of the nontraditional, HSE graduate (Creswell, 2008). Furthermore, purposeful sampling allowed the researcher to target the participants who possess the relevant experiences and therefore could provide the relevant data for the study (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

A homogenous sample selection of participants was selected for more intensive study. Creswell (2008) states that homogenous sampling works best when the researcher purposely samples sites or participants which possess similar traits or characteristics. The following criteria were used: a) participants were selected from Harper College; b) participants had attended the adult educational development (AED) classes; c) participants had taken and passed the HSE examination and earned their credential; d) participants had enrolled in postsecondary coursework in the past year; and e) participants were adult or nontraditional students over the age of 18.

Site Selection

This study was conducted at Harper College, a community college in northwest suburban Chicago, Illinois. Approval was received from the Institutional Review Board (Appendix A). The college was chosen as the research site because it houses an adult education program that offers HSE preparation courses whose mission is to transition HSE graduates to postsecondary coursework. The AED department serves approximately 1,200 students per year (Coy, 2017). Of this population, approximately 75-100 students take and pass their HSE examination while at Harper College (Coy, 2018).

The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (n.d.) classifies Harper College as a large, exclusively two-year, public community college located in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Harper College serves approximately 14,000 students and serves a higher part-time population of students than full-time students (Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education, n.d.; Harper College, 2018;). In 2009, Harper College joined Achieving the Dream and has been a leader college since 2013. The college has had ongoing institutional commitment to accelerate student success through data analysis, program support, access to resources, and leadership development (Achieving the Dream, n.d.). This study provides additional information to help the college support an underrepresented, but significant, population of nontraditional adult students transitioning to postsecondary coursework.

Participant Selection

In qualitative research study, the researcher uses purposeful sampling to obtain the most in-depth investigation of the study. Purposeful sampling requires that participants meet established criteria which are predetermined by the researcher sampling that will "guide the identification of information-rich cases" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016 p. 97). However, the researcher ideally then attempts to choose a random sample of these individuals (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The researcher identified a homogeneous or criterion-based sampling of HSE graduates who enrolled in postsecondary coursework at Harper College.

The participants chosen for this study consisted of nontraditional, HSE credential graduates who participated in the AED courses prior to taking the HSE credential exam and enrolled in postsecondary classes at Harper College. Participants for the study met the following criteria:

1. Participated in high school equivalency programming/classes at Harper College,

2. Passed HSE tests and earned an HSE credential,

3. Enrolled in postsecondary coursework at Harper College either full or part-time, and

4. Met definition of nontraditional and/or adult student over the age of 18.

Following the concepts of purposeful sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016), the researcher determined the sample size and the strategy for selecting the sample. In terms of the sampling size, Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that the size will depend on the questions being asked, the data gathered, and the feasibility of the sample plan. The student sample size was chosen based on prior research on the transition and persistence rates of GED graduates (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011b). According to Guison-Dowdy and Patterson (2011b), of those students who complete their HSE credential, approximately 60% indicate that they do so to begin postsecondary education; however, data show that of approximately 43% of HSE credential passers who enroll in postsecondary education, only 12% of HSE credential enrollees graduate college within six years. Based on the population of HSE graduates at the Harper College (75) and the persistence rates indicated in the above study, the researcher determined that 7-10 students would be a sound sample size for this study.

Participant Selection Strategy

First, the researcher received a list of potential participants based on the selected criteria from the Harper College Institutional Research department. Then, the researcher emailed all 23 students on the list. The researcher received a 44% response rate. The researcher identified two additional students via word of mouth who were missing from the Institutional Research department list for unknown reasons. Of the 11 participants who showed

interest, nine agreed to participate in the study. One potential participant had moved, and the

other had graduated from Harper and transferred to a university. After finalizing the nine

students, the researcher emailed details of the study to each potential participant. The

researcher explained the purpose of the study, and each student agreed to participate in the

study by returning a consent form (Appendix B). The researcher and each participant agreed on

a day and time for the interview at the researcher's office at Harper College.

INSTRUMENTATION AND DATA COLLECTION

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences HSE students as

they transition to postsecondary coursework. After determining the paradigm, research

questions, and sample selection in the qualitative research study, the researcher must

determine the types of data that will help address the research questions and then plan and

organize the data collection process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2008) recommends a

five-step process for collecting qualitative data:

1. Identify the sites and participants through purposeful sampling,

2. Learn and understand the process for gaining permissions to access sites and participants,

3. Identify the different approaches to collecting data and decide which methods suit the study,

4. Develop a procedure for recording data, and

5. Use ethical considerations when administering the data collection procedures.

The six most common methods of data collection that educational researchers use

include tests, questionnaires, interviews, focus groups, observation, and secondary or existing

data (Johnson & Christensen, 2008). The data collection methods used for this study were

general descriptive information forms, interviews, observational field notes, and secondary

institutional data and documents. Prior to conducting interviews, it was important to perform a

data collection pilot. To pilot the interview process, two colleagues were chosen from the

researcher's college. The researcher conducted mock interviews to practice interviewing the

students. The mock interviews helped the researcher refine the questions and receive feedback

for improvement.

Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were the primary method of data collection. Merriam and

Tisdell (2016) state that interviews are important for obtaining in-depth information about

participants' perspectives, thoughts, knowledge, and feelings about a topic. Furthermore, the

structured or semi-structured interview format is best for new researchers because it helps the

research to develop confidence and experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Creswell (2008)

presents two strategies for interviews: the interview guide approach, which is a more open-

ended interview approach, and the standardized interview approach, in which the questions

are more structured. For this study, the more structured approach to interviewing is the best

approach because it provides more structure and consistency to the interview process while

allowing for more flexibility throughout the interviews. Responses to some specific questions

were necessary; however, the interview was guided by questions or issues to be explored.

Interviews were conducted in person and were recorded with a digital voice recorder, and the

researcher also took notes during the interview. The semi-structured interview approach

ensured that participants were asked similar questions and in the same order, and the

interview questions were piloted before the actual data collection began.

Finally, for the interview process, the researcher considered and implemented specially designed data recording protocols while recording information during interviews (Creswell, 2008). The researcher designed an interview protocol (Appendix C) which included instructions for the interview process, the questions to be asked in the semi-structured interview, and the process of recording and writing down the interview data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This study used a protocol of essential information about the interview and purpose of the study, consent forms, 20 open-ended questions within five topic areas, possible probing questions, space to take notes, closing comments, and finally a tape recorder for recording.

Development of Interview Questions

Interview questions were developed to obtain the data desired for the study. Patton & Patton (2002) categorize six types of interview questions researchers can ask: experiential and behavioral, opinion and value questions, emotional questions, knowledge questions, sensory questions, and demographic questions. An interview guide method provided a framework for the questions. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), an interview guide provides a more systematic and comprehensive approach to interviewing by delimiting the issues to be explored.

The interview questions were developed based on the interview protocol used by (Harris, 2012). Harris's doctoral dissertation also explored the transition of HSE graduates into college. Questions adapted from the Harris study included academic, social, cultural, and economic. Questions related to institutional support were added. Interview questions were open-ended and designed to solicit rich data about the experiences of GED graduates in their transition to college and factors that impacted their persistence in their college coursework.

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Interviews with Students

Interviews were conducted in the researcher's office at Harper College. The average length of interview was 30 minutes. Each participant and the researcher agreed on a pseudonym in order to protect individual privacy. Each of the participants completed an information form including age, current employment status, marital status, age of children, current college enrollment status, and level of educational background. This information was used to confirm that the participants met the selection criteria and create a basic student profile. Credibility was established by explaining the nature of the research, the background of the topic, and a thorough review of the consent forms and anonymity procedures.

Observational Field Notes

Due to the exploratory nature of this study, observation was a method used to provide details of the setting of the interview, participant reactions, commentary on participants' expressions, and other critical observations. Field notes describing observations during interview were recorded immediately after each interview to ensure reliability of the researcher's recollections. Creswell (2008) states that a protocol is also necessary with observation to "ensure that one has an organized means for recording and keeping field notes" (p. 235). The researcher's observational protocol included a header to record basic information such as time, date, setting, and participant's name. Then, the researcher created two columns for recording descriptive observations and one for reflective observation. This protocol was used for each participant interviewed. As with the interview process, the researcher practiced the observational protocol with colleagues who were not part of the study to gain experience and to ensure a quality protocol.

Pertinent Documents and Secondary Data

The final data collection method is the collection and review of institutional data and documents, Data and Information System Illinois (DAISI), the Adult Education and Family Literacy database for the Illinois Community College Board, organizational charts, archived research data, and other information or documents which provided insights and information to understand the research questions. The use of documents assisted the researcher in providing contextual and background information related to the study and research questions.

DATA COLLECTION SUMMARY

Based on this qualitative case study, the data collection methods that were most suited were general descriptive forms, semi-structured interviews, observational field notes, and secondary institutional data and documents. The Institutional Research department provided a list of potential participants based on the criteria of the purposeful sampling method. The general information forms were important to gather basic information about the students' enrollment status, work schedule, career goal, and other nontraditional student factors. The interviews were the key method of data collection as the participants met with the researcher and shared first-hand, recent experiences transitioning from high school equivalency classes to postsecondary coursework. Field observational notes and collection of additional institutional secondary data and documents were also data collection methods used by the researcher.

DATA ANALYSIS

Data collection in the form of interviews, observations, and field notes occurred simultaneously with data analysis (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Collecting data using multiple

sources allows for data triangulation, or analysis of converging sources data to corroborate evidence and look for themes related to the research questions (Yin, 2012). Data analysis is an ongoing process that continues until a level of saturation is reached or when continued data collection does not produce any new findings or insights to the research questions (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

The data analysis methods used in this case study were data managing, reading and Memoing, and category coding to determine themes and patterns. The researcher primarily analyzed the data through a coding system to distinguish themes and patterns. A priori themes found in literature related to the conceptual frameworks were used to analyze the findings as well as emerging themes which developed from the data analysis.

Simultaneous data collection and analysis distinguishes qualitative research from quantitative research and was necessary to maintain focus and reduce an overload of data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Furthermore, ongoing analysis while collecting data was necessary because the final product and analysis methods are shaped by the data as it is collected (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This means that during the data collection process, decisions about narrowing the research topic or numbers of students interviewed, for example, was necessary. Both Creswell (2008) and Johnson and Christensen (2008) presented the data analysis framework in six steps which occur in an iterative and simultaneous fashion as shown in Figure 3. The spiral approach of collecting and analyzing data guided the data analysis process (Creswell, 2008). Because most qualitative research is a dynamic process, the spiral framework allowed for flexibility in defining the research question and illumination of data results (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Data
Collection

Data storage
and
organization

Validate
accuracy;
corroborate
results

Data
Interpretation

Code and
develop
category
systems

Represent
findings with
diagrams,
tables, and
graphs

Identify
relationships
and themes
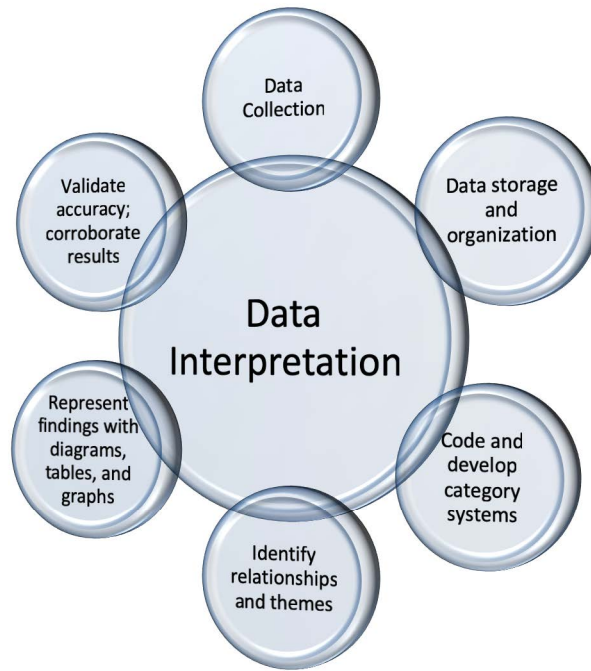
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Z=A=!A=ODAH=HX!C>H!@?=BG!!FDI+COODKLC>?=HCOF!?>IAP?Z!Z=A=!OD>P=AIH!!ID!C!@?B=!@DA!
C>CB;G?GV!(A=GZ=QRRh]!GICI=G!IFCI!?I!ICY=G!CLLAD[?KCI=B;!@DJA!FDJAG!ID!PA=G9OAFDJA!D@!
C!ICL=H!?>I=AP?=Zl!IF=A=@DA=X!IACPGDAD!D@!?>I=AP?=ZG!ZCG!B?K?I=H!HJ=!ID!I?K=!OD>GIAC?>IG!DA!
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HDOJK=>IGcZCG!?>P=>IDA?=H!C>H!DANC>?d=H!:;!I!L=V!"B=OIAD>?EOCAH!ODL?=G!D@!HCIC!Z=A=!
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ge!

Reading and Memoing

After student information forms, interviews, and observational field notes were collected, the researcher read over and reflected on the information, made reflective notes, wrote memos and notations about the data, and began to structure and categorize the data. As interviews were conducted, written memos were documented. These initial written memos included short phrases, concepts, and any other ideas or exploratory hunches that occurred to the researcher (Creswell, 2008). Memoing, sometimes described as reflective note-taking, helps the researcher make initial reflections about the data which help for later analysis (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

Coding, Theming, and Description

After initial reading and memoing, the next step in the data analysis process was to explore data for general themes (Creswell, 2008). After the preliminary exploratory analysis, the interviews were coded. The coding process consisted of dividing the text into segments of information, labeling of the information with 30-50 codes, reducing codes by about half, and then collapsing the codes into broad themes (Creswell, 2008). Codes from the interviews included student perspectives, perceptions, feelings, words, and engagement activities. As the data was analyzed and reduced for redundancy, five to eight themes were identified. During the theming and coding process, the research questions were revisited and reviewed to ensure the driving research questions were answered to form an in-depth understanding of the experiences of HSE graduates in their transition to and persistence in college classes.

Interpreting and Organizing

After initial data was collected and analyzed, codes were used to build both description and themes (Creswell, 2008). As the initial 30-50 codes were reduced to five to seven major themes, various types of themes were identified in categories such as ordinary, unexpected, hard-to-classify, and major/minor themes (Creswell, 2008). Components were identified that both supported and contradicted the themes to provide a realistic presentation of the data (Creswell, 2008). Finally, themes which emerged from the interviews and observation data were interconnected or connected to the theoretical or conceptual models (Creswell, 2008).

Searching for patterns, consolidating codes into manageable pieces, interpreting the data, and deciding what was most relevant to the case study so that it could be shared with others is the most difficult and time-consuming part of the data analysis process. Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2014) discuss the importance of making contrasts and comparisons, consolidating particulars into the general, noting relations between variables, seeing plausibility, and building a logical chain of evidence in the process of generating meaning while interpreting data.

During the interpretation process, the researcher also included reflective analysis, clustering of patterns and themes, and making contrasts and comparisons of the interview data. Since the data collection and analysis was based on the researcher-as-instrument model, the researcher included elements of her own experiences as part of the data including having a good familiarity with the phenomenon and having excellent investigative skills (Miles et al., 2014). Having a personalized experience of the phenomenon being studied is called heuristic inquiry and can provide more intimate analysis of the data (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016).

Additionally, a good qualitative researcher-as-instrument is comfortable and nonjudgmental with the participants, has a good familiarity with the case study, and has "a heightened sense of empathetic engagement and heightened sense of objective awareness" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 42). As an adult education faculty member working with HSE students to transition to postsecondary education, I have unique researcher-as-instrument skills and experiences which help during the data interpretation process.

Data analysis is interconnected with data collection at the beginning of the research process. Managing data by reading and identifying key words, phrases, and codes and storing the data in a safe and organized manner was an important element of the data analysis process. Memoing, theming, and coding were used to identify overall patterns, connections, and themes in the data. Finally, interpreting and organizing the data was a critical step in generating meaning of what was being studied so that findings could be shared with and understood by others and perhaps generalized and transferred to other contexts to improve the experiences of nontraditional students in their transition to postsecondary education.

QUALITY AND VALIDITY IN RESEARCH

To ensure quality of research, ethics, transparency, validity, and reliability must be present. This study was conducted in an ethical manner and followed the ethical issues checklist by Patton (2015) including the consideration of 1) explaining the purpose of the study and methods used, 2) risk assessment, 3) confidentiality, 4) informed consent, 5) data collection boundaries and access, and 6) other ethical and methodological choices. Since qualitative research cannot be replicated, ensuring transparency by recording the steps and process of data collection, analysis, and validity through research strategies ensured transparency in this

case study. The researcher-as-instrument allowed for deeper reflection and analysis of the data collected; therefore, transparency by the researcher was imperative during the research process.

Validity and Reliability

As in any research, including qualitative research, a key component of quality control is validity of the study's findings (Merriam and Tisdell, 2016; Yin, 2010). To ensure validity, data were properly collected and interpreted to accurately reflect and represent the research driving questions. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the importance of using research design features which strengthen the internal validity, or the credibility, of the narrative description, interpretations, and other findings. Yin (2010) reminds researchers that regardless of data gathering methodology, the researcher is the main instrument in qualitative research, and data will be filtered through the conceptual lens of the researcher. This means that the validity issue is not only related to the study's findings, but also pertains to the researcher's and participants' views and actions. Being the prime research instrument requires the researcher to be aware of her own biases (Yin, 2010).

Rigorous and Systematic Study

First, the validity of this study was ensured by following a rigorous and systematic research process. Guba and Lincoln (1982) discussed four primary criteria that qualitative researchers must follow:

1. Truth Value: ensuring that the research design attends to discovering the truth of the research question;

2. Applicability: ensuring the design will produce findings that have applicability in other contexts or with other respondents;

3. Consistency: determining if the findings of the study could be replicated with consistency if the study were replicated; and

4. Neutrality: establishing a process for ensuring that findings and conditions of the study (data collection and analysis) are based on the study and not the biases, motivations, and perspectives of the researcher (p. 246).

Keeping in mind the criteria above, this study maintained validity by consistently reviewing and comparing the data collection and data analysis process with the research and driving questions. In terms of applicability, this study is applicable to community college administrators, faculty, and the community at large to better understand the experiences of HSE graduates in their transition to postsecondary education. It was the intent that this research could be replicated at another community college. Researcher bias was reduced through the process of critical reflection or reflexivity where the researcher explained her bias, experiences, and assumptions which may inadvertently affect the research process (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This clarification also helps increase validity and reliability by allowing the reader to better understand how the researcher arrived at particular conclusions or interpretations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Johnson and Christensen (2008) presented a table of strategies used to enhance research validity. Throughout the research process, strategies described in Table 1 were applied and practiced in the study.

Table 1. *Strategies Used to Promote Research Validity and Trustworthiness*

Strategy	Description
Researcher-as-primary instrument/Researcher bias	Critical self-reflection of researcher to review biases, worldview, and experiences related to the study.
Triangulation and maximum variation and increase range of application	Using multiple data collection methods and data sources to corroborate findings.
Member checks/participant feedback	Checking in with participants after interviews to get feedback about interpretations and conclusions.
Negative case analysis/ruling out alternative explanations	Carefully examine all evidence to rule out rival explanations and look for cases which disconfirm expectations.
Peer Review	Discussion of interpretations and findings with peers not directly involved can help provide challenges and insights.
Sufficient engagement with data collection and extended fieldwork	Collect sufficient data over an extended period to reach the point of saturation.

Adapted from Johnson & Christensen L. B., (2008).

Triangulation

Validity and reliability of this study were enhanced through the triangulation of multiple research methods and data sources which included 1) descriptive information forms, 2) interviews, 3) observational field notes, and 4) secondary institutional data/documents. Comparing and cross-checking multiple sources of data increased both internal validity and credibility by corroborating evidence from different participants, types of data, and methods of data (Creswell, 2008; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Member Checking and Peer Review

Member checking was conducted throughout the study, especially during the interview process. Member checking, or asking one or more participants to check the accuracy of the process and findings, ensured an ongoing conversation with participants about the emerging themes and any pertinent findings (Creswell, 2008). Member checks with participants included

follow-up conversations by email and in person as well as contact with authors of any

secondary documents. Merriam and Tisdell, (2016) suggest that the strategy of member

checking can be an important way of ruling out misinterpretation as well as identifying biases in

the researcher. In addition to member checks, the researcher discussed the interpretations and

findings with the research chair, committee members, and professional researchers outside the

study who were familiar with the research and who provided insights and challenges.

Limitations

Limitations or potential weaknesses in a study should be advanced to help other

researchers understand what aspects of the study may be generalized or not (Creswell, 2008).

Articulating limitations also gives researchers ideas as to recommendations for further studies.

As with all research, case studies present limitations. Research limitations in this study

include, but are not limited to the following:

1. With only nine participants, the score of this case study is small. This case study is therefore limited to the findings from these subjects at one community college.

2. Participants are limited in their personal recollection of events from memory.

3. There is potential for researcher bias as the researcher knew all nine of the participants from previous experience as students in the researcher's HSE language arts classes.

Additionally, there were definite limitations to the research study as the case study was

conducted at one college and specific only to students who had completed their HSE credential.

This was due to the need to narrow down the focus of the study to take an in-depth look at

students who were college-ready by having attained their HSE credential and subsequently

ready to transition to postsecondary coursework. A case study, or bounded system naturally

causes limitations in qualitative research (Creswell, 2008). Since limitations may weaken a case

study in terms of generalizations outside of the study, it is important for the researcher to be

aware of the limitations within the research.

Delimitations are conditions that are defined by the researcher and limit the scope of

the study. The delimitations include, but are not limited to the following:

1. The case study was bound by time and place with a focus on one case of students enrolled in postsecondary coursework within a specific year.

2. Participants are only limited to students who took HSE classes at Harper College, passed their HSE examinations, and were enrolled into postsecondary classes in the past year.

3. There were a limited number of participants (9).

Accurate recall by the participants as to their exact experiences in the HSE program,

their transition to college classes experiences, and other college experiences was a limitation

that needs to be acknowledged. The challenge was minimized by repeating some questions in

different ways to ensure accuracy of the participants' responses. Additionally, participants were

offered to reviews the questions in advance; however, not all of the participants reviewed the

questions before the actual interview.

Integrity of Researcher, Sufficient Engagement, and Researcher Bias

Minimizing bias and subjectivity while using one's intimate knowledge of the case study

requires ethical interpretations skills by the researcher. This limitation was addressed by

presenting a full disclosure of the researcher's role as an adult education faculty member who

is interested in the successful transition of adult education students to postsecondary

education. Finally, to prove that bias and subjectivity were minimized, the researcher also

provided all participants with a consent form prior to the interviews and data collection. The

consent form provided information about the research and the researcher's intent prior to the

participants' agreement to participate. Students were also notified that they could opt out at

any time and that confidentiality would be maintained with the use of pseudonyms.

Merriam and Tisdell (2016) discussed the importance of taking enough time to collect

data to understand the research questions and look purposefully for variation in the

understanding of the driving questions. Furthermore, the researcher needs to recognize the

point when the data feels saturated as well as look for evidence and data which may support

alternative explanations (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). In other words, there is no right or wrong

answer in qualitative research, and the validity of this case study was enhanced when the

researcher purposefully sought data which might challenge expectations or findings. This

strategy which is called negative case analysis promotes validity and credibility by looking for

themes and evidence that disconfirm the researcher's generalizations or findings.

Related to the topic of the integrity of the researcher is the researcher's position or bias

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Because qualitative research is exploratory, open-ended, and

observational, a distinct researcher bias section of critical self-reflection about potential biases

was added to help mitigate selective observation/data analysis and allowing personal views and

experiences to affect data interpretation (Johnson & Christensen, 2008).

The Role of the Researcher

Unlike quantitative researchers who detach themselves from the research process,

qualitative researchers welcome and embrace their role and experiences within the study and

its process. Miles et al. (2014) discuss the qualities of a good researcher-as-instrument which include:

1. A good familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under the study;

2. A multidisciplinary approach as opposed to a narrow focus or grounding;

3. Good investigative skills, the ability to draw people out;

4. Being comfortable, resilient, and nonjudgmental with participants in the setting; and

5. A heightened sense of empathetic engagement, balanced with a heightened sense of objective awareness (p. 42).

The researcher has been in the fields of adult education, Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), HSE instruction, and college- and career-readiness preparation for over 20 years. The researcher is currently a full-time professor in adult education/HSE, English literacy acquisition, and integrated education and training (IET) with 17 years full-time teaching experience in a community college. The researcher has been involved in many initiatives to help increase the transition of adult education students to postsecondary education including:

1. The creation of Transition to Technical Trades Integrated Education and Training (IET) program which integrated language arts, college- and career-readiness, math, and fundamentals of heating (HVAC) instruction;

2. Revision of the language arts and English literacy acquisition curricula for department and State of Illinois to integrate new content standards, WIOA outcome measures, college- and career-readiness skills, and math;

3. Worked closely with advising and academic departments to advise and transition students into postsecondary training and coursework; maintained strong rapport with students; and

4. Developed a pilot and new position of Adult Educational Development Department Transition Coordinator as goal team leader for the 2010-2015 college strategic plan. The position was institutionalized and then eliminated in 2016.

The researcher has been actively involved organizations including the Commission on Adult

Basic Education, the Illinois Adult and Continuing Education Association, Illinois and

international TESOL, and National College Transition Network as a member and presenter. The

researcher decided to pursue a doctorate in the Community College Leadership program to

learn more about the community college and develop leadership skills to help advocate for the

needs of nontraditional and adult students. The researcher's leadership background, teaching

experience, and new research skills have provided her with deep insights as to how to better

support and transition nontraditional and adult students into postsecondary education.

SUMMARY

The qualitative paradigm was used to examine the experiences of HSE graduates'

transition to postsecondary education. Qualitative research is best suited because it lends itself

to gathering first-hand insights, knowledge, experiences, and interpretations from participants

within the specialized context of the community college. Methodology included a case study

approach. Within the case study, interviews were the primary source of data collection with

observation and document analysis as secondary sources. Results of this study may help to

inform practices that improve the transition to and persistence in college by HSE graduates.

The participants included in this case study were nine HSE credential earners who

participated in the adult educational development coursework and then transitioned to

postsecondary classes at Harper College. The nine participants were contacted via email and in

person based on the purposeful sampling approach. The Harper College Institutional Research

department provided the list of participants as well as secondary data on transition of HSE data

over the past two years.

The nine participants were contacted by the researcher who then reviewed the research background and consent form. The data collected included a general information form, semi-structured interviews, observational field notes, and secondary data sources. Interviews were conducted in person, and, due to the researcher-as-instrument skills of the researcher, provided rich, thick data about the participants' personal, transition, and college experiences.

Maintaining quality, validity, reliability, and ethical standards were implemented throughout the research process. Using member checks, triangulation, peer review, negative case analysis, and researcher-as-instrument ensured this case study is valid, ethical, transparent, and transferable to similar programs or colleges. Throughout the data collection and analysis process, the researcher's driving questions were reviewed and connected to the incoming data.

The goal of this case study was to explore the experiences of HSE credential earners in their transition to postsecondary education. Understanding the experiences of this student population will help guide community college administration, faculty, and staff to better serve and support this growing pipeline of adult students who are seeking higher education and career training to improve their lives. In the next chapter, research findings from the data is discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Qualitative research allows the researcher to gather data to acquire deep insights about the qualities and characteristics of a small sample, in this case a sample of HSE credential graduates who transitioned to postsecondary education. The rationale for using the qualitative paradigm is that this study incorporates the five typical features of qualitative research: 1) the study of meaning of participants' situations under real world conditions; 2) the representation of the views and perspectives of the participants; 3) a specific, contextual environment; 4) a contribution of insights into emerging or lesser known concepts which may help to enlighten others; and 5) the utilization of multiple sources of evidence or data (Yin, 2010). This chapter highlights the value of the qualitative study method through descriptive informational background forms and data collection through interviews and observational field notes. The main elements include a) descriptive data of each participant; b) summary of the descriptive data collected through student information forms, interviews, and observational field notes; c) emerging themes and patterns during the data analysis process.

This case study explored the experiences of HSE credential earners in their enrollment into and persistence in postsecondary education coursework. To address the study's research questions, a qualitative design method was used to understand how participants interpret their experiences and observe how meaning is constructed from their experiences (Merriam &

Tisdell, 2016). This chapter provides a review of the research questions, as well as data findings from the student informational forms, semi-structured interviews, and observational field notes.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research questions were developed to represent facets of inquiry that the researcher hoped to examine. The shared stories of the students generated many common themes and patterns in order to answer the following guiding questions of this case study:

1. What factors contribute to the decision of HSE graduates to enroll in postsecondary coursework?

2. What factors do GED graduates report influence their persistence and success in community college?

3. In what ways do GED graduates describe the college as helping or hindering their transition to community college?

QUALIITATIVE DATA FINDINGS

This qualitative case study included a pre-interview demographic information form (Appendix D), face-to-face interviews, and observational field notes. Participants are referred to by pseudonyms to ensure confidentiality. Participants included five female and four male students who attended the Harper College adult education/HSE classes, achieved their HSE credential while studying at Harper College, and transitioned to postsecondary classes at Harper in pursuit of a degree or certificate.

Findings: Pre-Interview Demographic Data

The demographic information form was designed to gain general information about the participants' previous and current educational information, employment status, educational

and career goal, family demographics (dependents), age, and race/ethnicity. Table 2 shows the

demographic data of the nine participants in the study. Table 3 show the participant

educational background and goals.

Table 2. *Participant Demographics*

Name	Age	Gender	Race/ Ethnicity	English is 2nd Language /Foreign Born	# of Children	Working Y/N	FT/PT
Jade	23	F	Hispanic	No	0	Y	PT
Rylann	20	F	White	No	2	Y	PT
Tess	22	F	White	No	0	N	
Taylor	21	M	Black Non-Hispanic	Yes Uganda	0	Y	FT
Mary	44	F	White	Yes Egypt	2		PT
Gio	21	M	Hispanic	No	0	Y	FT
Mac	32	M	Native Hawaiian	No	0	Y	PT
Javier	25	M	Hispanic	Yes Mexico	0	Y	FT
Shea	19	F	White	No	0	Y	FT

Table 3. *Participant Educational Background and Goals*

Name	First Gen	Grade Left High School	Enrollment	Educational Goal	Career Goal
Jade	Y	10th	PT	Master's	Nurse Practitioner
Rylann	N	10th	FT	Bachelor's	American Sign Language Interpreter
Tess	Y	Home School to age 16	FT	Master's	Psychology and Speech Pathology
Taylor	Y	Completed HS in Uganda	PT	Bachelor's	Graphic Design/Animation
Mary	N	Completed HS and College in Egypt	FT	Bachelor's	Accounting
Gio	Y	12th	Not Enrolled	Associate's	Undecided Military Law Enforcement
Mac	N	10th	PT	Associate's	Radiologic Technology
Javier	Y	11th	PT	Bachelor's	Business
Shea	Y	11th	PT	Bachelor's	Nursing RN/BSN

STUDENT PROFILES

Jade

Jade is a 23-year-old single, Hispanic female who dropped out of high school at the beginning of her junior when she was 16 to help care for her terminally-ill father who passed away a few years later. She noted that a tutor from the high school came to her home during her sophomore year to help her finish that year, but that the work was too much for her while also caring for her father. After her father died, she experienced a period of depression and insecurity that she was getting older and that all of her friends from high school had graduated. Finally, after being away from school for six years, she decided to come to Harper College's Adult Educational Development (AED) department to complete her HSE. "I had put my

education on hold because I felt that I needed to take care of family responsibilities that were timely priorities. I came to Harper College because I wanted to finish what I had started and move on with my life and goals." Jade completed her HSE credential in one semester and started college classes in the summer of 2017. She was the recipient of the Distinguished HSE Student Scholarship which finances 60 credit hours of college classes at Harper College.

Jade was already sure she wanted to enroll in college classes after passing her HSE exams. "I decided that continuing onto college was just as important, if not more important than, completing my HSE to advance my life and accomplish what I wanted." She was also very clear about her career goal when she started at Harper. "I always knew that I wanted to be a nurse practitioner, but my primary goal was to just to be in school like everyone else."

In terms of challenges and the differences between college classes and HSE classes, Jade reported that being a college student is harder due to time management and larger class sizes. The most difficult part about the transition from the AED program to college classes was "not knowing anyone and being around completely different people. I knew they were not from the AED program, so I felt like I was kind of an outsider." She reported that the social aspect was much more difficult to adjust to than the academics. Jade explained:

> Learning how to balance home and school, home and school has been the hardest for me. Even though I only work part time and go to school part time, it's a struggle to do well in both things and having time to take care of things at home is really hard. You can't forget yourself, but it's the easiest thing to do when you are a college student.

Jade discussed the preparation and benefits she received in the AED program which helped to prepare her for college classes. She said, "The entire HSE program seems to be more connected by having multiple individuals to guide you during and after the program." Although much of the HSE reading, writing, math, and other content classes were more of a "refresher"

for her, she said the HSE classes taught her about learning styles and how to use Blackboard.

Although the HSE instructors and staff did not have an effect on her decision to transition to

college, she mentioned that each instructor in the HSE program "showed that they believed in

me, so it was the encouragement that I needed."

Jade discussed the impact of the former Transition Coordinator/Advisor (TC):

[TC's name] had a major impact on my transition to college. . . . he showed me everything I needed to know things about financial aid when I didn't even know what that meant, what classes that were best to take according to my comfort level and answering all questions that came to my mind during my journey.

Jade discussed that in terms of persisting in college now, her current advisor has more of an

impact than her college instructors. Jade is in the One Million Degrees scholarship program

which provides financial and advising support to students. She explained:

My current advisor definitely keeps me on track. We meet regularly and we follow the path that I'm on, what I need to do to improve, and if I'm having any trouble. My current advisor has had more of impact than my college instructors. Not all, but some of my instructors I have had—it seems that they have so many students they don't really care to know if the students pursue further than their own class. So, I find that they are only concerned with their own class, not the students' future goals.

Jade believes there are a few ways Harper College could improve the transition experience for

HSE students:

Harper College could introduce students earlier on to scholarships available outside of the HSE program. I think a lot of students see that there's scholarship opportunity here, but they don't know how many are out there, so I feel that [for] students who have a financial struggle, that would make them more like to continue on to college classes instead of just getting a GED. Another thing that could help would be a regular check-in for students who want to go on to college classes. . .more career exploration, and it would help if instructors would go deeper on how to use the math module for preparing for the college math placement test.

In terms of other involvement on campus and responsibilities, Jade is required to come

to meetings one Saturday a month for One Million Degrees. She also works 14-18 hours per

week in the AED office as a student aide. She has been consistently attending school part time

at about 9 hours per semester. She has used the test-taking skills center and the anatomy study

lab for academic support. In terms nonacademic involvement, Jade does not have time for

clubs and sports because "I don't find it to be the most important because handling college

classes, work, and life at home is a lot to handle."

Jade's college experience has had a big impact at a personal level. Jade explained:

It's given me a boost of confidence definitely. It feels like I have something to talk about now of what I am doing. I used to get a lot of questions about what's new in your life . . .what's going on, and I didn't have an answer to all that. So now that I do it makes me feel a lot better especially in social situations. I feel like I'm *ready* for someone to ask me. . .I walk with my head higher now!

Jade also discussed how going to college has made her mother, who did not attend college,

proud.

Jade reported that there is not one person who has guided her the most to persist in

college. Jade explained:

It has really been everybody in the adult education department that I have encountered with, every instructor I have had here [in AED], everyone in the staff that has helped me from start to finish from the information session to the point where they asked me where I want to continue from here. . . I feel like I've such as advantage over students that have been in high school [due to the support from the AED department].

Jade presented the following advice to recent HSE graduates:

For any recent grad who wants to attend college, I give them my full encouragement. It's been the best decision I have ever made, and I believe that anyone who earns a GED can also earn a certificate or college degree with the determination they carry. Keep going.

Rylann

Rylann, a 20-year-old single parent of two children ages three and two, began the interview by telling the researcher she was pregnant with her third child. Rylann dropped out of high school her sophomore year at the age of 16 for depression issues. When she reenrolled in high school her junior year, she was behind on credits and found out she was pregnant. Subsequently she dropped out again and because "I really didn't have a good relationship with the father at the time." Although she had contemplated going back to school many times, "it didn't really happen because then came second baby on top of that, so I moved out to Illinois [from Indiana], and then when I came to Harper, I finally managed to get it [GED] in three months."

Rylann had been away from school for about three and a half years before enrolling in HSE classes. She was already very determined to go to college after completing her HSE credential. "That was the whole reason I got it so that I could start college and get my life on track the way I want to." After completing her HSE within one semester in fall 2017, she enrolled full time in the fashion design program in spring semester 2018 but dropped her classes half way through due to depression, a bullying experience in the classroom, and lack of faculty and counseling support. She explained:

> Well, when I was in the fashion design program, I didn't really fit in and nobody really cared, and they disrupted the class because they wanted to verbally bully me and the teacher just laughed about it. So that was really difficult. I didn't get support from anybody, so I dropped out.

Rylann reenrolled college classes in fall 2018. Against the advice of her college advisor, she insisted on enrolling full time again and commented that the advisor "didn't think I could go to school full time because I'm pregnant." The researcher attempted to find additional advising

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and counseling support for Rylann to discuss this issue after the interview. Rylann was somewhat undecided about her career goal after her first college experience, but she expressed an interest in being a "Deaf Parent Infant Specialist," a type of American Sign Language Interpreter. She was in the process of figuring out which classes to take in American Sign Language and psychology as well as taking general education classes. Rylann was also accepted into the honor's program and taking honor's-level psychology.

In terms of the challenges of college and the difference between the HSE classes and college classes, Rylann expressed the freedom of being able to make her own decisions and desire for independence:

> Well, when I was an HSE student, I didn't really have a choice on what I took. I took what I needed to, and then I took the test for it. With college, I can take classes to be whatever I want to as I please. I don't have to worry about taking a test at a testing center. I can take classes that I enjoy and love being in.

Rylann expressed that depending on the teacher, some college classes, especially her honor's classes, are harder because there are more quizzes, exams, and work required. Rylann explained that the HSE classes, including the Bridge to College and Career Success class, did not do much to help her transition to college; however, "it's literally everyone in the department helping out." For example, she explained:

> Like when you don't know how to take a specific class, or you don't know how to afford school, they helped when I needed to find resources and they would scrounge around for every last resource possible.

Rylann explained the major impact the TC had on her experience transitioning to college classes:

> I was able to have my GED advisor [TC] be my permanent advisor moving into college just so that I felt more comfortable in what I was dealing with and everything. I had an appointment with him like every two weeks because if I had a question, I didn't want to

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try to answer it via email because I wanted him to explain it directly to me. It was a lot easier and then he could show me exactly what I needed to do.

Although the AED faculty and staff did not have an impact on her decision to attend college, Rylann noted with a sense of humor:

On my transition to college, they had *everything* to do with it. Without you guys, it would have been like a show meant for a sitcom. That would have been a sitcom watching me trying to figure out how to do my classes and everything. That would have been a really bad show.

During the initial interview, Rylann expressed that she had difficulties connecting with the new advisor assigned to her: "My current, current advisor I don't know. She hasn't emailed me when um she got assigned to me. She hasn't tried to reach out to me since [TC's name] left." Throughout the semester, Rylann had conflicts with her new college advisor and contacted their supervisor to change advisors.

In terms of academic and non-academic involvement at Harper, Rylann expressed interest in the tutoring center and writing center. She wanted to be part of the Harper Pride group, but she said, "I just don't see myself having time to do that having two kids and one on the way." Rylann enjoyed spending time on campus while her kids were in childcare at a family friends' home where she lived. She tried to complete all of her homework at school. She explained:

Well for me, I don't go home until my homework is finished. Or until I can put it on pause until I can go to school again, and that way I always make sure when I go home it's about my home life and not about my school life. It's like if I was going to work—I'm not going to bring work home with me. I'm not going to bring school home with me. Because I tried that when I was in the HSE program, but it didn't go well.

Rylann had many suggestions as to how Harper College could improve the transition experience for HSE graduates to college. She explained:

It would be really nice for there to be legitimate, designated people that could give tours on request so that I know how to find my classes. . . and in the Bridge Class [Bridge to College and Career Success], they should teach you how to set up interviews with teachers and knowing which teachers can accommodate special needs. Bullying resources should be more pronounced. I'm sure there are some, but I've never heard anything from anyone's mouth about it. If it was hard for me to deal with, then it's going to be a lot harder for others to deal with, especially if they have special needs.

Attending college has had a major impact on Rylann's personal life. First, she has clarified her career goals. She explained:

I went from wanting to be an interpreter for ASL to wanting to be in the fashion design program because they were eliminating the interpreter program (at Harper College) to going back to what I have a passion for which is working with deaf people. So now I'm going to be a Deaf Parent Infant Specialist. Thanks to school, I was able to start figuring out how to put that into an actual degree that can start changing other people's lives. Which in the final result is going to be changing my own as well. It's definitely changing me!

Rylann also talked about having made new friends at college, and a "better community of friends." In terms of support from family and friends, she acknowledges the support of her boyfriend:

Well, my boyfriend is supportive to the point where he is overly supportive. He is making sure that he has a checklist for me that he keeps in his head and goes through before I leave his house making sure I have everything for school. He's on top of everything that I forgot for school. Even when I'm a little unorganized because I'm studying in the house for a bit, I'm still really organized when it's time to start packing up. So he's supportive and he understands when I need to study and if I didn't get enough time to study before. And he's doing everything possible to help financially support the kids. He's making sure he's there for everything.

In terms of economics, Rylann works part time approximately 10 hours per week Uber driving and Doordashing (food delivery such as Walmart grocery pick up). She also does art commissions. She draws "furry art and anthro animals" for people who want pictures and

characters. Rylann uses financial aid and financial support from family and now her boyfriend to help pay for classes and living expenses.

Rylann does not attribute her persistence to college to any one person. She explained:

As far as staying in college myself 'cuz I actually want to be in college. . . I actually *want* to get my bachelor's. I'm not worried about. . .well the other reason is my kids and I want to have a good life for them. But at the same time, the career I want is the career *I want.* It'll just better their lives, too.

Rylann's advice to recent HSE graduates included making sure one has a solid college support system and relationships with faculty and advisors.

I would tell them [HSE graduates] to go to [TC's name]! Honestly, honestly before you make the college transition, just make sure you have faculty that you connect with. If anything, they can help you if you can't find a different support person, and then you always have at least a set of people that if you need something, they are there for you.

Throughout the semester, Rylann had conflicts with her college advisor and contacted their supervisor to change advisors. During the semester, Rylann was hospitalized for depression and was absent from classes for almost two weeks. When she stopped by the researcher's class to check in after this incident, the researcher referred her to the AED student service specialist. The student service specialist referred her to a faculty counselor, but it is unknown if Rylann followed through or if she completed her semester.

Tess

Tess is a 22-year-old white, married female who was homeschooled before completing her HSE at Harper College. She was in her second to last semester at Harper College and planned to transfer to a Chicago-area, four-year university. Due to her higher-than-average scores on the HSE exam, participation, and financial need, Tess won the HSE Distinguished Scholar Award which has paid for 60 credit hours of towards her associate degree.

Tess explained that her life and family situation at home contributed to her dropping out of homeschool.

> Leaving high school was not totally my decision. I grew up homeschooled and um, the curriculum just never worked out. With my grandmother teaching me, she never had enough money to buy the supplies that we needed. So we were working with very old stuff that she used when she was a kid, and I hated the smell of it. So musty. I hate old books because of it. After a while, I got so frustrated that I didn't want to do school anymore. . .with family trouble and just wanting to be a rebellious teenager. I was about 15 or 16 when I was officially not trying anymore.

Tess had been away from education for about five years before coming to Harper College. She came to Harper due to the location. She credits her husband as the person who encouraged her most. "Why I got my GED was because of my husband. My husband—his influence on my education."

> Tess decided to enroll in college classes due to personal fulfillment and future goals.

> I think to figure myself out because I went from being a little kid to someone's wife, and I never figured out who I was in the middle of that. Also, just future goals. . . wanting to have a family someday. I want to be able to support them. Also, to step out of my family some because none of them have college. I will be the first. Well, my sister went for one year, but I'll be the first to graduate.

Tess described the differences between HSE and her college classes experience in terms of academics and the overall environment and structure.

> High school equivalency was much more relaxed, and if you don't do it, that's fine, and if you don't do it, that's fine; if you do it, that's good. To me, I looked at it as I have to get everything done, and I did, but that's just my personality. It's not like there was any punishment or any consequences [in the HSE program]. There were no actual grades . . .you're here for free and do it if you want or not, but college classes are much more strict. Honestly, less pleasant depending on the teachers. Some of my teachers have been amazing, but other ones I wonder, "why are you a teacher?" I'd say that's the biggest difference is the environment. . .the structure. You don't actually have to get things done, but if you don't you fail, and you've paid money.

The AED faculty and classes had some impact on Tess's transition to college classes, but minimal because she was only in the classes for one semester. "I guess I just think of this as like a safe place of like everyone is kind and supportive and wants you to succeed." Tess described that the HSE classes helped to increase her self-confidence. In the HSE classes, she learned how to be a student again and how to socialize with people since she had been at home for many years. She also learned to drive while taking HSE classes which opened a new world for her. She reported the Bridge to College and Career Success class was not helpful because the class did not cover the aspects of college that she needed to learn such as "how grading works in college, GPAs, and how to transfer."

The TC was "definitely impactful." Tess reported further that he helped her with the selection of her major and career goal.

> [TC's name] was the one who suggested the major that I'd to go for which is speech pathology. He kind of helped me meet the middle because I wanted to go into the medical field in the beginning, but then that ended up being too gross, but I also really want to work with people and help people. Then we just kind of met a middle and this was also medical, but not the extreme.

At the time of the interview, Tess had not met her new advisor since the former TC had left Harper College. The new advisor had emailed Tess, but Tess had met with the TC before he left to get all the information she needed. "Because I don't know, I *trusted* [TC's name], and I was a little nervous about him leaving and then getting thrown to someone else."

In terms of Tess's current college instructors' impact on her persistence in college and her experiences, Tess had mixed reviews.

> My instructors. . .it depends. Some of them are really encouraging, and like you can really tell they want to help you and are there to help you learn. You feel comfortable going to ask them questions or ask questions in class. But I've also had instructors where it's like you ask a question in class and they like mock you for asking a question. Well

one specific I can think of—she would mock people in class for not knowing the answers, and I was definitely discouraged to ask questions after that. Also, the expectations of the instructors vary from instructor to instructor. Like my psychology instructor doesn't care at all—you can do whatever you want, and then I have others that like you don't get one late day.

Tess discussed several challenges about her college experience at Harper including communication, technology, the "One Stop Center."

I would say I get frustrated with the tech side sometimes because I have classes that don't show up in my Blackboard. Then I'll try to ask my instructor and they say that's not my problem, and then they tell me to contact another person and then I keep getting redirected all the time. And another confusing campus resource is the One Stop. I never know what to stop there for. I could never figure out what the One Stop does. I know it's called the One Stop, but when I go there, they always tell me I'm in the wrong place.

In terms of suggestions for improving HSE graduates' transition to college, Tess suggested ideas related to having more "seminars/crash courses" to explain how college works. She also suggested more "adjustment" activities such as going to college events and campus tours and assigning students a student mentor who has gone through the same process of transitioning from HSE classes to college.

In terms of academic support services and nonacademic involvement on campus, Tess has used the tutoring center on occasion but has not used the writing center. She was interested in joining the American Sign Language (ASL) Club but was not interested in nonacademic involvement on campus. "It's not really important to me personally, but the ASL Club interests me because it's part of my area of interest, otherwise I'm kind of just here for my classes and then I'm out."

College classes have changed Tess on a personal level by increasing her knowledge and self-esteem.

Before getting my GED, I was insanely shy. I still am, but not to the extreme I was before where I didn't want to talk to anybody before if they brought up things about education, or just things I've never even heard about before. It made me feel uncomfortable and stupid. Now, I feel like I can talk to people. Like I can talk to them about different topics because I've taken a bunch of different classes. Not that I know much but compared to before now. And just a year ago, two years ago, I wasn't like this at all. I've changed so much just being in school in the past two years.

While college classes have improved her family life, she described how she wanted to spend less time with her side of the family since they do not understand her experiences as much as her husband's side of the family who "are all very articulate and educated, so they're very supportive."

In terms of economics, Tess does not work and depends on her husband for living and school expenses. Before she won the HSE Distinguished Scholar Award, her husband paid for her books and fees.

The person who has guided Tess the most to persist in college is her husband. "I know that's a boring answer, but it's the truth." Advice that Tess gave to HSE graduates relates to going to school part time at first and making college a priority.

Start out with one or two classes. Don't go too crazy, and make sure it works into your current schedule. If it's going to be way too hard, then you are going to quit. So ease into it, but make it a priority. If it's your decision, it should be a priority.

Tess plans on getting her Associate's in Arts at Harper and then transfer to a university to get her bachelor's degree in psychology with a minor in ASL. After that, she plans on pursuing her master's degree in speech pathology. Her interest is in working with stroke victims and/or deaf and hard-of-hearing people. After the interview, the researcher was asked to write a letter of recommendation for Tess's transfer application to the University of Illinois at Chicago

and DePaul University. Tess is currently waiting to hear back from several colleges and plans to

transfer in fall 2019 as a junior.

Taylor

Taylor, a 21-year-old single African American male, completed his high school education

in Uganda at the age of 18. His family emigrated from Uganda to the United States for political

asylum shortly after he had graduated high school. Taylor decided to enroll in the AED

department to get his U.S. HSE rather than trying to transfer his Uganda diploma. He explained:

> I should have come with my papers [high school diploma transcript], but I didn't come
> with them so I thought instead of like paying the money to bring the papers here, then I
> heard about this GED high school equivalency program. Two months wasn't bad [to
> complete the HSE program]. I wasn't doing anything at the moment. I didn't have a job
> at the time, so I just decided I could go for my GED and then right after go to school for
> college just straight out without wasting any money.

Taylor explained the dire circumstances of his life situation in Uganda before

immigrating to the United States.

> There are a lot of problems in Uganda politically. We've had a president who's been in
> power for more than 30 years now who is like a dictator. . . . He's not doing anything for
> the younger people. People's life is threatened for speaking out. A lot of killings, too,
> and I suspect the killings are targeted and then people need to leave the country.
> There's no jobs. . .there's no education. We need a change. There's a lot of corruption
> and stuff like that. . .If I would be there right now, my parents would be hustling for
> jobs. It's really hard there.

Shortly after arriving in the Harper district, Taylor enrolled in the HSE classes. He

completed the HSE program within one semester plus one summer eight-week session and

began college classes in fall 2017. He is currently enrolled in college classes part time since he

also works full time now to help with his family's housing and his own living expenses. Taylor

already had the intention of enrolling in college classes directly after obtaining his HSE

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credential. In fact, he explained that he wanted to start college right away because "I didn't

want to get distracted." His main goal for starting college was to study for a career.

Taylor discussed the differences between the HSE classes and college classes in terms of

academic rigor, challenge, and the balance of new, multiple responsibilities.

> The high school equivalency is I think it was like high school. It was kind of soft and lenient, you know, and taken softly. And college is straight to it and hardcore. You're not scared to go for it. . . A lot of homework and then coming in full time for classes, my job, and I wasn't used to it. Like I told you, I used to go to school only, but here I have to work and go to school and catch up with everything. Managing it all is hard.

The HSE classes helped Taylor to "sharpen his skills." He specifically mentioned how the

language arts class helped him with his writing skills. Taylor credits the AED staff and teachers

for helping him understand the transition process to college.

> They helped me a lot. . .with me catching up and not staying doubtful. Making me aware of where I am going. . .learning about college classes and telling me it's not going to be the same, that it's going to be harder, and you're going to have to put the effort into it. They're not going to babysit and spoon feed you all the time. That was really something that changes you!

The TC had a major impact on Taylor's transition to college, particularly in guidance, life choices

in switching to a major he wanted rather than one his family had pressured him into.

> [TC's name] has helped me *a lot* that's for sure. He guided me through the classes like what classes to take. He was telling me I should be confident—it's about me that it's not about him. And making me aware it's your life and I'm just here to guide you. And he made me realized I didn't want to do computer programming. That's they I switched to graphic design. If it's being real to myself, I'm not here to please other people first. I need to please myself and other people will be pleased when I be real to myself.

In terms of support from current college instructors and advisors in his persistence,

Taylor explained that what is more important is his own personal commitment and

determination.

I think they [college instructors] do their part. It's basically up to me if I want to go to classes. They show me they're there for me if I need the help. Yeah, extra credit classes if I miss out on a day. First of all, it's all about me, It's your life, and you can study. There are a lot of jobs you can go for, but if you want a career or something, you have to go to class every day you know.

Taylor had some suggestions for improving the experiences of transitioning HSE graduates to college including more one-on-one personal and career advising/guidance, more college-level practice, and more rigorous coursework.

If there is somebody who is not enlightened [about going to college], it would be good to have a short meeting, like a day meeting, to explain the process, like advising them. They need to tell them really it doesn't stop here and they can keep going and get better opportunities here. I think a meeting would be good. Taking more time to make them aware and that we're going to talk about careers and guidance and stuff like that . . . . And more practice, not getting shocked of what I'm seeing [in college]. Not making it soft. If you make it harder, when they transfer it will be easier for them. I understand the concept of high school equivalency that you need to make it softer, but I think it should be harder. I understand there's a lot of people in it like immigrants and kids who dropped out, but I shouldn't come from the GED and go into a [college] class and we feel like it's different. It should be the same level.

In terms of academic support and nonacademic involvement at Harper, Taylor used the writing center when he was still taking college English courses. Now he uses the tutoring for graphic design. He does not go to faculty office hours. Because Taylor works full time, he does not have much time for clubs but would like to join the Jazz Club since he plays piano and would like to meet new people.

I really want to involve myself you know, go out there are meet new people. It's a lonely world out there if you are really new to the country. If you decide to be in the corner and be the guy who is quiet and not confident? No, I want to go out there and meet people. I had this guy invite me to Jazz Club. But the time [conflict]. I really want to get into it. Yeah, it brings up a lot of memories.

Attending college has had a positive impact on Taylor's personal life. Specifically, he has developed his self-confidence, decided on a new major, and matured into adulthood.

Yes, confidence. Confident. Really me changing my major. I came with a purpose really. When I came to this country. . .my parents, it was all about me pleasing them, from childhood though. I had that mentality, you know. That I was meant to please them. Do this, do this. . .this is the right thing, this is the right way, you know. But I came to realize that it's not about them all the time, so now I am confident about myself and what I want to do, and how I want to do it. I'm grown up now. I'm not a baby anymore.

College has also had an impact on Taylor's social life including making new friends and sharing new knowledge and experiences together. There has also been an increase of respect by those around him.

Making more friends. Then there's this respect—that mutual respect and knowledge, you know. . .elevating your mind. When I am talking to people and we're talking about a certain subject, even at home, they actually listen. They are like this guy is really. . .really learning!

In terms of economics, Taylor works full time as a picker/packer at an electronic appliance factory. He lives at home with his father and stepmother but contributes towards rent and bills. He wished he could work less, but explained he really needs the money. To pay for college, Taylor uses financial aid. "If that wasn't there, I would have probably dropped out."

The person who has guided Taylor the most to stay in school is his father who did not attend college. His father discussed the long-term financial benefits of a college education.

My family, my dad. He's really that person who tells you education is something. He used to tell me education is everything. And then he switched it up when we came here. He said, "You can work. You can work your ass off a minimum wage job and work every day and get two jobs or three jobs, or you can go to school for two years and elevate your mind and probably get more money. In the future, in 2-3-4 years from now, you'll be getting something more than that you won't regret doing it."

Taylor's advice to recent HSE graduates included understanding the long-term benefits of having college degree.

Just keep going really. It will pay off. I know I haven't graduated myself, and I can't just assure you that it's going to pay off. But I am pretty confident it's better than just

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stopping. It's better to just keep going because there's a lot of ways to elevate your mind. Knowledge doesn't hurt. That's the truth!

Taylor is currently enrolled in college part time since he could not enroll in one of the graphic design classes that was full. He explained how graphic design courses have limited availability, so he has to wait until the next semester. He is not certain when he will graduate but anticipates in fall 2019 since the graphic design program is a shorter program than his original major.

> The graphic design made my career shorter. Cuz I was going to be here until 2021 or something. I would have had to have taken physics and chemistry, but so everything made it faster with the graphic design major. I'm looking forward to it [graduating]!

Mary

> Mary is a 44-year-old married mother of two daughters ages 18 and 20. One of her daughters attends Harper College. Mary is originally from Egypt and is a non-native speaker of English. Her family emigrated from Egypt to the U.S. for political asylum/religious freedom.

> Actually, I came to the United States when the Muslim Brothers. They killed a lot people, especially Christian people. So, I took my daughters, and I flee to United States and that's it.

> Mary had completed not only high school already in Egypt, but she also completed her bachelor's degree in math in 1996 and had worked as a math teacher. When she came to the U.S. in 2013, she realized she needed to learn English and first began classes in English Literacy Acquisition (ELA) in 2015 at one of the AED department's community sites. She began the HSE classes in summer of 2015 and eventually transferred to the main campus. She finally achieved her HSE credential in spring 2017 and began college classes in summer 2017. Mary also took Academic English as a Second Language reading and writing classes concurrently with her HSE

classes. Now, Mary is enrolled in full-time college classes at Harper, and her major is

accounting.

Mary took HSE classes to improve her English as a stepping stone to college classes. Her

main reason for attending college classes after obtaining her HSE credential was to get on the

pathway towards a career.

> I don't like to be by myself and I didn't have any job to satisfy me. I don't like to work in factories. Or labors. I hate that stuff. I wanted to attend college for a better life and for a better career.

Mary explained the HSE classes helped her to transition to college because the

curriculum was designed more with English language learners in mind, and therefore the

classes were more manageable for her.

> In the high school equivalency classes, you treat with as we are second language. Most of us we are second language, so you give us bit by bit, and this was really helpful for me. It took me like maybe six hours to translate two- or three-page papers and understand everything. If you try to give us more than this, I cannot keep up track with you. . . you treat like with baby—you cannot read, you cannot write. We grew up like this.

Mary spoke about how the language arts and math class helped prepare her for college classes.

Specifically, she learned how to use Blackboard in her language arts class.

> I really have the experience [in the researcher's class] how does college work. I didn't understand at first. I tried to figure out what you said and what the other teacher said. So you help me with direction and understanding. You gave us the Blackboard, and we had to do the Discussion Board. You make me more familiar with Blackboard which helped me a lot [in college classes].

She also liked the various presentations and debates in her HSE classes such as the topic of

choosing a four-year degree or two-year degree. "It make me think about it more."

However, the Bridge to College and Career Success class did not help her with the

transition process.

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Well the Bridge class doesn't help us at all. It was a waste of time to be honest with you because they collect us and like playing. So here is the tutoring center, and here you can blah, blah, blah. What is the benefit for that? Nothing.

The TC had a major impact on Mary's transition process to college especially in terms of choosing a major.

[TC's name] helped me a lot with this transition. And he tried to figure out which major I can take, so helped me choose my major. At the beginning, I choose to physical therapy assistant, but he tried to talk with me that it would take full-time classes and at this time, I couldn't take full-time classes. My English [was not good enough] to handle that. I feel that I cannot take four classes. It was too much.

Mary discussed some challenges she has faced in college classes especially related to the English language and not having the same support that she had while in the HSE classes. "To understand the teachers. Yeah because now you are in college; you're responsible for yourself. Nobody will help you anymore like a baby." Mary had positive things to say about her current college teachers even though they are more challenging. "I love my math teacher. I don't know, because I love math! But for accounting I had a hard time. It's a new language." Other challenges included finding buildings on campus because "it's hard to find things."

Mary's suggestions for improving the transition process for HSE graduates to college included motivating students by showing how it will improve their lives, providing more information about financial aid, and presenting more opportunities for more rigorous college experiences.

The only way you can say that is to tell them you will have a better life for you and for your kids. Because life is really hard. Try to find a way that we will help in this way, and you can help them find full funding because this [financial aid] encouraged me a lot. At the beginning, I took the GED for the English only and when you talked to me about financial aid, so I thought well, why not? Also, give me more experiences. I feel like I was in a cage or like Kindergarten. It was sometimes challenging and sometimes not.

Other suggestions Mary expressed related to the college staff having a better understanding of

the students' life challenges outside the college.

> You don't know about these people's life outside the college. You don't know how many challenges they have—how they are struggling in their life. Because most of them don't have a high level of education, so their jobs are very low which makes life very challenging for them. It's challenging to attend, and I have to work to make money to finance my home and my kids. It's so much. And you can encourage them to keep doing, don't worry you can do it. And be more flexible. Really, there's nothing you can do—nothing in your hands.

> In terms of academic support services, Mary frequently uses the tutoring center, but she

expressed that they do not always have the tutor that she needs such as an accounting tutor.

She used the writing center for her English 102 class to get help for research. She remarked she

only came to the researcher's office for office hours, not any of her college instructors. When

asked about nonacademic involvement, Mary laughed. "No, I'm 44! I have a lot of things to do. I

don't have time for that!"

> College has had a big impact on Mary's self-confidence and English skills. She feels more

confident because now she feels comfortable talking to anyone. College has also had an impact

on her family as she sees herself as a role model for daughters and motivation for them to go to

school.

> I'm like a role model for my daughters. They like what I do. They put me in a big place. They say, "See Mommy what she's doing—you are the only person doing that." [Their] friends' moms—they just go to work. But I go to school. And they [daughters] like to be lazy to study, but I love to study. So, I took about ten hours, six hours, as much as I can . . .and they say to me, "You study so much!" I cannot sleep if I have homework or have a test. It encourages my daughters.

> In terms of economics, Mary's husband is very supportive financially. "He push me to do

it. You go, go, he said. When I talk to him about the money, he always told me not to worry

about that." Mary receives financial aid which covers her classes and fees. She pays for her

books with her own money. Mary was recently accepted into the One Million Degrees program which will also help pay for books and fees. Mary works part time as a student aide in the Harper College Financial Aid office. At the beginning, her supervisor gave her "small tasks" to do, but when she told them she was a math teacher in her country, they have her more responsibility in the office including the access code to the state financial aid system. This new responsibility made her feel proud, and she expressed interest in working in the department full time once she has her degree.

Mary's advice to recent HSE graduates was simple and to the point. "Just do it, if you don't help yourself, nobody will." Her goal is to complete her associate's degree in accounting and eventually get her master's degree in accounting. She decided not to major in math because she does not want to be a teacher in the U.S.

Gio

Gio is a 21-year-old Hispanic male who was not enrolled in the fall 2018 semester. Gio had attended high school until his senior year but did not have enough credits to graduate due to various personal and school issues he had beginning his first year of high school.

> Well, when I was younger, I was kind of a troublemaker in school. I got suspended on two occasions. I actually got sent to Juvie [juvenile detention center], and when I was in there, I did all the work that I had to do. We still had classes in there, but for some reason when I got out—when I was discharged, and I went back to school—they told me the credits from the Juvie school did not transfer to the high school, so I pretty much had to start over. And that was my freshman year—that was the first time I got sent to Juvie, so I was pretty much stuck at freshman year.

In addition to spending time in the juvenile detention center, Gio moved to Oklahoma during his sophomore year. His mother sent him to Oklahoma to live with his father in hopes that he

might have a different environment and get back on track at school; however, the same pattern

continued, and he described a lack of motivation that he had during high school.

> So, my mom thought it was a good idea to get me away from all this. Then I came back
> and I guess you could say I straightened up a little bit. I got in in the right place, but I just
> didn't have the ambition yet. I was skipping school again. There were days I didn't feel
> like going. That's another thing that set me back. The first time I got kicked out of school
> I was very discouraged and not motivated at all to get my GED. I was just pretty much
> down on myself for a while.

Gio left high school finally in 2014, and a couple months later, in January 2015, he started HSE

classes at Harper College in January 2015. However, he did stay in the program very long for

similar reasons he had in high school. In addition, he faced new life responsibilities of working

and paying bills.

> I left and came back a couple of times. Pretty much the same thing. I kind of would just
> give up on myself a lot—when things got hard. Because you know life happens. At that
> point, I was old enough to already, like, pay my own bills and get my own things, so I
> also had to work. And I felt like going to school and doing all this didn't really count—it
> really didn't matter, so I would just go to work instead of going to school.

Gio continued to work and came back to the Harper AED program to enroll in HSE classes in

January 2018. This time, he passed his GED after one semester of classes and immediately

began college classes in summer 2018. He said that this time, "I had my mind set differently. I

gave it all I had and got it after a couple tries."

> Gio decided to enroll in college classes due to the encouragement from others and his

goal to enlist in the military.

> I wanted to join the Marines, and when I went to go enlist, they had told me since I
> had dropped out or had gotten kicked out of high school, that I actually needed to
> attend college and get 16 credits before I could enlist.

Gio completed two classes the summer of 2018: English 101 and sociology. He especially liked

his experience in the sociology class because of the quality of the instructor and Gio's interest

in the topic.

> I really liked Intro to Sociology, and I feel like, how should I say it—it was like a personal interest. I put more effort into the class, and I actually paid attention. I took a lot of notes down. With the homework, it was really not like homework for me—it was more like research for myself. Just the topics and the conversations the professor would being up—I was very engaged in the class.

> Gio did not re-enroll in fall semester 2018 due to his work schedule. He worked as a

hardwood floor installer and repairman with his uncle who owns the business. He explained

that he was working Monday through Saturdays, and sometimes Sundays, during the busy

periods. Gio's uncle relies on him since he does not have any other workers.

> Well, I just felt like I needed to work a little bit more, and with the amount of work that I do—it really gets in the way of school. Or school gets in the way of work. I'd rather just come back to school when the work is like—slower. . . I'm only working all these hours until he [uncle] finds someone else who can help him out. And then when that happens, I'm probably going to come back to school. But it does affect my schedule in a way—working a lot.

> When Gio transitioned from the HSE classes to college classes, he expressed that the

classes were similar in terms of experience and difficulty, and that the process was smooth.

> The main difference is the subjects—what is being taught. But to me, it was a little more work in the actual college classes. Other than that, I feel like it's pretty much the same. Even the professors I had in the college classes were a lot like you guys—very engaged and very interested in helping us. It was an easy transition.

Gio also remarked that he had learned how to use Blackboard while in the HSE program. He felt

proud that he already had it downloaded on his phone while other students did not know to

use it yet.

> The TC had a big impact on Gio's transition as well.

[TC's name] actually helped me a lot. Because I had no ideas how to, uh, enroll in classes. I had no clue where to even start. And he was always there. He pretty much was there for me the whole time. He set up everything for me. He pretty much told me if there is anything else I need, if there is any question I have, you know, about the transition from HSE into college classes, that you know—he is always there. He was just very helpful.

Gio also credits the HSE faculty and staff on helping him through the transition process.

You know, it's pretty much the same. You guys were always there to help us. They gave me their contact information. Even after I graduated, [HSE math teacher's name] told me if you ever need anything here, I can always help you out. And [language arts teacher's name] told me if I ever need any help with my essays, that she's always there. And I always appreciate that. You guys are really helpful.

Gio did not feel that Harper College could improve their process for transitioning HSE graduates to college classes.

Everything seems fine. I feel the most part I could handle it pretty good. I don't mean to sound too cocky. I just feel like the last time I transitioned into college—like really it wasn't really as bad I thought it was going to be. Now I can transition on my own.

In terms of academic support services at Harper, Gio used the writing center for extra credit for his English 101 class. He also met with his sociology professor for office hours. "He actually gave me his contact information. We would talk from time to time. Like if I needed guidance or help with something, I would contact him and have a little conversation."

Gio's biggest challenge during his short college experience was time management. He explained that he learned how to manage his time by making sure he took good notes during class, and then reviewed whenever he had extra time. He said,

I learned that whenever I have downtime, no matter where I'm at, it's always important to review the work, go over the work, and pretty much to refresh my memory with it. Because that way, if I continuously just think about it or see it over and over, it will stick.

Attending college classes had a positive impact on Gio by giving him an opportunity to explore and consider different career options. He also seemed to be in the process of changing his initial career goal and reflected on having a more open mind than before.

> Going to college opened up my mind—because honestly, the things I wanted to do at the beginning, it doesn't grab my attention anymore. What I wanted to do in the beginning does not grab my attention anymore. . .My initial career goal was law enforcement. I wanted to be a detective. I feel that there's more—more options for me now. . . I'm still on the fence about it. Like if I don't find something that really grabs my attention, then I'll probably just end up sticking to law enforcement. . . . What I'm trying to say is that college is helping me to keep an open mind. It's helping me to explore my options and just really think about what I want to do for the rest of my life.

In terms of impact on his social and family life, Gio has met new friends in college and carpooled with some to school. Gio expressed that his mother was proud that he was talking college classes and that she liked to bring the topic up with family. Gio's mother is also the main person who has guided him to persist in college classes. "My mom definitely. Because even at my (HSE) graduation—like the way she just seems so proud of me, you know. I want her to look like that again eventually."

> At times Gio expressed former doubts about himself with hopes of the future.

> I thought I would never be able to do this. You know, I thought I was going to be one of those guys that just ends up working the rest of his life. But if I could achieve this, I knew I could achieve way more.

Gio's advice for recent HSE graduates related to enrolling in college classes right away rather than putting it off. He then reflected on how he had this same problem when he first started HSE classes and then regrettably had repeated this behavior by not enrolling in fall semester.

> For me it would be the same story as getting my GED. I'd always say I'll do it next semester, and then next semester, and then before you know it, it's a like a year or two years. It's better just to do it right away. And I think that's what my problem was. I decided to take a break, but if I really think about it, I could have still been coming back and still managed the time [to take a class this semester].

Gio had additional advice and reflections at the end of the interview which included faculty developing "a bond" with students. By getting to know the students better, students are more likely to come back and want to succeed. "That way, I feel like I don't want to let you down." He expressed that all the college teachers should be like [HSE language arts teacher's name] and [HSE math teacher's name]. I feel they are really engaged with us and genuine about what they do. He also explained that HSE graduates should not be afraid to ask questions. "Just don't be afraid to get engaged."

Gio was planning to re-enroll in spring semester 2019. He appeared excited about coming back to school. The researcher is not aware if Gio reached out to his new advisor or if he actually enrolled in spring 2019 classes.

Mac

Mac is a 32-year-old Filipino-American, single male who had been out of school for more than ten years before coming back to school to pursue his HSE credential and attend college classes. Mac has been taking college classes for almost a year in radiologic technology.

During Mac's sophomore year of high school, he decided to drop out due to personal problems and "partying a lot."

> Due to not hanging out with the right kind of people—and having my life threatened. Yeah, I thought that someone was out to get me, and I didn't leave the house for a while. And then I tried to go back, but it just really didn't work out, so I ended up not going   back.

Mac had enrolled in HSE classes at Harper College in 2007 but dropped out for unknown reasons. During the period between leaving high school and coming back to Harper, ten years later, Mac worked at a car dealership. He "moved his way up the ladder" first as a transporter,

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then service writer, and finally a salesman. He explained that he made good money working at the dealership, but "there were probably three days out of the week for about a 12-hour day that you would go home for nothing, and I had consecutive months like that. I just couldn't live that way anymore."

Financial struggles pushed Mac to enroll in the HSE classes at Harper College. He also spoke about having "an epiphany" while driving his family to Disneyworld for a vacation.

> We rented two vans and drove, and since everybody's older, I had to drive, so I had a lot of time to myself. And that's when I started to think about myself and what I am doing with my life. Should I go back to school? This was just before I started at Harper. I was still a car salesman at the time. It was my week off, and we were driving to Florida so that was when I had my epiphany to go back to school.

Mac completed the HSE classes within one semester and began college classes in spring semester 2018. Mac had learned about the radiology technician field from his cousin and decided that was the career he wanted to pursue. "And it's been one of the best decisions of my life."

Mac explained that the main difference between HSE classes and college classes for him is that he is a lot older than the other students in class. However, he also observed that he has a better work ethic than the younger students.

> Seeing their work ethic, and then just being like "I've been there before." I bet their parents are paying for college, and I'm paying out pocket for mine. So, I work—I want to work that much harder. . .I'm not the best student in the world, but I do try hard.

Mac described HSE classes and college classes as being fairly similar in terms of academics. He appreciated that he learned how to use Blackboard in the HSE Language Arts class because "Everything is done on Blackboard now, and even some of the books are all digital." Mac placed directly into English 101 from the English placement exam and felt that the HSE language arts

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class prepared him for college essay writing. The HSE math and college math classes, on the other hand, required much more extra review. "I had to take one of the lower math [college] classes just to refresh my memory and get me back up to where I needed to be."

Mac's transition to college classes went without mishap. The main challenge for him was getting to class early. "The transition was actually really smooth. It felt like I was just like in one of your classrooms, and then kind of got the same feel in college classes."

In terms of challenges, Mac expressed dissatisfaction with one of his teachers due impersonality and requiring students to pay for a book that was not used in class.

> The only thing different would be sometimes you really got to know all of us, and in my chem class he doesn't. He probably doesn't know any of our names. And he's kind of a mumbler. And he doesn't really go by the book, but he *made* us buy the book. So he is probably the most difficult part I have now. I have to do a lot of stuff on my own.

The TC was very helpful in Mac's transition to college classes in helping him understand the transfer process. "Yes, he was actually really helpful on where I wanted to go. If I wanted to keep going here [Harper College] or if I wanted to transfer somewhere else." Mac was assigned a new college advisor who helped him with the prerequisites he needed to take. He mentioned that when she learned he came from the HSE program, she made sure that he chose introductory-level classes so that he could be more prepared, particularly in the sciences.

Mac explained that his persistence in college is primarily due to his own motivation, not the help of instructors or advisors. At the same time, he is comfortable reaching out for help if needed. "For me personally, I am more my own drive that I want to do this, so I get a little tunnel vision sometimes, but they do help, and I do ask for help, and nobody ever turns me away."

Mac has not participated in any nonacademic involvement such as clubs or the fitness center at Harper. "I don't have much to do with it because I work. I'm working part time as well." He has also never used any academic support services at Harper.

Mac works as a lab assistant at a cadaver lab for 15-30 hours per week. Mac's brother-in-law is a radiology technician for the same lab and helped Mac get the job which fits well into his career goal of becoming a radiology technician. He eagerly spoke about his experience in the lab.

> Yes, my job fits into my goal *a lot*! I'm learning hands-on. I'm using the C-Arm machines already. They are the x-ray machines that they use in the operating room. So, it's called the c-arm because it's like a "c" shape with an arm. . .We x-ray the cadavers. Surgeons come in, and they learn new procedures, and they also learn new surgical tools. So, we prep the cadaver for whatever they need, and they when they are done, we sew them back up and put them back in the freezer. . .the first week I worked there I couldn't eat meat. I thought I was going to be ok because when I was a kid, we used to butcher cows and pigs, and we'd split it between our families. . .but when I saw the human cadaver, I thought "Oh, this is different and I'm not used this."

Mac was excited because the lab manager told him, "You're going to have an easy time in class [at Harper] because of what you are learning here." Mac's supervisors are very supportive of Mac's school schedule. Mac said they told him that school was a priority, and that if got his degree, he could get a full-time job there. In addition to letting Mac do homework at work, the lab manager, a former professor at Arizona State University, has provided additional on-the-job learning experiences and support for Mac.

> So he is always telling me, 'Here, check this out—this is this, and that is that.' He's been a huge help. One time they were doing heart surgery, and I asked to look at the heart. And he was like, 'All right.' And he kind of just—well, they had already taken out the heart, and he reached right in and just ripped it out. He just took it right out. And I was like "Whoa!" And then he showed me the different parts of the heart.

The biggest impact that college classes have had on Mac's personal life is that he now has a clear direction and career goal. "Well, before, I didn't have a direction, and then when I finally figured it out, and now that I'm going in the direction that I actually planned—it's really nice." He also said he feels much better about himself.

In terms of social life, he laughed when he said he decided to break up with his girlfriend and move home in order to prioritize his education. Moving back home has improved his relationship with his mother and father. Although he must pay for his own school with his own financial aid and money, his parents are not charging him rent to live at home. "I feel more concentrated on myself." Mac's mother and father are very supportive of his educational journey, especially Mac's mother who is a retired nurse.

Finally, Mac's decision to attend college has had a "domino effect" on some of his friends from high school.

> Two of my friends followed my lead and went back to school! Yeah—these people actually went to high school, and they said well you did it and you're doing better than I, and you're learning more. So now they went back to school—two of them.

At the time of the interview, Mac was enrolled part time (nine credit hours) at Harper in fall 2018. He has been paying for college using a student loan. He was unfamiliar with scholarships that he might be eligible for, including a free three-credit hour class he could have received from the AED department for completing his HSE at Harper College.

Mac's advice to recent HSE graduates was simple. "Stop thinking about it so much and just do it. That's what got me through." He also explained the HSE graduates have to reach out for help if they need it. Mac expressed an interest in furthering his education beyond the

radiology technician license. "I would like to work my way up because I know I'm going to just be there and doing the walk-ins, but I eventually want to make my way to the operating room"

Javier

Javier is a 25-year-old, single, Hispanic male who went to high school in both Mexico and the U.S. He dropped out of high school in the U.S., moved to Mexico and went to high school there, and then moved back to the U.S. and began working. Javier had been out of school for about five years before starting the HSE classes at Harper College. Going to college and getting a degree were Javier's main reasons for getting his HSE credential at Harper. Also, the high school in Mexico is not equivalent to the U.S. high school diploma.

Javier explained that his experience in college classes is very different from the HSE classes, particularly related to instructors' expectations and support. He also expressed the need for college students to be more self-motivated, responsible, and independent due to financial consequences.

> Well the teachers are a lot different. So I feel like when you are trying to do the GED, a lot of teachers are helping you, like for you to be motivated and come to class and learn as much as you can. And they help you if you have questions and stuff like that. In college, it's a little tougher. There's no babysitting. It's just like you have to do this if you want to pass and yeah—so it's on you. It's not like the teacher will do it for you. They will help you, but up to a certain point. . . . Also one of the things is you are paying for the full amount for it, so if I don't make the best out of it, then it's money wasted.

Javier's biggest challenge in the first semester transitioning to college classes was feeling older and "out of place." He also felt a difference in motivation from the other students.

> Pretty much all my classmates were like 18 or 19. And I just felt like I was a little bit too old for the class. And I felt like if I didn't waste so much time before, I could have been done with this. It was the first semester I felt like a little bit out of place—the mentality that some of my classmates had—it was not the same as the one I had. And the way they were talking. It was just the first semester, and after that I kind of get it.

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Javier felt that the HSE classes were mostly a refresher for him since he had already completed most of his high school education. He explained that the HSE classes helped him to "get the mentality that you have to go to school. . . it put me on the right track to do the next step which is college classes."

Javier had met with the TC a couple of times but that the TC did not have an impact on his transition or persistence in college. In fact, he experienced communication difficulties and felt the TC may have been "overwhelmed."

> I would say that I feel like some information he gave me was not the best. I felt like it was a lot of miscommunicating. I think in general, I feel communication is an opportunity that everyone has. Nowadays, we're not the best at communicating. I do feel that sometimes people get overwhelmed. And people don't know how to express that, so I felt like sometimes he got a little overwhelmed and didn't know how to manage that because when I reached out to him for information, his answer would not be the same even though it was the same question. So sometimes he would answer, and it would get more confusing to me.

Javier worked closely with her HSE math teacher for transition advice, math help, and scholarship information. "She was a great help to me." Javier was assigned a new college advisor when he began college classes. The new advisor helped Javier with choosing classes and steps to take after a low placement test in English. "She literally went above and beyond to help me." Javier now has a new advisor whom he emails back and forth with regularly about both academic and personal issues such as stress. "So far we have covered everything that I've needed, so I don't really need her as often unless I have a question about my class or I'm thinking I'm getting overwhelmed or whatever, she will help me." Overall, Javier spoke very highly of his college advisors.

Javier felt that Harper College could do a better job of transitioning HSE students to college classes by providing more information and better communication about the enrollment process, financial aid/scholarships, and more understanding about how the pathway to college works. "Like, I didn't know that when I finish the GED and go to Harper, that I could get a free class. I feel like a lot of people don't know this." Also, he mentioned that the Harper website was not helpful.

> Even when you go to the website, it's not really clear. You may click on it, and you can still be confused about it. I would say like more communication—a little bit more information about it [the transition process] because I remember the first day I was a little bit scared. I didn't know what to do, what to expect, or how to move, but honestly something that made it better was my friends that I have that go to this college—helping me find my way.

Javier also felt that there should be more advertisement and marketing about the AED program, especially that the services are not just for older adults, but younger adults as well. "I think people really don't know. I feel like you need more signs and something big about it." Finally, he explained that he was not aware of many resources on campus, including the tutoring center, until his second semester of classes. "The school is intimidating because it's really huge. So you don't know where everything is the first year."

Javier expressed mostly good reviews about the support from his college teachers. He particularly liked that his teachers had flexible times for extra help and were approachable. However, he expressed that it is important to learn how to choose teachers that match this style of teaching and support that worked well with him.

> Like my first semester, I was not fully aware of how to select teachers, so I did select a teacher that I was not feeling comfortable with in the way I didn't understand how he was teaching. And the class was really hard for me, and I ended up dropping the class. But besides that, all of my teachers have been very helpful when it comes to questions or anything. . .They have this open door policy that if you have questions. . . one of my

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teachers comes early and leaves late so you can stay and she'll go over it with you. . .and another teacher, she stays in the tutoring center for an hour or so, so you can go over there.

Javier regularly uses the tutoring center when his instructors have office hours there. He used the writing center last semester. "They don't do your homework, but they help you and give you an idea about how to improve it." Javier expressed interest in nonacademic involvement, but due to his work commitment, he does not have the time.

Attending college has had a positive impact on his personal life by improving his self-esteem and setting a goal for himself to achieve. "It [college] makes you feel better about yourself, it's just something you want to complete—a goal, so the closer you are, the better you feel." Also, Javier expressed the application of what he has learned in college to his work, and the increase of knowledge.

> It helps you to see different things like work-related. You have a better understanding how to behave at work because how you have to be in a room with like 30 people, so you have to understand this stuff. What you learn in class applies to work, and stuff like that.

In terms of the impact on social life, Javier expressed that he does not have time for a social life at the moment since he is prioritizing work and school. "I would say I see my friends maybe once every two weeks. . . definitely not time to do fun stuff."

In terms of economics, Javier works 48 hours per week, sometimes more, as both a store manager at Forever 21 and a server in a restaurant. He has used credit cards and the payment plan to pay for his college classes, about 6-10 credits per semester. Javier does not receive federal financial aid. At the time of the interview, he recently received a Patricia Moyer $1200 scholarship from the Harper College Foundation with the help of the AED math teacher to pay for two semesters of classes.

Javier discussed in detail the difficulty of balancing school and work. He manages to go to school part time by taking classes on Mondays and Wednesdays and scheduling his homework time on those days as well. One employer has not been very supportive about his going to school.

> Well, the way he sees it—this is a business, and we need to drive business, blah, blah. But I understand where he's coming from. I mean this is his career—like maybe his life, and most other people are just there for this. But his is not for me though. I'm prioritizing school over work, and he wants me to prioritize work over everything else.

In spite of these challenges, he expressed a conviction and determination to complete his career goal by reminding himself that his current jobs "are not going to be my future or career."

The person who has guided Javier most to persist in college is himself. "I feel like I'm doing this for myself—not for anybody else, and I feel at the end it will reward me." Javier had advice for recent GED graduates which including not doubting oneself, and to think about how a college education is important for one's future life and career satisfaction. "It *does* matter. It helps you so you can feel better about yourself, and it also will help you get a better job and move on in life to something better."

Javier's goal is to continue studying business and then transfer to a four-year institution. He is considering business management for his bachelor's degree. Because Javier is only going to school part time, he realizes it will take longer than two years. "It kind of bums me out a little bit [that it will take longer], but eventually, like—I will get it done."

Shea

Shea is a single, 19-year-old white female who had relocated from the south to Illinois to live with her stepmother. Shea dropped out of school between her junior and senior year due

to moving back and forth from Tennessee to Florida with her mom who was a single parent. Due to the interruption in schooling, she lost credits, and the last high school she attended would not let her reenroll in school due to lost credits. "Yeah, so when I was 17, I got on a Greyhound, went to Tennessee, lived with my grandmother, and then I moved here to Palatine."

Shea had been out of school less than a year before attending HSE classes at Harper College. "I had been out of school a good 10 months—quite a while!" Her stepmother suggested Harper College due to its reputation. Shea began HSE classes spring semester 2018 and completed and passed all her HSE tests during the summer session of 2018.

After completing her HSE, Shea enrolled in part-time general education classes in fall semester 2018. Her main reason for attending college was her career goal of becoming a registered nurse. "I've always wanted to be a nurse because I've always wanted to help people, and you need college to do that."

The main difference between HSE and college classes was the size of the lecture hall classes and less personalized attention. "It's [college classes] not as one-on-one as it can be with the GED classes." She also discussed that she has more reading, writing, and homework. "It's a bit more harder—you get essay after essay." In terms of challenges this first semester, she said the biggest challenge is not having any friends and lack of familiarity with the campus. "I don't know a lot of people, so that's hard walking around and kind of not knowing where to go."

Shea felt the HSE helped prepare her well for college classes. "They gave me more knowledge that I needed to have in order to have a good start in the classes." She mentioned

that learning Blackboard and the Harper app in the HSE classes was helpful. The HSE instructors had a big impact on Shea's transition in the way they motivated her and explained the process to her. "My teachers were very helpful, and they told me what I needed to do, and that I *can* do it. Likewise, the TC helped her understand the process of registering for classes and "setting deadlines."

So far in her first semester, Shea has not met her new college advisor; however, they have been communicating via email. Shea has had a good experience with her college classes and teachers. "They're pretty funny. They can relate a lot too. And they don't just give you assignments and just push you away. They actually talk about them and write down outlines. They are good teachers."

In terms of academic support, Shea does not know where the writing center and tutoring center are located. However, she does use the library every day to meet up with some of her classmates and go over assignments and do peer editing on essays. When asked about nonacademic involvement, Shea laughed. "No, I don't have time because I work a lot. It's hard to find time for stuff like that."

Being a college student has increased Shea's self-esteem, knowledge, and confidence about her future. "I feel more smart, and that I can actually do things, and that I'm going to be able to eventually pursue my career—that I thought I wouldn't be able to do when I was 18." In terms of family support, Shea credits her stepmother for helping her enroll and persist in college. "She actually was like you are going [to college] whether you like it or not."

In terms of economics, Shea works between 28-25 hours per week as a shift leader at Oberweis ice cream shop. She receives financial aid to pay for classes and books, and she uses

her money to pay for her car, insurance, and rent at her stepmother's home. Shea was not familiar with scholarships at Harper including the free three-credit hour class that she could have received for completing her HSE credential. However, shortly after the interview, Shea contacted the researcher to notify her she was awarded the HSE Distinguished Scholar Award which will pay for two years of college.

Although Shea has considered taking college classes full time, she felt she needed to work to pay for her expenses and expressed the difficulty of balancing work and school. "Sometimes when I wake up, I just don't want to go [to class]. So sometimes I'll skip a class, but I'll still go online and take all the notes and write them all down."

Shea said that her stepmother and her HSE instructors have been the main people who have guided her to persist in college. She did not have any suggestions on how Harper could improve the college transition process for HSE graduates. Her advice to recent HSE graduates was about persistence. "Just do it and keep going. And it gets easier as you keep going. Like the first week you might be scared of, like, I'm going to be late, but I mean, it's going to be okay."

Shea discussed how she is determined to complete her prerequisites and general education courses required for the nursing program at Harper. Her long-term educational goal is a bachelor's degree in nursing.

SUMMARY

The focus of this case study was to gain insight into the experiences of recent HSE graduates in their transition to postsecondary coursework. Nine participants were interviewed to examine topics related to their transition to college and experiences as a new college student. The main elements included descriptive and demographic data from student

information forms, interviews, observational field notes, and notation of emerging themes

during the data analysis process.

CHAPTER FIVE: ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

INTRODUCTION

Transition of HSE graduates to postsecondary education has become a growing interest for education policy makers and institutions of higher education over the past decade (Mullin, 2014). Few studies, however, focus specifically on underexamined population on college campuses (Mullin, 2014; Zafft et al., 2006). Most of the current research addressing this population is quantitative in nature. There are limited qualitative studies which explore the experiences of this population as they begin their first experiences with postsecondary education.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the experiences of HSE graduates in their transition to college classes as well as their efforts to persist in their education towards their associate degree or career certificate. By examining the experiences of this nontraditional student population, this study gives voice to the students and the challenges they faced in attending college.

Through a qualitative case study approach, this research focused on the participants' stories to capture their experiences as nontraditional students with a HSE credential who successfully transition to and persist in college. The researcher conducted individual interviews with students who had attended the HSE classes in the AED department, achieved their HSE credential, and then enrolled in college classes at Harper College.

In qualitative data analysis, the data collection and analysis processes occur side-by-side. Similarly, Miles et al. (2014) state that the qualitative data analysis process is "a continuous, iterative enterprise" and that qualitative researchers are "in a more fluid and humanistic position" than quantitative researchers (p. 14). The following research questions were used to guide this study:

1. What factors contribute to the decision of HSE graduates to enroll in postsecondary coursework?

2. What factors do GED graduates report influence their persistence and success in community college?

3. In what ways do GED graduates describe the college as helping or hindering their transition to community college?

This chapter is organized by the themes that began to emerge from the data collection process. Based on the interview data collected in this study, the researcher began to see similarities among the participants' responses regarding the factors which contribute answers to each of the research questions. The factors which contributed to the students' decision to enroll in colleges were similar to the reasons they also persisted in college. The students described many similar personal and institutional factors which both helped and hindered their transition to college classes. Therefore, the results of this study are organized into factors both inside and outside the college environment which correspond to three theoretical foundations: Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of the persistence and dropping out process for nontraditional college students, Schlossberg's (2011) transition model, and Cross's (1981) barriers to adult learner participation in higher education. This structure includes the influence of background variables (demographics, enrollment status, educational goals), academic variables (study habits, connection to faculty, advising), environmental factors (economic

situation, hours worked, family encouragement), and psychological factors (goals, motivation). Analysis of the findings is also connected to research in adult transition to postsecondary education and persistence of nontraditional students. The first series of factors are organized as occurring outside the community college, and the second set is classified as experiences and interactions within the college.

FACTORS OUTSIDE THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Key factors outside the college which influenced the participants' transition to and persistence in postsecondary education included personal and career goals and aspirations, overcoming past barriers, individual characteristics, and family support. Key barriers or deterrents to persisting in college included working and juggling multiple adult responsibilities. These findings are supported by recent research that adult learners transitioning to college are more likely to persist in college when they are highly motivated due to personal and career goals, have a solid career plan, and have fewer personal obstacles such as lack of family support or health issues (Smith & Gluck, 2016).

Educational and Career Aspirations/Goals

For all of the participants in this case study, the primary reason to both obtain their high school equivalency and enroll in postsecondary education was based on the desire to further their education and begin studying for a career. The participants' realization that additional education and training was required to change the quality of their life, enter a specific career, and increase their earning potential was a critical factor in enrolling in both HSE classes and postsecondary education.

I came to Harper College because I wanted to finish what I started and move on with my goals. . .I always knew I wanted to be a nurse. (Jade)

That was the whole reason I got it [HSE credential] so that I could start college. (Rylann)

Also future goals—wanting to have a family some day. And I want to be able to support them. (Tess)

Because I didn't find any job to satisfy me. I don't like to work in factories. Or like labors. I hate that stuff. (Mary)

I wanted to join the Marines, and when I went to go enlist, they had told me that since I had dropped out, or that I had been kicked out of school, that I needed to attend college and get 16 college credits before I enlist. (Gio)

I knew that I wanted to do radiology technician, and I knew the steps I needed to take, so I just started taking them, and it's been on the best decisions of my life. (Mac)

Well one of the reasons I completed my HSE was to keep going to school and then get a degree [in business]. . .so that was my goal. (Javier)

Well, I've always wanted to be a nurse because I've always wanted to help people, and you need college to do that. (Shea)

Although a couple participants were still in the process of deciding their exact area of interest and career goal, they all responded that entering postsecondary education was their goal at the onset of enrolling in the HSE classes. Several of the participants reflected that attending college was instrumental in "opening their mind" to new options, participating in career exploration, and gaining the self-confidence to decide on a new career direction without the influence of somebody else telling them what to do. None of the participants had to be convinced to attend college classes. They all had made the conscious decision to pursue further education for a variety of different goals. Personal goals and aspirations to achieve a better quality of life were the main motivators for the participants to both achieve their HSE credential and enroll in college.

Overcoming Past Barriers

All of the participants discussed overcoming past barriers as a reason to enroll in HSE classes and transition to college. The barriers that contributed to their leaving school were a combination of situational, dispositional, and institutional hurdles (Cross, 1981) that they faced during and after their high school years. Noteworthy in the participants' stories were the diversity of situational barriers. These situational barriers included depression, pregnancy, moving, family issues, economic issues (working full time), and caretaking of a terminally ill parent. Two participants had dealt with political trauma in their native countries, forcing them to immigrate to the U.S. for asylum.

> I had to take care of my father who was terminally ill, and I felt I needed to take care of family responsibilities that were timely priorities. I came to Harper because I wanted to finish what I had started and move on with my life and goals. (Jade)

> I dropped out of my sophomore year for depression issues. . . then the following year I was pregnant. Then I wanted to get my GED for a few years, but it didn't happen because then came second baby on top of that. . .That was the whole reason I got it [HSE credential] so I could start college and get my life on track. (Rylann)

> I came to the United States when the Muslim Brothers—they killed a lot of people, especially Christian people. So I took my daughters and I flee to the United States. (Mary)

Dispositional barriers included a lack of motivation in high school, school delinquency, low self-esteem, and feelings of being behind people their own age.

> I wanted to figure myself out because I went from being a little kid to someone's wife, and I never figure out who I was in the middle of that. (Tess)

> I was getting into a lot of trouble here. So my mom thought it was a good idea to get me away from all this [and move to Oklahoma with his father]. . . I straightened up a little bit, but I just didn't have the ambition yet. I was skipping school again. . .actually when I first got kicked out of school, I was very discouraged and not motivated at all to get my GED. I was just pretty down on myself for a while. . .I came back after a while and just had my mind set a little bit differently and I gave it my all. [Gio]

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Institutional barriers included participants' difficulties with their high schools accepting credits from other schools when the participants had moved or attended school in a juvenile detention center, lack of quality academic resources and support for homeschoolers, and limited opportunities to complete credits lost after having stopped out or dropped out high school. For foreign-born students, institutional barriers included not having access to educational transcripts and records.

The participants often discussed their barriers and negative experiences at length to describe the effort that it took to overcome and resolve these issues. The participants realized that they wanted a better life for themselves and their children. This realization led to the conclusions that they wanted to move ahead in their lives, set goals for themselves, and achieve independence. They realized that furthering their education, setting goals, and achieving those goals would strengthen them and buffer them from more barriers down the road. The researcher observed that the majority of the participants were in the process of using the 4S's system (situation, self, supports, and strategies) for overcoming past barriers and coping with their transition to college (Anderson et al., 2012).

INDIVIDUAL CHARACTERISTICS: MOTIVATION, SELF-ESTEEM, AND CONFIDENCE

Although educational goals and overcoming past barriers were strong motivational factors for the participants to enroll in college, a major impact on their persistence and success in college was self-motivation and the ongoing increase in self-esteem and confidence as they attended college classes. Participants discussed the process of changing majors or deciding a new goal was an empowering part of their increasing self-confidence.

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Confidence. Confident. Really me changing from my major (from computer science to graphic design). When I came to this country, I had that mentality that I was meant to please my parents.. . .But I came to realize really that it's not about them, and so now I am confident about myself and what I want to do, and how I want to do it. I'm grown up now. (Taylor)

As far as staying in college, I actually want to be in college. I actually *want* to get my bachelor's. (Rylann)

I actually feel a lot better about myself. Before I didn't have a direction, and then when I finally figured it out, and now I'm going in the direction that I had planned—it's really nice. (Mac)

College has changed my life. It made me more confident about myself because now I can deal with anyone and talk to anyone. (Mary)

I feel more smart—and that I can actually do things, and that I'm going to be able to eventually pursue my career—that I thought I wouldn't be able to do when I was 18. (Shea)

Before I was insanely shy. . .I didn't want to talk to anybody before if they brought up things about education or jus things I've never even heard about. It made me feel stupid and uncomfortable. I felt I had nothing to contribute. Now I feel like I can talk to people—I can talk about different topics. I've changed so much in the last two years just being in school. (Tess)

It [college] just opened my mind. Because honestly the things that I wanted to do at the beginning—it doesn't grab my attention anymore. . .My initial career goal was law enforcement. I wanted to be a detective. Now, I'm on the fence about it. . .What I'm trying to say is college is helping me to explore my options and just really think about what I want to do for the rest of my life. (Gio)

College makes you feel better about yourself, so it's just something you want to complete—a goal, so the closer you are, the better you feel. (Gio)

Family Support

Family, including stepparents and significant others, were a source of positive influences

on the participants' decision to return to education and persist in their postsecondary classes.

Family members provided ongoing motivational encouragement and financial support which

were critical in the participants' success. Even though 90% of the participants worked to support themselves and their education, family members provided additional financial and moral support so that the participants had time to study and do homework. Family members helped to ease the burden of juggling multiple responsibilities. Furthermore, family members reminded the participants about the long-term value of a college education which validated the participants' choice to go to school.

> Well, my boyfriend is supportive to the point where he is overly supportive. He is making sure that he as a checklist for me that he keeps in his head and goes through before I go to school. . . . He's very supportive and he understands when I need to study if I didn't get enough tie before. And he's doing everything possible to help financially support the kids. He's making sure he's there for everything. (Rylann)

> My family. . .my dad. He's really that person who tells you education is something. . . He didn't go to college. He stopped in high school. He wanted to be a lawyer, and when he said it, I was laughing because he is this argumentative person and would have made a great lawyer. He used to tell me education is everything. And then he switched it up when we came here [from Uganda]. He said, "You can work your ass off at a minimum wage job and work every day. . .work two or three jobs—or you can go to school for two years and elevate your mind and probably get more money. In the future, in two, three, four years from now, you'll be getting something more that you won't regret doing it. (Taylor)

> My husband is very supportive. He pushed me to do it, "You go, go, go!" when I talk to him about the money—I need more money, I can go to work—He always told me no— you study. (Mary)

> My stepmom loves it (that participant is in college). She actually was like "you're going whether you like it or not." (Shea)

The study participants also expressed pleasure in being validated by their parents, children, and significant others while in college. The fact that family members felt proud of the participants had a powerful impact on their persistence in college.

> With my family, I feel that. . . they have something to *brag* about when they talk to other family members or friends. . . . I feel that it's made my family, but especially mom proud. (Jade)

> And now I'm like a role model for my daughters. They like what I do. They put me in a ig place. . . . It encourages them. (Mary)

Even the participant who had stopped out of college for the semester was motivated to return in order to continue to make his mother proud of him and to achieve his educational goals.

> My mom. . .I guess you could say she feels proud to say that her son is in college classes. And whenever we're around family we haven't seen in a long time, she'll bring it up, but not like showing off. Just you know, saying she's proud of me that I'm finally doing it. . .I want her to look like that again (proud) eventually. Because I thought I would never get my GED and go to college. . .I thought I was going to be one of those guys that just ends up working the rest of his life. (Gio)

With one exception, all of the participants spoke about family support as a positive influencer in their persistence in school. In one case, the participant's immediate family was not encouraging; however, her husband's family was very supportive since they valued education. "They're all very articulate and educated, so they're very supportive, but my family not so much. . . . I don't want to see them because it's hard to share things with them" (Tess).

Overall, family support had an impressive impact on the participants' transition to and persistence in college. These findings relate to Bean and Metzner's (1985) model which claimed that that environmental variables, or "pull factors" can impact nontraditional students' retention because these variables can support or decrease retention. More specifically, the positive impact of family support and encouragement can compensate for the negative impact of barriers. In other words, nontraditional students who receive strong, positive environmental support are more likely to persist in postsecondary education even if they have other academic or personal barriers which might impede their persistence.

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Impact of Work

Almost 90% of the participants were working to pay for tuition, fees, books, living expenses, cars, and other expenses while going to school. Three of the nine students worked 35 or more hours per week, and two of those students worked more than 48 hours per week, sometimes at more than one job. Among those participants who were working full and part time, all of them reported that they could not afford to go to school or pay for their expenses without working.

Working had both negative and positive influences on the participants' enrollment and persistence in college. The first impact was on enrollment status. Only 33% of the participants in the case study were enrolled in college full time. In general, students who worked, especially if they worked full time, were enrolled in nine credit hours or less. One participant, Gio, had stopped out of college and not enrolled in the fall 2018 semester due to working overtime as a hardwood floor installer. Almost all of the students who were working, especially full time, discussed the difficulty in balancing school and work priorities. They also discussed the impact that working had on their academic performance.

> Sometimes when I wake up—I just don't want to go [to school], so sometimes I'll skip a class, but I'll still go online and take all the notes and write them down. (Shea)

> I wish I was working less hours, but I really need the money. If I was to have less [work] hours, I would get more time in school. I would probably learn more. (Taylor)

> I'm only working all these hours until my uncle can find someone else who can help him. And then when that happens, I'm probably going to come back to school, but it does affect my schedule in a way—working a lot. (Gio)

> Work definitely does make it hard to keep up with school, especially weeks where I have multiple tests that I need to worry about while I'm at work. It makes it hard to go home and still continue to want to study and keep my brain on active mode. It makes it harder to perform in class. (Jade)

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Some employers were not flexible or understanding of the participants' desire to go to college. Javier, in particular, expressed frustration about his employer's lack of support and dealt with this situation by reminding himself of his long-term goal.

> Working has affected my college. So at work they want me to work more and change my hours, but with school, I just try to do my best. Sometimes business don't really understand us. They say, "We're running a business, and we need you to be here." But at this point, that's not going to be my future or career. I'm not going to be there forever. So, it does affect [college] because, like, I wish business would understand.

Working, however, was also a positive influencer for students, particularly those who worked on campus as student aides or worked in a job that was related to their field of study. One participant, Mac, was particularly excited about his job as a cadaver lab technician. Not only could he do homework on the job, but his supervisor was a former professor and had been teaching Mac lessons in anatomy, how to use operating room machinery, and other skills that apply directly to his radiology technology career program. Likewise, Mary, who works in the financial aid office as a student aide, was given more responsibilities when her supervisor found out she had a background in math. She has shown an interest in working in the financial aid department full time once she completes her associate degree.

For all of the participants, working and school/life balance had a negative impact on their social integration or participation in both academic and nonacademic involvement such as academic support services, tutoring, library, student clubs, college activities, and sports. The students reported that between working and going to school, they did not have time for extra involvement which did not relate direct to their classes. About half of the participants found time to use some of the academic support centers on classes, and half said they did not have the time.

The participants' work experiences had both a negative and positive impact on the participants' persistence in college. Mostly, working affected the participants' ability to study full time, which means it will take longer to achieve their degrees or certificate. Over half of the participants reported that their jobs had a negative impact on their academic performance and attendance. Students who were working part time as student aides at the college or working in part-time jobs related to their field reported the most positive influences of their work life on their persistence in college.

FACTORS WITHIN THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

In their studies of nontraditional student persistence, Bean and Metzner (1985) found that nontraditional students often have fewer interactions with their college environment than traditional students due to having multiple responsibilities including work, school, and family responsibilities. This leads to nontraditional students having less involvement with faculty, academic support services, and extracurricular activities (pp. 489-90). However, the participants in this research developed their own network of support throughout the college including the TC, college advisers, college faculty, and AED department faculty. Support for transitioning to college was established when students attended HSE classes and continued for most students throughout their transition to college.

When the students began taking college courses, most students reported academic success and persistence due to a combination of institutional factors including having a determined career goal, financial support, and college-wide support beginning with their first HSE classes in adult education program. Literature supports the study's findings that transition support, projected goals and aspirations with life and career planning, and financial support are

strong drivers is persistence and success in college for adult learners (CAEL, 2018; Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

Pathway to Postsecondary Education Support

Participants in this study benefitted from a variety of college-wide support systems and postsecondary socio-academic experiences in both transitioning to and persisting in college. These support systems acted as pathway to postsecondary education for recent HSE graduates. Due to complex and multiple deterrents to enrolling into and persisting in postsecondary education, nontraditional HSE graduates need additional support as they navigate the college experience (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a). Successful postsecondary education support includes clear information about financial aid and scholarships, counseling and advising in academic and career planning and goal setting, and transition programming with multifaceted services including academic supports, counseling, and mentoring (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

Specifically, students discussed the impact of the transition coordinator/advisor and the Adult Educational Development (AED) program and staff in preparing them and the actual transition to college. These findings are supported by recent literature which reports that participating in transition programming prior to entering postsecondary education and having a strong transition support network play a great role in both college enrollment and persistence by adult students (CAEL, 2018; Smith & Gluck, 2016).

Transition Coordinator/Advisor (TC)

Eight out of the nine students reported that the TC had a major impact on their successful transition to college. The TC provided important college information, guidance, career advising, and other personalized support to the participants before, during, and after the transition process. The support from the TC began when students were in HSE classes and he came to give presentations about a variety of college-related topics. Additionally, he would introduce and re-introduce himself throughout the semester and gave his contact information so that students could make appointments with him. Participants met one-on-one with the TC several times during the transition process, especially to learn about financial aid/scholarships, fill out financial aid forms, explore areas of interest and majors, choose instructors, register for classes, and receive guidance in and referrals to overcome barriers and identify solutions to personal problems.

Participants responded positively about having a single point of contact to assist them in transitioning into and persisting in college. A majority of the participants did not want to change advisors after they began college classes, and some went so far as to get all the information they needed from the TC so that they did not have to meet with a new advisor. They talked about how they trusted the TC, and this relationship was built over a period of time beginning when students were taking HSE classes. In some cases, the TC was instrumental in helping the participants decide on a major and career direction based on their interests, personality, and aptitude. The TC knew the participants' strengths and weaknesses well, and this relationship encouraged participants to persist in college as they developed confidence about their area of study choice. In essence, the TC's relationship with the participants

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empowered the students to become more independent and confident about their life and

career choices.

> [TC's name] had a major impact on my transition to college. He showed me everything I need to know. . . financial aid when I didn't even know what that meant, what classes that were best to take according to my comfort level and answering all questions that came to my mind during my journey. (Jade)

> I had an appointment with him like every two weeks [laughing] because if I had a question, I didn't want to try to answer it via email. . . it was a lot easier to meet with him and he could show me exactly what I needed to do. (Rylann)

> He helped me a lot with the transition. And he tried to figure out which major I can take so he helped me choose my major. (Mary)

> He helped me *a lot* that's for sure. He guided me through the classes like what classes to take. He was telling me I should be confident—it's about me and it not about him. And making me aware it's your life and I'm just here to guide. And he made me realize I didn't want to do computer programming—that's why I switched to graphic design. It's being real to myself. I'm not here to please other people first. I need to please myself and then other people will be pleased when I be real to myself. (Taylor)

> He had a big impact. He actually helped me because I did not know how to enroll in classes. I had no idea where to start. And he was always there. He pretty much was there for the me the whole time. He set everything up for me. He told me if there is anything else I need, if there is any questions I have, you know, about the transition from HSE into college class, that you know, he is always there. He was just very helpful. (Gio)

> He was actually really helpful on where I wanted to go. If I wanted to keep going here [Harper], or if I wanted to transfer somewhere else. (Mac)

> [TC's name] was definitely impactful. Actually, he is the one that suggested the major that I'd like to go for which is speech pathology. (Tess)

The strong relationship and single point of contact with the TC and the participants was

an instrumental factor in both the transition to and persistence in college, especially in ensuring

a smooth pathway and resource/support person for the participants as they navigated their

transition to college.

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AED Department Faculty, Staff, and Classroom Experiences

Participants discussed how their experiences in the AED program helped to prepare

them for the college transition. These experiences included academic skills building, technology

skill development (Blackboard), learning the structure of college, and developing a network of

support where they could ask questions and find support. Their experiences in the HSE classes

also helped them develop their self-confidence as a student. "I just think of this as like a safe

place—like everyone is really kind and supportive and wants you to succeed" (Tess). The

participants acknowledged the HSE instructors and motivational forces and encouragers for

transitioning to college.

> I really had with [the HSE classes] the experience of how does college work. I didn't
> understand at first. (Mary)

> The [HSE classes] helped a lot! Me catching up and not staying doubtful the whole time.
> Learning about the college classes. Making me aware about where I'm going. Telling me
> it's not going to be the same, that it's going to be harder, and you're going to have to
> put in that effort. They're not going to babysit you and spoon feed you all the time. That
> was really something that changes you. (Taylor)

> Everyone was just very supportive and helpful as much as possible as long as you
> reached out for it. . . . Without you guys, it would have been like a show meant for a
> sitcom. That would have been a sitcom watching me trying to figure out how to do my
> classes and everything. That would have been really bad show (laughing). (Rylann)

> They [HSE instructors] gave me knowledge I didn't have before that I need to have in
> order to have a good start in the [college] classes. They [HSE teachers] were all very
> helpful, and they told me what I needed to do and that I *can* do it. (Shea)

> Each of my HSE instructors or staff from the department had a great impact on my
> decision to take college classes. I knew it was essential for my future, but each instructor
> showed me that they believed in me, so it was the encouragement that I needed. (Jade)

While most of the participants expressed that their academic experiences in the HSE

classes prepared them for college, a criticism by a couple of the participants about the HSE

classes' preparation was the lack of rigor and similarity to the college classroom environment. This had a negative impact on their first college experiences because they had to adjust to a more rigorous and academic environment.

> The high school equivalency is I think it was like high school. It was kind of soft and lenient, you know, and taken softly. And college is like straight to it and hardcore. . .If you make it harder, when they transfer, it's be easier for them. . .it should be the same level. (Taylor)

> Give me more experiences. I feel like I was in a cage or like Kindergarten. It was sometimes challenging, and sometimes not. (Mary)

A majority of the participants maintained relationships with one or more of their HSE instructors after enrolling in college classes. Participants who maintained relationships sought out instructors for help in communicating with their new college advisors, information about scholarships including help writing scholarship applications, math support, and letters of recommendation for university transfer to name a few. Some participants would check in with their instructors about their progress in classes. Through their relationships with HSE faculty and staff, participants were given encouragement about navigating the transition to college as well as support network or safety net while taking their college classes. This support did not replace that of their college advisors or the TC; it provided additional avenues of support that nontraditional students needed to be successful (Osam et al., 2017). Additionally, effective relationships with AED faculty and staff helped the students form a sense of self-efficacy and a sense of mattering, both of which have been found to be instrumental in transitioning adult learners to college (Karmelita, 2017).

College Faculty

College faculty had both a positive and negative impact on the participants' persistence in college classes. Participants who reported a positive impact by faculty expressed an interest in the content area being taught and the engaging teaching practices of the faculty. Additionally, participants responded positively about experiences with faculty who were approachable/relatable, developed a connection, and made an effort to meet the students before and after class or in the tutoring center.

> I love my math teacher—I don't know because I love math! (Mary)

> Besides that, all my teachers have been really helpful when it comes to if I have any questions. . .they have this open door policy if you have any questions. . . .One of my teachers comes early and leaves late so if you have any questions. . . .Another teacher— she stays in the tutoring center, and I used to spend a lot of time over there so she could go over stuff. (Javier)

> I really liked Intro to Sociology and feel like—how should I say it—it was like a personal interest. I put more effort into the class and actually paid attention. . .Just the topics and the conversations with that professor would bring up. I was very engaged in that class . . .I met with my sociology professor a couple of times. He actually gave me his contact information. We would talk from time to time. Like if I needed guidance, or I needed help with something, I would contact him and have a little conversation. (Gio)

> They [college faculty] are pretty funny. They can relate a lot too, and they don't just give you assignments and just push you away. They are good teachers. (Shea)

Participants also reported a negative influence of their college instructors on their persistence in college. Some students talked about their college instructors being more impersonal and less supportive due to larger class sizes. Participants also discussed the importance of choosing faculty that match one's learning style.

> Well, I would say it depends on the teachers. Like my first semester, I was not fully aware of how to select teachers, so I did select a teacher that I was not feeling comfortable with in the way that I didn't understand how he was teaching. And that class was really for me, and I ended up dropping that class. (Javier)

` Not all but some of the instructors I had—it seems that they have so many students that they don't really care to know if the students pursue further than their own class. (Jade)

My instructors, it depends. Some of them are really encouraging, and you can tell they really want to help you learn. . . But I've also had instructors where it's like you ask a question in class, and they mock you for asking a question. . .they are much more strict, and honestly less pleasant depending on the teacher. Some of my teachers have been amazing, but other ones I wonder, "Why are you a teacher?" (Tess)

Several of the participants discussed that persistence in college was their own

responsibility, and not that of the faculty. In other words, they sought the help of faculty if

needed, but their success in college classes was due to their own motivation to achieve their

personal and career goals.

I think they do their part. It up to me basically. It's up to me if I want to go to classes. They show me they're there for me if I need the help. Yeah, extra credit classes if I miss out on a day. First of all, it's all about me. It's your life. . .if you want a career or something, you have to go to class every day, you know. (Taylor)

For me, I don't think [that the college faculty have an impact on persistence]. I am more my own drive that I want to do this, so I kind of get a little tunnel vision sometimes, but they do help, and I do ask for help, and nobody ever turns me away. (Mac)

You're in college. . .you're responsible for yourself. Nobody will help you anymore like a baby. (Mary)

In their studies on nontraditional student persistence, Bean and Metzner (1985) found

that nontraditional students often have fewer interactions with their college environment not

only extracurricular activities, but also with faculty (pp. 489-90). In terms of persistence, the

students discussed both the positive and negative impact of their college faculty on their

persistence. These findings are supported by research which states that nontraditional students

report better outcomes with college instructors who create feelings of belonging and support

and who deliver their content in an enjoyable and memorable manner (Capps, 2012). The

findings also support Schlossberg's transition theory which posits that adult students demand a positive support system during the *moving into* transition phase (Anderson et al., 2012). Without the proper support, orientation, and guidance, adult students can feel marginalized and insecure due to change and uncertainty. The findings demonstrated that it was important for the participants to feel appreciated, noticed, and acknowledged, especially in the moving-in phase of the transition (Anderson et al., 2012).

College Advisors

The participants reported both negative and positive reviews of the impact of advisors on their persistence in college. Two of the participants continued to use the advising services of the TC and did not want to be assigned a new advisor. One of these participants reported that she had developed a solid relationship with the TC and that trust had been built.

> So, my new advisor—they emailed me, but I haven't met them yet. I don't know if I will. Because I don't know, I trusted [TC's name], and I was a little nervous about him leaving and then getting thrown to someone else. So, I've already got the classes I'm going to sign up for next semester. (Tess)

One participant who was assigned a new advisor complained that her advisor did not support decision to attend full-time classes because she was pregnant (Rylann). She then switched to a new advisor who was more sensitive to her nontraditional student status. Participants who were assigned to a new advisor were contacted by email by their new advisor. At the time of the interviews, several of the participants had not yet met with their new advisor but had planned on scheduling an appointment once they finished midterms and prepared to register for the next semester's classes.

Two students reported that their new advisors had a very positive impact on their persistence in college. One student's new advisor was a One Million Degree (OMD) program advisor. The OMD program has a more intrusive and "high touch" advising model where advisors meet more regularly with students and are familiar with advising nontraditional students. Ideally, OMD advisors seemed to be the best advisors due to their skill in working with nontraditional students as well as their additional support and mentoring that they provide students.

> My current advisor definitely keeps me in check. We meet regularly, and we follow the path that I am on, what I need to improve, and if I'm having any trouble. My current advisor has had more of an impact (on persistence) that my current instructors for college. (Jade)

The sole participant who did not report a positive impact by the TC expressed that his current college advisors have been very helpful. He has had three advisors since he has been in college.

> I had a different counselor right at the beginning, and she literally went above and beyond to help me. . . . My first semester was her and other counselor, and the second one, she is no longer at Harper. She was also really helpful. She helped me know what I wanted to do—to pick out classes, and if I had any questions, she was there to help me . . . Well, I just met her [new advisor]. Yeah, she's pretty good. She seems to know what she's doing. She emails me often. If I have any questions, she's just an email away. (Javier)

Overall, participants reported a benefit from their college advisors in choosing classes/scheduling and learning more about majors and their requirements. Students who had more nontraditional student barriers such as pregnancy, anxiety, and/or juggling multiple responsibilities reported the most criticisms of their advisors.

The mixed reviews of advisors may be due to the students' recent transition to new advisors where a personal relationship had not been established yet. Students who had strong personal connections with their advisor and who met with their advisors frequently benefitted

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from the relationship for both academic and personal support. Students who had multiple

barriers had more difficulty finding advisors they felt they could trust and who could counsel

them with juggling multiple barriers. These findings are supported by research by Capps (2012)

who found that nontraditional students who felt advisors had a "dismissive" attitude were

more likely to leave college. Colleges that treat HSE graduates as adult learners and provide

advising *and* personal counseling to address the multiple roles and responsibilities adults face

have better transition and persistence outcomes (Zafft et al., 2006). Students who developed a

strong relationship with their advisor were more likely to persist (Capps, 2012). The availability

of a strong support person such as a navigator or advisor, or a combination of support, is a

necessary component for HSE credential holders to successfully transition to and persist

postsecondary education (Goodman & Kallenbach, 2018). Additionally, adult students with

multiple barriers need access and/or referrals to addition counseling services with counselors

who are experienced in working with nontraditional students.

Classroom Experiences/Social Integration

In terms of classroom experiences, participants expressed that the social integration

was much more difficult to adjust to than the academic rigor of college classes. A majority of

the participants discussed examples of feeling marginalized, older than other students, or

feeling out of place. One student felt verbally bullied by classmates.

> The most difficult part of going to school my first semester was not knowing anyone and
> being around completely different people. I knew that they were not from the same
> program as I was from [AED], so it felt like I was an outsider and the only one in that
> situation. So, it reminded me of how good it was to feel like other were in the same boat
> as I was. (Jade)

Well, when I was in the fashion program, it was the people cuz I didn't really fit in, and then nobody really cared. And they disrupted the class because they wanted to verbally bully me, and the teacher just laughed about it. So that was really difficult. (Rylann)

So, the first semester I started, pretty much all my classmates were like 18 or 19, and it just felt like I was a little too old for the class. (Javier)

The number one thing [about how college classes are different from HSE classes] is the age range of the people I'm in class with. I'm a bit older than everyone else. (Mac)

Although a majority of the participants used one or more of the academic support services on campus such as the tutoring center, writing center, or library, none of the participants were involved in any nonacademic programming at the college such as clubs or sports due to work and family commitments.

The students' classroom experiences and social integration findings confirm Bean and Metzner's (1985) theory that nontraditional students are not as influenced by the social environment as they are achieving their academic goals. At the same time, adult students need to feel included and a sense of belonging, especially in the initial transition phase into their new role as a college student (Anderson et al., 2012). Without the proper support and guidance during the initial transition phase, adults can feel marginalized due to the uncertainty of their new role (Anderson et al., 2012). These findings are reinforced by Bean and Metzner (1985) who argued that nontraditional students were more likely to persist if the institution helped them reach their academic goals.

Financial Support

One of the most important factors and influencers for participants to transition and persist in college was financial support. All of the participants relied on federal financial aid, student loans, and private scholarships to pay for college tuition, fees, and expenses. Several of

the students applied for and received scholarships including the HSE Distinguished Scholar

Award, One Million Degrees scholarship program, and other scholarships from the Harper

College Educational Foundation which helped pay for one or more classes, and in three cases,

the full 60-hour associate degree. One student used the Women's Program for additional

support. Although students worked to pay for their expenses and received financial help from

their families, without college financial support, students would not have transitioned to and

persisted in college.

> I've used financial aid to my advantage, but I've been lucky to have a scholarship that covers my tuition, and I've been lucky to receive a stipend from One Million Degrees. (Jade)

> Financial aid paid for it all. (Shea)

> Financial aid, faculty help, family, my boyfriend, and the Women's Program. (Rylann)

One participant discussed the challenge of paying for college when one does not qualify for

federal financial aid.

> So, I've used my credit cards to pay for classes. I did the [Harper] payment plan, but sometimes trying to make a payment plan and then having all the other expenses like I had to pay my car, my rent, and all my other bills, the class—the payment plan didn't work out sometimes, so I just use my credit card and pay off as I go. But now, I got a scholarship—that'd be $1200—they've divided into two. It's $600 for the fall semester, and $600 for the spring semester. (Javier)

> Literature suggests the availability of financial resources as one of the primary

constraints for adults returning to college (Osam et al., 2017). At the same time, adults with

HSE credentials received 25% less in financial aid than traditional high school graduates even

though three-quarters of HSE passers are financially independent and are 43.5% more likely to

have their income at or below the poverty level (Guison-Dowdy & Patterson, 2011a).

Participants reported that it was imperative for colleges to provide more information about financial aid, scholarships, student loans so that more HSE graduates transition to college.

Participants reported that Harper College could improve the transition of HSE graduates to college by providing more information about financial aid as well as more financial support for HSE graduates.

> I feel like more people should know about it [college]. I know the government helps, but a little extra help will be better. I would say not just for myself, but there are people out there who cannot afford at all paying for a class. Even though this is not a full-price university, it's still expensive, so I feel like more financial support would be better to go to college. (Javier)

Institutional Barriers

Institutional barriers are the policies and procedures within the college structure and culture that prevent adult students from participating in educational activities (Cross, 1981). Research has shown that colleges which reduce institutional barriers through effective program and transition design, institutional collaboration and partnerships, and comprehensive support systems have experienced an increase in adult learners' transition to and persistence in college (CAEL, 2018; Smith & Gluck, 2016). The participants reported a variety of barriers in their college transition and persistence. College structural and procedural barriers included:

1. Lack of communication and understanding about basic enrollment processes such as registering for classes, choosing instructors, understanding credit hours/GPA, and other basic college knowledge;

2. Frustrations with various departments at Harper including the One Stop and technology support in trying to resolve questions;

3. Lack of availability of classes and waiting lists for classes;

4. Lack of communication and understanding about financial aid, scholarships, and other financial support; and

5. Lack of access to counselors or advisors who understood nontraditional student barriers.

The participants also reported college culture barriers including:

1. Feeling marginalized, older, or like an outsider in college classes;

2. Lack of rigor and applicability of the Bridge to College and Career Success transition class and some of the HSE classroom experiences;

3. Lack of support and understanding of financial and personal challenges that adult learners face; and

4. Negative college classroom experiences/lack of engaged faculty.

These findings are reinforced by the literature which states that postsecondary socio-academic experiences are associated with student persistence, and that institutional actors/agents and support help nontraditional students integrate into and persist in college (Capps, 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011). One participant summed up the importance of institutional support in understanding the unique needs of HSE graduates transitioning to college.

> I think, from the outside, transition is very overlooked. I feel like a lot of people don't understand what it's like to even get a GED. They think it's just another day for these students, but each step is very important along with the transition. I think it's overlooked [the transition] just like getting a GED is. People think that getting a high school diploma is the best thing out there; whereas, I think getting a GED requires a lot more determination, time, and a lot of devotion. Just like transitioning to college is. And it's very scary coming from a program where a lot of students from different backgrounds are here but they are still in the same boat as you. Whereas you feel like you're kind of a big fish in a little pond and you go to college and you are a little fish in big pond. So, the transition to college is very difficult, even though you are ready, you are not mentally ready. (Jade)

SUMMARY

Chapter 5 analyzed data collected where several themes emerged about the factors that have a positive and negative impact on the participants' transition to and persistence in postsecondary classes. Factors outside the community college include educational and career

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goals/aspirations, overcoming past barriers, individual characteristics, family support, and work. Factors within the community college include a network of pathway to postsecondary support (TC and AED department faculty and staff), financial support, college faculty and advisors, and socio-academic integration. Additional institutional barriers were also explained to better understand the challenges that adult learners face in transitioning to and persisting in college.

HSE credential holders expressed a determination and pride in overcoming past barriers and current challenges to achieve personal, academic, and career goals and aspirations. At some point in their lives, participants made a realization that in order to change their lives or achieve their goals, they needed to return to school and pursue postsecondary education. One participant referred to this experience as an epiphany and another as "the best decision I have made in my life." Transitioning to college including the enrollment process, managing personal and institutional barriers, and persisting from one semester to the next were promoted by a variety of internal and external factors.

Having a clear educational and career pathway and goal was a strong factor in the participants' decision to transition to college. As participants achieved more clarity about their career path, the more confident they became. As the students' confidence and self-esteem grew, they became motivated and determined to achieve their goals in spite of external or internal barriers in their lives such as work schedule or negative institutional culture experiences. Family support was a theme throughout the study with students identifying strong family moral and financial support. Family was also a theme when discussing influencers on college persistence. Affirmations of pride and emotional support from family increased the students' self-efficacy to achieve their goals.

The most prevalent support system of support was the unique network of transition support provided by the AED department. The primary support was the singular point of contact of the TC who developed a relationship with the participants a semester or more before they transitioned to college classes. The TC provided information about college enrollment, scheduling instructors, financial aid, and a variety of other college knowledge topics. The TC also provided career and academic advising which was instrumental in for participants determine an area of study and therefore to have a career goal. The TC provided presentations in HSE classes and met with students in one-on-one in weekly sessions. The TC had effective counseling skills in working with adults with multiple barriers and developed trust with participants which helped to build their self-confidence and increase their persistence. Eight out of nine students articulated that without the support of the TC, they would have not succeeded in the transition process.

Although students articulated that the HSE classes were more of a refresher and often not as rigorous as college classes, they expressed that they practiced how to be a college student and improved their writing and math skills. They also relied on their HSE instructors for additional support and advice during the transition process to college, especially for scholarship information and math support. College faculty, advisors, and socio-academic experiences had some positive and negative impact on students' persistence in college. Since 90% of the students worked part time or more, they did not have as much time for academic support services such as faculty office hours, the tutoring center, and the library. None of the students participated in extracurricular activities due to lack of time and a clear focus on their educational and career goal.

Financial support, including federal financial aid and Harper Foundation scholarships, was a very important factor in students' transition to and persistence in college. Unfortunately, because the students work, the majority take only part-time classes which increases the time it takes to complete their degree. Students who worked more than full time had the most negative impact of work on their persistence. One of these participants stopped out the past semester due to working more than 48 hours per week. Students who worked as student aides and/or who worked in a job that was related to their career goal reported the greatest benefit of working on their persistence in college.

Participants articulated situational and institutional barriers as challenges to their transition to and persistence in college. Situational barriers were mitigated by having a clear academic and career goal, personal motivation and drive, and family support. Institutional barriers included a lack of communication and understanding of college enrollment process and "college knowledge" information. Participants also expressed a feeling of marginalization and lack of understanding of adult learner challenges and multiple roles and responsibilities. Many participants expressed difficulty in navigating the college system, finding resources, and connecting with the faculty and staff who could support them. Institutional barriers were mitigated by students' reaching out to their college advising and other support networks such as staff in the AED department. Finally, students who had higher self-efficacy skills took initiative to ask questions and find help.

CHAPTER 6: DISCUSSION, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PRACTICE

The purpose of this research was to examine the experiences of HSE graduates who have transitioned to community college postsecondary coursework and explore which factors contributed to their enrollment into and persistence in postsecondary education. Several themes emerged from the research. The factors which contributed to the students' decision to enroll in college were similar to the reasons they also persisted in college.

Key factors external to the college which influenced the participants' transition to and persistence in postsecondary education included personal and career goals and aspirations, overcoming past barriers, individual characteristics, and family support. Key barriers or deterrents to persisting in college included working and juggling multiple adult responsibilities.

The primary factor internal to the college which impacted the participants' enrollment in and persistence in college was a network of pathway to postsecondary education support services. This support included a single point person or TC who developed a relationship with students and provided support and information before they transitioned to college. Other factors contributing to transition and persistence were the AED department faculty and staff, academic preparation and college readiness in the HSE classes, college faculty and advisors, positive college classroom experiences, and financial support.

Key institutional barriers to persistence included a lack of information and communication about the process and procedures of enrolling in college, lack of rigor and college-readiness skills in HSE classes, lack of financial aid and scholarship information, lack of positive college classroom experiences, and feelings of marginalization/lack of understanding of the multiple roles and responsibilities adult students face. These factors are demonstrated in Figure 4.

External Factors   **Internal Factors**

Individual Characteristics
motviation, confidence, self-efficacy

Pathway to PSE Support
Transition Point Person
Academic Planning, College Navigation, Managing Barriers
College Readiness in AED

Overcoming Past Situational Barriers

Family Support

College Faculty and Advisors
Positive socio-academic integration; ongoing career planning

College Transition and Persistence

Educational and Career Goals/Aspirations

Financial Support
Financial Aid, Scholarships; Crisis Support

Barriers:
Work
College culture/lack of support
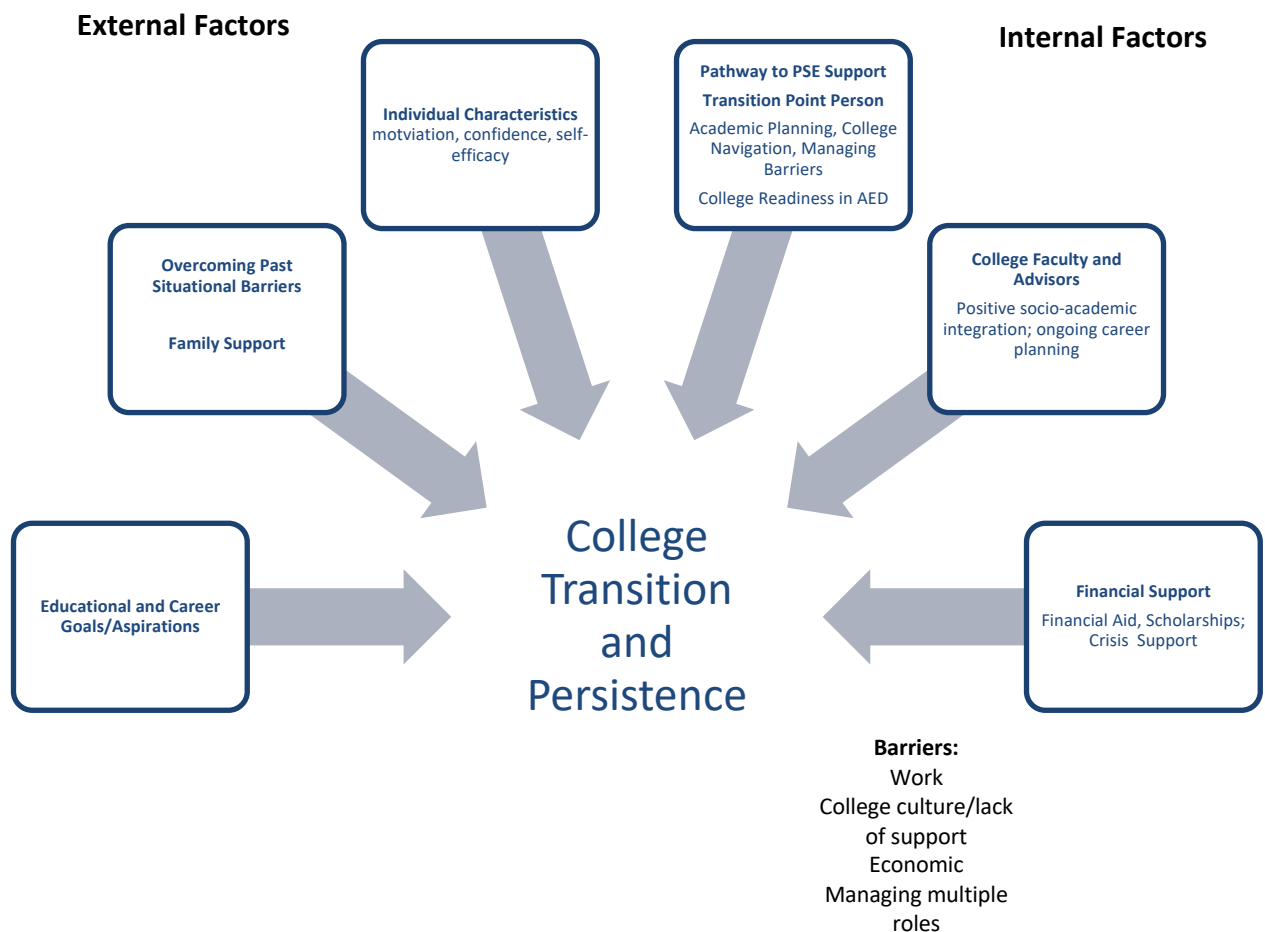Economic
Managing multiple roles

Figure 4. College Transition and Persistence Factors and Barriers.

Based on the results of the study, there are several implications for consideration by community college administrators which merit consideration in transitioning and supporting the persistence of adult learners as they transition from adult education programming to college classes.

Critical Importance of Community College Postsecondary Education for HSE Graduates

The vast majority of students enrolled in HSE programs pursue their HSE credential in order to attend college classes at the community college. Furthermore, an HSE and a higher education is no longer a luxury, but a necessity for economic opportunity for adult students. It is the responsibility for community colleges to partner more closely with their adult education providers to help bridge this population of students into their colleges. Community college leaders should recognize the reality that HSE graduates are a sizeable population on their campus and in their community, and that currently only about one-third of this population is transitioning to college even though their ultimate goal is to pursue a postsecondary credential. It is recommended that community colleges embrace the responsibility of serving this population and make an explicit commitment to serve and support the HSE student population as part of the institution mission and strategic planning goals.

Provision of Comprehensive Pathway to Postsecondary Education/Transition Support

As detailed in the results of this study, HSE graduates need specialized support in both the transition process to college and in continued persistence in college. Community colleges administrators should consider developing a comprehensive adult transition program design where the adult education program partners closely with advising/counseling, registration,

financial aid, academic support services, and other key departments that may support

transition. A comprehensive HSE to college transition program should include the following

elements:

- Funding a full-time transition advisor, college navigator, or coach who works closely with students prior to college enrollment to provide initial college transition support and career planning;

- Developing a transition course that is integrated with a college course (co-enrollment) in a learning community format to foster a support and guidance for the first transition to college;

- Creating mentoring program of former students to provide guidance to recently transitioned HSE students to college;

- Helping students develop an academic and career plan starting in HSE classes with more intensive career and academic planning during the transition process; creating opportunities to learn about areas of interest, career exploration, and majors;

- Providing extra support by counselors skilled in working with nontraditional, adult students; helping students stabilize their lives and manage multiple barriers, roles, and responsibilities;

- Helping students in their HSE classes see the growth in their academic skills and the connection to college to increase self-efficacy and confidence;

- Creating more rigorous academic experiences in HSE and transition classes; teaching students about grades, credit hours, and other college knowledge; and

- Providing information about financial aid and scholarships; assisting students with learning how to fill out financial aid and scholarship applications.

Role of Academic and Career Planning

Since the primary goal for HSE graduates is to attend college, community college

administrators should ensure that their adult education/HSE students have adequate access to

academic and career planning support and services prior to college enrollment. Addressing

adult learners' life and career goals before transitioning to college will help assess the students'

capacities and obstacles in helping students successfully transition and persist towards their goals.

Financial Support

A major factor in the adult students transitioning to college is financial support. All the students relied on federal financial aid, student loans, and scholarships. By increasing financial support for students, students can work part time or less. Students who worked part time or less were more likely to persist in college than students working full time. Colleges should consider more scholarship opportunities for students, especially more scholarships like One Million Degrees which provide additional advising and counseling support. College administrators should also consider implementing a Promise Program (free college tuition) for adult students currently being piloted and/or implemented in Indiana, Maine, Minnesota, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington (Black, 2018). Financial support is a critical element in increasing college enrollment and graduation. Adult Promise Programs should also include the HSE graduate population even though many are under the age of 24 since they have multiple adult roles and financial responsibilities.

Creation of a College Culture that Support Adults Transitioning to College

Adult education programs, although often housed within the community college, have not been recognized as a valuable resource and pipeline for new student enrollment for community colleges. Community colleges should consider collecting and analyzing their adult education program demographic and transition data and studying the inequities in student outcomes. These data should be used in student success and strategic plans in to increase the

focus on nontraditional students to improve their pathway to and success in college. College

leaders should create a culture that supports the unique needs of HSE graduates and includes

the adult education student population in college planning processes and procedures. Adult

education programs should be more closely aligned and integrated with advising and

counseling departments in order to ensure HSE graduates have a supported pathway into

postsecondary education.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

Review of the literature confirms while the majority of HSE credential holders indicate

they wish to transition to postsecondary education, approximately only one-third actually

enroll in postsecondary education and only 12% actually earn a degree or certificate within six

years (Zhang et. al., 2011). This research affirmed HSE graduates desired to obtain their HSE

credential in order to further their education and begin studying for a career. The research also

confirmed that successful transition to college included a variety of external and institutional

factors and support services.

Future research that should be undertaken by the subject institution includes projects

that may increase the transition and persistence rates of adult education students within the

college. A variety of program design and procedural changes should be explored to support the

transition of HSE graduates into college. This includes developing a comprehensive transition

program and pathway to postsecondary education support network. A pilot research project

could be conducted and followed longitudinally to evaluation transition rates.

Since this study only focused on students who successfully transitioned to college

classes, another implication for further research includes studying the large majority of HSE

graduates who obtained their HSE credential and did not transition to college. It would be helpful to learn what the main factors were for students who decided not to transition to college and/or to learn more about those who began college and dropped out. A focus group could be designed to interview students who left the institution and explore internal and external factors which may have contributed to their nonparticipation in higher education.

Another suggestion for future research involves foreign-born and nonnative English speakers who use an HSE credential as a stepping stone to college. Since the majority of students in the adult education program at the subject institution are foreign-born and nonnative speakers of English, this population should be assessed for English language and other barriers such as financial and academic preparation. This information may help increase support services, and it could result in curricular and program design changes to help transition more nonnative English speakers into higher education.

One final recommendation for future research addresses program design and financial support. Some colleges, including the subject institution, are beginning to explore giving students the opportunity to register for a college class while participating in their HSE program (co-enrollment). For example, Integrated Education and Training (IET) programs allow students to take career program classes such as certified nursing assistant (CNA) or supply chain management while still enrolled in HSE classes. However, the vast majority of students wait to begin college classes until they have earned their HSE certificate. Colleges often lose these students before they finish their HSE certificate or right after they achieve their HSE credential. For example, in 2017-2018, approximately 70% of Harper College's HSE graduates did not enroll in college classes after completing their GED credential (Coy, 2018).

Furthermore, the majority of students in this study planned on earning an associate degree or higher, and they planned on transferring to a four-year university. The majority of the participants in this study were not interested in short-term career programs. Recent research has shown that students who enroll in targeted, cohort-style college classes such as college-level psychology or math while taking HSE classes are more likely to achieve their HSE credential as well as persist in postsecondary education. This research should include the impact of financial support on students' persistence in college as well since the lack of knowledge of financial resources and lack of financial aid was one of the biggest factors in the participants' decision to persist in college. A pilot research project could be conducted and followed longitudinally to evaluate transition rates.

SUMMARY

The population of adults returning to school to earn their HSE credential and transition to postsecondary education will continue to grow as higher education becomes increasingly necessary for a better quality of life and economic prosperity. This study gave voice to an often invisible population on college campuses in order to help inform college administrators, adult education faculty and staff, and other decision makers about the factors that support or deter HSE graduates in their transition to and persistence in college. Furthermore, this study suggested programs, processes, and procedural changes to help support the success of adult students in their goal to complete a postsecondary education and improve the quality of life for themselves and their families.

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APPENDIX A: IRB APPROVAL LETTER

FERRIS STATE UNIVERSITY

Date: July 23, 2018

To: Sandra Balkema

From: Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair

Re: IRB Application *IRBFY1718181 Experiences of High School Equivalency Graduates' Transition to and Persistence in Community College*

The Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your application for using human subjects in the study, " *Experiences of High School Equivalency Graduates' Transition to and Persistence in Community College" (IRB FY1718181)* and Approved this project under Federal Regulations Expedited Review 6. Collection of data from voice, video, digital, or image recordings made for research purposes.

Approval has an expiration date of one year from the date of this letter . **As such, you may collect data according to the procedures outlined in your application until July 23, 2019 .** Should additional time be needed to conduct your approved study, a request for extension must be submitted to the IRB a month prior to its expiration.

Your protocol has been assigned project number IRBFY1718181. Approval mandates that you follow all University policy and procedures, in addition to applicable governmental regulations. Approval applies only to the activities described in the protocol submission; should revisions need to be made, all materials must be reviewed and approved by the IRB prior to initiation. In addition, the IRB must be made aware of any serious and unexpected and/or unanticipated adverse events as well as complaints and non-compliance issues.

Understand that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and participant rights with assurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document and investigators maintain consent records for a minimum of three years.

As mandated by Title 45 Code of Federal Regulations, Part 46 (45 CFR 46) the IRB requires submission of annual reviews during the life of the research project and a Final Report Form upon study completion. Thank you for your compliance with these guidelines and best wishes for a successful research endeavor. Please let us know if the IRB can be of any future assistance.

Regards,

Gregory Wellman, R.Ph, Ph.D, IRB Chair
Ferris State University Institutional Review Board Office of Research and Sponsored Programs

APPENDIX B: CONSENT FORM

Dear _____,

I am a student in the Doctorate in Community College Leadership program at Ferris State University and am working on a dissertation project designed to explore the experiences of high school equivalency (HSE) graduates' transition to and persistence in postsecondary coursework at Harper College.
To inform this project I am conducting interviews with HSE (formerly known as GED) graduates. I am contacting you to see if you would be willing to answer a series of questions about your experience transitioning to college classes and what factors have helped you to enroll and continue in college classes towards your degree or certificate.

Your participation in this study is voluntary which is explained along with other details in the informed consent form. When interviews are completed, I will use pseudonyms for participants and their institutions to protect the confidentiality of all participants.

If you have any questions please give me a call at 630-670-6421 or 847-925-6418, or you can send an email to jbell@harpercollege.edu.
I hope to hear from you soon, and thanks in advance for your help!

Jennifer E. Bell
Professor, Adult Educational Development at Harper College

INFORMED CONSENT FORM

Project Title: Experiences of High School Equivalency Graduates' Transition to and Persistence in Community College

Researcher: Jennifer E. Bell
        Email: bellj32@ferris.edu   Phone: 847-925-6418 or 630-670-6421

Faculty Advisor / Principal Investigator: Sandra Balkema
        Email: SandraBalkema@ferris.edu   Phone: 231-591-5631

STUDY PURPOSE

You are invited to participate in a research study about the experiences of HSE/GED graduates' transition to and persistence in college classes. The researchers are interested in gaining insight from students regarding factors that contributed to their enrollment in college after passing the HSE test, and what factors contribute or hinder the persistence of HSE graduates in college classes.

PARTICIPATION

Taking part in this study is completely voluntary.
You are eligible to participate in this study because you are an HSE/GED graduate, completed Adult Educational Development classes, and enrolled in college classes. If you agree to be part of this study, you will be asked a series of questions related to your experiences as an HSE graduate in college classes.

POTENTIAL RISKS/DISCOMFORTS

There are no known risks associated with this study.

ANTICIPATED BENEFITS

This research is designed to examine the experiences of HSE graduates to help community colleges provide better support to HSE graduates as they transition to and persist in college classes towards a college degree.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Signing this form is required in order for you to take part in the study and gives the researchers your permission to obtain, use and share information about you for this study. The results of this study could be published in an article but would not include any information that would identify you. There are some

reasons why people other than the researchers may need to see the information you provided as part of the study. This includes organizations responsible for making sure the research is conducted safely and properly, including Ferris State University.

The researcher will be audio recording the interview with you; however, only the researcher and, potentially, a hired transcriptionist, will have access to the audio recordings. Once they have been transcribed, the recordings will be destroyed. Your initials here _____ indicate your acceptance of this process.

In order to keep your information safe, the researchers will protect your anonymity and maintain your confidentiality. The data you provide will be stored in a locked file. The researchers will retain the data for 3 years after which time the researchers will dispose of your data by standard state of the art methods for secure disposal. The data will not be made available to other researchers for other studies following the completion of this research study.

CONTACT INFORMATION

The main researcher conducting this study is Jennifer E. Bell, a doctoral student at Ferris State University. If you have any questions you may email her at bellj32@ferris.edu or call 847-925-6418 or 630-670-6421. You may also contact her faculty advisor/principal investigator, Dr Sandra Balkema (sandrabalkema@ferris.edu) if you have questions about the study.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a subject in this study, please contact: Ferris State University Institutional Review Board (IRB) for Human Participants, 1010 Campus Drive, FLITE 410D, Big Rapids, MI 49307, (231) 591-2553, IRB@ferris.edu.

SIGNATURES

Research Subject: I understand the information printed on this form. I understand that if I have more questions or concerns about the study or my participation as a research subject, I may contact the people listed above in the "Contact Information" section. I understand that I may make a copy of this form. I understand that if my ability to consent for myself changes, either I or my legal representative may be asked to re-consent prior to my continued participation.

Signature of Subject: _____ Date of Signature:_____

Printed Name: _____

Contact Information: email - _____ phone - _____

Principal Investigator: I have given this research subject information about this study that I believe is accurate and complete. The subject has indicated that he or she understands the nature of the study and the risks and benefits of participating.

Printed Name:_____Title:_____

Signature:_____ Date of Signature:_____

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Date:_____   Pseudonym: _____

  Introduction
          Personal introduction
          Purpose of the study
          Provide informed consent form
          Explain interview structure and thanks for participating

Academic

1. Why did you leave high school and come to Harper College to pursue your HSE credential?
2. How long had you been away from education before you came to take your HSE?
3. How or why did you decide to attend college classes after completing your HSE?
4. How does your current experience as a college student differ from when you were enrolled as an HSE student?
5. How did your experiences while taking HSE classes prepare you for college?
6. During your first semester of college classes, what was the most difficult part of going to school?

Institutional

7. Describe the impact that the advising specialist or transition coordinator had on your transition to college.
8. Explain the impact your HSE instructors or staff had on your decision to take college classes.
9. Describe the impact your current advisors or instructors had on your persistence in college classes?
10. How do you feel Harper College could improve the experiences for HSE students to attend and persist in college?
11. How important is non-academic involvement such as student organizations, clubs, or sports in helping you persist in college?
12. How important is academic support (such as tutoring center, writing center, faculty interaction) to your overall educational experience?

Social

13. Can you share with me your experiences and challenges with learning how to use campus resources, understanding expectations of the instructors, learning how to balance home and school, or other challenge?
14. In what way has your college experience changed your life on a personal level? How has your college experience changed the way you feel about yourself?
15. How has going to college affected your social and family life?

Economic

16. Do you work while going to college? How many hours do you work each week? Has working affected your ability to keep up with college work?
17. What services or resources did you use to pay for college classes, books, and fees? Describe any financial challenges you have that make it hard to stay in college.
18. How has your experience transitioning to college changed your position, relationships, or responsibilities at work?

Closing

19. What or who do you feel has guided you the most to stay in college and complete your college degree or certificate?
20. What would have made your college transition experience better?
21. What advice would you give to a recent HSE grad who wants to attend college?
22. What is your long term educational and career goal (bachelor's, master's, etc)
23. Is there anything you would like to add that I did not cover?

APPENDIX D: STUDENT DEMOGRAPHIC SURVEY FORM

STUDENT INFORMATION FORM

Contact Information

1. Name:

2. Address:

3. Phone Number(s):

4. Email Address:

5. What is the best way to contact you? ☐ Email ☐ Phone ☐ Mail

6. What are the best days for you to meet for an interview? *Check all that apply*.

   ☐ Monday ☐ Tuesday ☐ Wednesday ☐ Thursday ☐ Friday ☐ Saturday ☐ Sunday

Education Information

7. What year did you leave high school:	☐ Freshman ☐ Junior ☐ Sophomore ☐ Senior
8. When did you start HSE classes at Harper? *Example: December 15, 2017*	
9. When did you pass your HSE (GED) test? *Example: December 15, 2017*	
10. When did you enroll in college classes at Harper? *Example: December 15, 2017*	
11. What Area of Interest/Major did you select?	
12. Do you attend full-time or part time?	☐ Full-time ☐ Part time
13. What are your education goals? *Check all that apply.*	☐ Several college classes ☐ A career certificate ☐ Associate's Degree ☐ Bachelor's Degree ☐ Master's Degree ☐ Doctorate
14. What do you plan to do after attending Harper College?	☐ Pursue another certificate in my field ☐ Transfer to a university ☐ Start working
15. What is your career goal in the future?	

Additional Information

16. Marital Status	☐ Single ☐ Married ☐ Domestic Partnership ☐ Prefer not to answer
17. Do you have children? If yes, how many and ages?	
18. Are you currently employed?	☐ Yes ☐ No
19. What is your current job title?	
20. If you are working, how many hours do you typically work each week?	