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## Exploring the Outcomes and Perceptions of Traditional and Post-baccalaureate ASLS Students

Kashia D. Bayard

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**Abstract:** An increase in the number of post-baccalaureate students returning to college for additional education provides a need to better understand this growing population. Studies on program outcomes for traditional and post-baccalaureate students have focused primarily in the medical and nursing fields. These studies lack detailed insight into the student's experiences and perceptions. Within the Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences fields there is also limited research on traditional and post-baccalaureate student outcomes and experiences. This mixed methods study examined the outcomes and explored the experiences and perceptions of traditional and post-baccalaureate students in the Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences program at the University of Northern Colorado. During the first stage, student outcomes were examined from a previously administered exit survey to determine differences between traditional and post-baccalaureate students. During stage two, participants from each student group were interviewed to develop a greater understanding of each student's experiences and perceptions. Research suggests that traditional and post-baccalaureate students have different qualities such as learning preferences. Findings indicated common trends in the perception of competition among students and overall experiences that each student encounters as a traditional or post-baccalaureate student. The results may be significant in determining unique advising and building awareness of unique group needs. This may lead to increased understanding of each academic path and the advising that is given to each student.

**Keywords:** *Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences, student perceptions*

The interest in the field of Audiology and Speech Language-Sciences (ASLS) has tremendously increased (ASHA, 2012). With this graduate degree an individual can proceed into a career of audiology or speech language pathology. Speech language pathologists (SLP) evaluate and diagnose speech, language, cognitive communication, and swallowing disorders in a variety of settings such as schools, hospitals, universities, rehabilitation centers, private practices, research laboratories, and home health care (ASHA, 2012)

Settings in which an SLP can work as well as the demand for these services are consistently increasing (ASHA, 2012). The field of speech language pathology is expected to increase faster than average in 2014. The increase is due to the baby boom generation now entering retirement age, the survival rate of premature infants, and federal laws that guarantee special education and related services to all individuals that are eligible for services (ASHA, 2012). The importance of early identification of speech disorders in children is now increasing which will also result in an

increase in the field of speech language pathology (ASHA, 2012).

ASHA (2012) states that there are currently over 126,219 certified speech language pathologists. In addition, employment will increase when those currently in the field need to be replaced (ASHA, 2012). The projected growth rate for employment is anticipated to increase by 23% from 2010 to 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics).

ASHA (2012) reports speech language pathologists are required to obtain a masters degree, complete clinical experiences, and pass a national exam in order to obtain a certificate of clinical competence. Furthermore, the individual must attend a graduate school that has met the standards of the Council on Academic Accreditation (CAA) in speech-language pathology. State licensure standards that must also be met, and these requirements may vary depending on the state. Admission into graduate school is competitive in the field of Speech-Language Sciences. Generally, a minimum grade point average of 3.0 is expected as well as

Graduate Record Exam (GRE) scores and letters of recommendation. Many programs accept students that have not obtained a degree in communication sciences and disorders (CSD). These students may take prerequisite classes prior to admission or after beginning the program, depending on the graduate program. Acceptance into a graduate program is not guaranteed with the completion of an undergraduate degree and many programs deny qualified students on the basis of lack of capacity (ASHA, 2012). In 2011 admissions data from the University of Northern Colorado indicated that 25.24% were admitted to the SLP graduate program. In 2012 the number of students accepted decreased to 16.25% (University of Northern Colorado, 2012). This demonstrates the competitive quality of acceptance into graduate programs in the field of speech-language pathology.

As a traditional student in the ASLS undergraduate program at the University of Northern Colorado this researcher noticed a divide between traditional and post-baccalaureate students competing for a bachelor's degree in ASLS and as applicants for graduate school in audiology or speech language pathology programs. A traditional student is most commonly known as an individual who progressed from attending high school to attending a university undergraduate program in a traditional fashion and is most commonly less than 24 years of age (Bye et al., 2007; Jinkens, 2009). A post-baccalaureate student has already earned a bachelor's degree and generally is on an accelerated track due to his/her existing degree. This type of student may take classes to obtain another degree or to prepare to apply for graduate school (University of Colorado Boulder, 2012; University of Washington, 2005). Returning as a post-baccalaureate student can allow students to become more competitive candidates for graduate school (University of Colorado Boulder, 2012).

Currently, there is little information on existing programs where students have the opportunity to enroll in a traditional or post-baccalaureate program. Existing data on accelerated programs has focused on students

enrolled in medical and nursing programs, but the speech language pathology field and the students who belong to this discipline have not been explored in great detail (Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007).

To gain a better understanding of the dynamics between these student populations and their experiences in the Audiology Speech-Language Sciences program at the University of Northern Colorado, the outcomes, experiences, and perceptions of traditional and post-baccalaureate students were explored. These findings are essential for the growing population of post-baccalaureate students in the ASLS program at UNC to assure that the needs of all students are being met in terms of advising and programming specific to each type of student. The research has provided a unique perspective from each student about the outcomes they obtained and the experience that they had in the ASLS program. These data may also aid in determining advising for future traditional and post-baccalaureate students. It is also important to understand these differences in student outcomes and experiences in order to appreciate and better understand each academic path.

The research aims of this study were to distinguish the characteristics of traditional and post-baccalaureate students in the ASLS program. What types of outcomes does each group generally obtain? How do student perceptions and experiences compare?

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### Characteristics of Student Groups

#### *Maturity*

Borges, Richard, & Duffy (2007) note that studies have shown that traditional students have greater career maturity than students that have taken an accelerated program. This increase in career maturity may be due to their extended time in the program. An individual who exhibits career maturity has developed the process to make thorough career decisions (Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007). Suliman (2006) compared critical thinking and learning style of nursing students in

traditional and accelerated tracks. The traditional students started the program straight out of high school where as the accelerated track took part in a two year program and were given course credits from their previously completed college work. These accelerated track students had attained degrees in physics, chemistry, mathematics, or biology (Suliman, 2006.) In contrast to the previous study, this study indicated that cognitive maturity of students differed between traditional students and accelerated track students (Suliman, 2006). Findings showed that the students on the accelerated track had great self-confidence and cognitive maturity (Suliman, 2006). This may be due to their prior experience and ability to be independent learners because of entering the program at an older age and academic experience that they have acquired over time. It has also been noted that post-baccalaureate students may have more life experiences, maturity, and dedication than that of a traditional student (Bye et al., 2007; University of Colorado Boulder, 2012).

#### *Learning Methods*

Cangelosi & Whitt (2005) note that post-baccalaureate students or accelerated track students in the nursing field are known to be motivated learners who tend to challenge traditional thinking and have greater expectations than that of the traditional student. Suliman (2006) found that traditional track students were divergers, meaning that these types of students tend to learn by thinking and observation, whereas accelerated track students were convergers and displayed greater critical thinking as well as a tendency to learn by thinking and doing. The difference in critical thinking abilities was attributed to demographic characteristics such as the older age of those students in the accelerated track. This study noted that while some characteristics differed their learning styles were similar (Suliman, 2006). Walker et al. (2007) compared traditional and post-baccalaureate students and found that post-baccalaureate students had significant difference in their preference of methods used to teach them. The post-baccalaureate students rated themselves significantly higher in self-directedness and

motivation to learn and study than their traditional counter parts. This finding was supported across the ages of the post-baccalaureate students. Post-baccalaureate students were also found to have higher expectations for classroom structure and guidance from faculty (Walker et al., 2007). Jinkens (2009) suggests that traditional and nontraditional students tend to have different learning methods, but age may not be appropriate in defining student types. Jinkens (2009) indicates that the classification of student may be determined by factors such as how the individual perceives education, life-changing events, and mind set rather than the chronological age.

#### *Motivation*

Miklancie & Davis (2005) also noted that post-baccalaureate students tend to have more life experiences and take more initiative than traditional students. They have also been known to view education more critically (Miklancie & Davis, 2005). Miklancie and Davis explored intrinsic and extrinsic motivation and found that nontraditional students report greater intrinsic motivation and traditional students report greater extrinsic motivation. This study found that nontraditional students had greater motivation overall (Miklancie & Davis, 2005). Cangelosi & Whitt (2005) note that accelerated students are similar to adult learners in many ways including their ability to make use of their prior knowledge and experiences. These students are also motivated by the need to achieve and become more competent.

#### **A Need For Further Study**

Suliman (2006) suggests that there is a lack of information on the student experience and their perceptions of accelerated programs. It is indicated that more study is needed on the topic of accelerated paths and unique programming may be needed for students on fast tracks (Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007). Cangelosi and Whitt (2005) noted that there was animosity between traditional and accelerated track students. Miklancie and Davis (2005) observed that there is not sufficient time for differing student types to become acquainted with one another when one

group is in accelerated programs. Some programs and events have been put in place to facilitate relationships between traditional and post-baccalaureate students and improve the quality of the program (Miklancie & Davis, 2005).

The present study focuses on a similar population of traditional student that may contain slight age differences but are all completing their undergraduate work for the first time and post-baccalaureate students that have already earned a previous degree. It may be assumed the students in this study have different experiences as students because they belong to different student groups.

What are the characteristics of traditional and post-baccalaureate students in the ASLS program? What types of outcomes does each group generally obtain? How do student perceptions and experiences compare?

## METHODS

### Setting

A mid-sized university in the west has both a traditional program and a post-baccalaureate program in the Audiology and Speech-Language Sciences. The traditional program generally consists of 120 university credit hours, with approximately 40 credits for the major. The post-baccalaureate program is the undergraduate preparation necessary before entering the master's degree program. This program generally includes 27-30 credit hours.

### Recruitment

The first stage of the study included data that were obtained during previous semesters as part of a routine with the program for measuring student outcomes. These data have no information that could be linked back to the participants in the survey. This information was used for examining outcomes achieved by traditional and post-baccalaureate students. Participants for the second stage of the study were recruited via announcements made during graduate classes. The researcher briefly described the study that would take place and the interviews that were

needed. Participants were then contacted through email and arranged interview meetings in the ASLS clinic per their convenience.

### Participants

Traditional and post-baccalaureate students completed the questionnaire examined in the first stage of this study at the ending phase of their ASLS degree or completion of pre-requisites. A total of 36 students completed the questionnaire. Participants from the second stage of the study were first and second year speech-language pathology graduate students at the University. In total there were six participants; two were traditional students and four were post-baccalaureate students. Because all participants who took part in the second stage of the research were currently enrolled in the UNC speech-language pathology graduate program, it can be assumed that these students have obtained successful outcomes during their undergraduate career. All of the graduate students who took part in the study signed consent forms, which can be seen in appendix A.

### Data Collection and Analysis: Stage 1

The first stage of this study began with the review of a quantitative questionnaire that measured the outcomes that traditional and post-baccalaureate students obtained in their undergraduate or post-baccalaureate career. These data were collected from the Audiology Speech-Language Sciences program annual outcome measurement protocol questionnaire. This questionnaire was conducted by an ASLS faculty member and was collected in the spring of 2011. The data attained from this survey does not have any identifiers associated with it. These data were used to compare the outcomes that traditional and post-baccalaureate students within the Audiology and Speech Language Sciences generally obtained throughout their undergraduate traditional or post-baccalaureate career. The following items were examined: program status, number of applications to graduate school, intended field of study in graduate study, number of graduate school acceptances, alternate status offers, overall GPA and GPA in the major, and GRE scores. See

appendix B to view the questionnaire. Initial analysis of the outcomes included calculating ranges and/or averages for all chosen items of the questionnaire. These results were essential in providing insight into the outcomes that traditional and post-baccalaureate students generally obtain.

### **Data Collection and Analysis: Stage 2**

The second stage of this study was qualitative in nature and allowed the researcher to further examine the outcomes and perceptions of each student participant. All of the participants in this study chose pseudonyms to protect their identity throughout the research study. The semi-structured interviews were audio recorded by the researcher and were conducted on an individual basis in a quiet location of convenience to the interviewee. The interviews placed emphasis on the experiences and perceptions of students from both traditional and post-baccalaureate groups. The researcher began by inquiring about their general experience in the program and then continued with more detailed questions regarding their satisfaction with the program and their perceptions on the competition in the program. See appendix C to view interview questions. Given this is a qualitative study, transcript review and interpretation was completed. Audiotaped interview responses were transcribed and the responses were reviewed with theme analyses. A qualified reviewer was used to confirm themes that were found. Participants were contacted to proceed with a fact check that allowed the participants to review the transcripts and comment on any inaccuracies. The results from the interview have provided a unique perspective of the experiences of both traditional and post-baccalaureate students.

## **FINDINGS**

The findings section is organized according to curriculum, outcomes that were obtained in the undergraduate exit survey, and experiences and perceptions that were explored by interview.

### **Curriculum of Traditional and Post-baccalaureate Students in the ASLS Program**

Table 1 demonstrates the curriculum of traditional and post-baccalaureate students in the Audiology Speech-Language Sciences program. Classes that are featured in bold lettering are classes that are shared by both student groups.

As seen in Table 1, the curriculum shows the institutional perspective in terms of the requirements that each student takes and how the paths compare. After reviewing the curriculum for both types of students it is evident that there is no substantial difference in the curriculum of both students. The post-baccalaureate path is a compact version of the traditional path. Both curriculums are designed to prepare students for graduate level work.

### **Stage 1 Findings**

The following tables demonstrate the findings from Stage 1, which includes data obtained from ASLS undergraduate exit survey. These data have shown that both student groups are similar in their reported outcomes that they received in the ASLS program. The sample size of this survey was 36 students. Of the 36 students who were given the questionnaire 32 responded. Some of the students who completed this survey chose to omit some responses.

The findings from this stage of the research also reflect those missing responses. The survey originally identified leveling students and post-baccalaureate students as a separate group; however, for the purposes of this study, those student groups were combined because all of the students have previous degrees. A leveling student is an individual who has obtained a degree in another discipline and must complete core undergraduate coursework in communication disorders to begin a master's degree program in audiology or speech language pathology, but has not completed the ASLS undergraduate degree. The questionnaire

reflected a program status of 20 traditional students and 12 post-baccalaureate students.

**Table 1**  
**ASLS Curriculum Comparison**

Traditional Bachelor's Degree Curriculum	Post-Baccalaureate Program Curriculum
Required ASLS Courses	Required ASLS Courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Phonetics*</li> <li>• Normal Speech and Language Development*</li> <li>• Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Hearing Mechanism*</li> <li>• Articulation and Voice Disorders*</li> <li>• Language Disorders in Children*</li> <li>• Fundamentals of Physiological and Biological Acoustics*</li> <li>• Basic Audiology*</li> <li>• Clinical Processes in Speech-Language Pathology*</li> <li>• Aural Rehabilitation and Amplification*</li> <li>• Introduction to Human Communication and Its Disorders</li> <li>• Language Sampling Processes</li> <li>• Clinical Practicum in Audiology or Entry/Primary Speech-Language Pathology Practicum</li> <li>• Advanced Audiology or Organically-Based Communication Disorders</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Phonetics*</li> <li>• Normal Speech and Language Development*</li> <li>• Anatomy and Physiology of the Speech and Hearing Mechanism*</li> <li>• Articulation and Voice Disorders*</li> <li>• Language Disorders in Children*</li> <li>• Fundamentals of Physiological and Biological Acoustics*</li> <li>• Basic Audiology*</li> <li>• Clinical Processes in Speech-Language Pathology*</li> <li>• Aural Rehabilitation and Amplification*</li> </ul>
Non-ASLS Courses	Non-ASLS Courses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introduction to Human Anatomy and Physiology</li> <li>• American Sign Language</li> <li>• Introduction to Undergraduate Research</li> <li>• College Research Paper or Scientific Writing</li> </ul>	

*Note.* \* denotes classes required for both traditional and post-baccalaureate students.

**Table 2**  
**GPA and GRE Scores attained by ASLS Students**

	Traditional Student	Post-baccalaureate Student
Overall GPA Score	3.49	3.56
Major GPA Score	3.66	3.77
GRE Score Verbal	407	428
GRE Score Quantitative	494	526
GRE Score Composite	910	1020
GRE Score Analytical	3.9	3.93

*Note.* This table contains the average of the GPA and GRE scores that were recorded by use of the exit survey. Calculations were rounded to the nearest hundredth. These findings indicate no significant difference in the overall and major GPA of traditional and post-baccalaureate ASLS students.

**Table 3**  
**Student's Acceptance Status**

	Traditional Student	Post-baccalaureate Student
Accepted to Graduate School	54.55%	75%
Alternate Status	54.55%	16.67%
Field of study		
Speech-Language	58.33%	66.67%
Audiology	33.33%	25%
Other	8.33%	8.33%

*Note.* This table contains the percentage of students accepted to graduate school, students who received an alternate status, and the percentage of students in each field of study. The outcomes featured are only of those who responded to the following items on the questionnaire.

## Stage 2 Findings

The interviews focused on exploring the experiences and perceptions that traditional and

post-baccalaureate students had in the ASLS program. The following findings are organized according to the most prevalent themes that emerged. There were also unique aspects that appeared during discussions with students that will also be reviewed in detail.

### Student Profiles

*Christina-* Student participant was classified as a traditional student. Before beginning the undergraduate ASLS program she had earned an associate's degree in Pre-Speech Pathology. Christina was in the age range of the average traditional student.

*Irene-* Student participant was classified as a traditional student. Before beginning the undergraduate ASLS program she had worked in restaurant management. Irene was older than most traditional students.

*Lola-* Student participant was classified as a post-baccalaureate student. Before beginning the post-baccalaureate ASLS program Lola had attained a bachelor's degree in Psychology. She also gained experience working for a daycare program after she completed her first bachelor's degree.

*Michelle-* Student participant was classified as a post-baccalaureate student. Before beginning the post-baccalaureate ASLS program Michelle had attained a bachelor's degree in Health and Exercise Science. She also gained experience working for a daycare program.

*Melody-* Student participant was classified as a post-baccalaureate student. Before beginning the post-baccalaureate ASLS program Melody had attained a bachelor's degree in Music Therapy. During her junior year of her first bachelor's program she knew she would like to continue her education with an ASLS program.

*Debra-* Student participant was classified as a post-baccalaureate student. Before beginning the post-baccalaureate ASLS program Debra had attained a degree in Early Childhood Education. She also worked as a teacher for four years.

### Program Satisfaction – Traditional Students

Both traditional participants described positive experiences during their undergraduate career and felt that the program had prepared them for graduate level work appropriately. They reported being satisfied with the program. While reflecting back on her career at UNC, Irene said, "I was really satisfied, especially now looking back having grad school under my belt. I think I learned the things that I needed to learn."

Christina said, "I learned more about graduate school because I assumed everyone who wants to get in, can get in and I learned that that's not the case. I learned how to make it so that you can get in. The kinds of things you can learn and the kinds of people you can work with in the program. So I was really satisfied with it."

### Program Satisfaction – Post-baccalaureate Students

Post-baccalaureate students in the program demonstrated the same theme of overall satisfaction during their interviews. When asked about her satisfaction with the program Debra responded, "I loved it. I liked it thought the teachers were great." The literature noted that post-baccalaureate students tend to hold greater importance in forming relationships with professors (Walker et al., 2007). This was reflected by Michelle who stated, "I liked it. I immediately loved all the professors and thought that it was very great that they tried really hard to learn our names and more about us because when I went to a larger school it was a little different."

### Advising – Traditional Students

Students portrayed similar advising experiences. Irene commented, "I originally did not have a great advisor I had an audiology professor as an advisor. I felt that I didn't really gain a lot of insight from her because of her audiology background. I switched to have a speech language pathology person as my advisor and I think that that worked out a lot better for me. My original advisor also was fairly new to the program at that time so kind of missed the boat on a couple things and made recommendations for classes I didn't need to take. Generally I was really happy with my advising situation. My

advisor as well as other professors did a great job of advising.”

Christina had a similar advising experience to Irene. She described her advising experiences as “My very first advising appointment when I was transferring in I met with a professor and she blew my mind and I was like I want to come here. She had it all together she looked at my transcript. She was so organized and made everything pretty straightforward and I really liked that. But then when I was assigned my advisor full time I think it was his first time advising.... The only reason I went to advising was to get my pin because he was like when you come have the classes ready that you want to take. Well what’s the point of advising? So that wasn’t very positive, but now I have my original professor again so it’s been really good.”

### **Advising – Post-baccalaureate Students**

A comparable experience was depicted when Lola was asked about advising satisfaction within the program she said, “Advising was pretty easy, only complaint was that I had a professor who was an audiologist and not a speech person so occasionally I felt like she was trying to woo me towards audiology and occasionally I felt like she didn’t really know. I did the SLPA class she had no idea what that was about what that involved. So she just kind of signed off on my sheet without really much consideration but other than that she was a great advisor.” Melody was pleased with the experience and responded, “It’s been good, nobody’s messed me up too bad.”

Both traditional and post-baccalaureate students seemed to have dealt with different issues with advising but nothing that could not be easily resolved. There was a commonality in the dissatisfaction of being paired with an advisor that was not of the same specialty such as a professor in audiology or a professor in speech-language pathology. Overall, students enjoyed their advising experiences and had positive opinions of the advisors and the guidance they offered.

### **Competition – Traditional Students**

Traditional students, Irene and Christina, acknowledge the competition within the ASLS program. While these two students were both traditional they had differing opinions of who the competition was between. Irene indicated that there was an apparent competition among all students, “I felt like there was a competition between everybody. It was really competitive to get into grad school. I don’t necessarily think that it was specific to levelers versus non-levelers. It was competitive between everybody.” Irene offered a unique perspective because, while completing her first degree in ASLS, she was an older student and didn’t seem as affected by the competition.

In comparison Christina, a younger student, explained that she was well aware of the competition among students and described her feelings as “I feel like for people that have been on this track their whole life and this is what they want to do and then the leveling come in in one year and take all the spots. Seems a little unfair.”

Both students indicated that there was a definite competition in the ASLS program. As research indicates the growth in the field is increasing and the admission process into graduate school can be competitive (AHSA, 2012). Both students also illustrated the divide that was created in classes between students because of this sense of competition.

### **Competition – Post-baccalaureate Students**

As stated earlier the competition was apparent to a variety of students. Lola indicated that there was tension because of the competition and even felt that her post-baccalaureate status affected the way people viewed her. Lola said, “Overall I was pretty satisfied. I wish I would have known before hand how competitive it was just to know coming into it that you know not everyone is going to really like me and I’m going have a lot of rude people just because we’re all vying for the same spots, but other than that I really enjoyed it.” Melody had a similar response and also indicated specific competitive behaviors, she said, “It was intense. You could feel it even if it wasn’t necessarily spoken, but everybody was like oh

what did you get on this grade, just a lot of questions like that...Curiosity.” Lola, while acknowledging the competition also displayed a desire for camaraderie among varying student groups. She stated, “I still wanted to forge friendships and partnerships when we had class projects together. I would just like them to know I wasn’t trying to cheat them out of their spot I wasn’t trying to take it from them I was just trying to have a fair shot at it too.”

Student’s opinions varied in how much they felt the competition affected them. Michelle noted that she was less affected by the competition. When questioned whether she felt the program was competitive she responded, “Not really I’ve never felt like I was very competitive with other students. I’ve only thought about what I needed to do, especially now that I already had a degree and coming in a second time I had a very different thought process to the whole school thing anyway.” Her response aligns with the literature in regard to post-baccalaureate students having a greater sense of maturity (Suliman, 2006.)

Similar to traditional students, the post-baccalaureate students were well aware of the competition between student groups and all students in general. The post-baccalaureate students seemed to have greater maturity because they conveyed a desire to create friendships with all students groups and also maintained focus on one’s own abilities rather than the competitiveness between students.

### **Separation of Groups – Traditional Students**

There was evident separation of traditional students and post-baccalaureate students. “Between the groups I don’t know I felt like it was kind of segregated. It was like well we’re leveling students and we already have a degree”, Cristina said after being asked about group dynamics. Irene, an older traditional student had a different take on the separation that was experienced throughout the program. Irene said, “For me everybody was new and I was also older and a lot of the leveling students were older. I had friends that were leveling students and traditional students. I think other people thought that there

was kind of a difference. Probably having to do with age and just not knowing anybody. When you don’t know anybody you bond with other people that don’t know anybody.”

### **Separation of Groups – Post-baccalaureate Students**

The separation perceived by students seemed to stem from differences in age and maturity level. Michelle responded, “I don’t know if it was just because of the age difference or we just kind of flocked together because we already kind of knew we could tell the undergrads already knew each other. So we kind of looked maybe like we were out of place. I never felt out of place.” This separation was also perceived by Melody who said, “There’s definitely a separation. I feel like there were a few students who were undergrad who would interact with me and the other leveling students but some of the other students I feel like they’re like, I don’t want to talk with them.”

### **Maturity – Traditional Students**

Christina noted that the leveling students may be at an advantage because of their maturity as students. She said, “I tend to feel that the leveling students are maybe a little more outgoing because they have more life experience sometimes.” The traditional students conveyed that the post-baccalaureate students had a definite edge in regard to prior experiences and knowledge.

### **Maturity – Post-baccalaureate Students**

All leveling students found their previous degree to be helpful. It appeared that many were successful in part because of the earlier experiences and skills they had acquired. Michelle said, “I felt like I was more prepared in terms of mental maturity level. Not just schooling.” Debra also believed her prior degree and experience alleviated some of the stress of the intensive accelerated program. Debra said, “My first undergrad it was a lot of work and that really prepared me for school and teaching.”

### **Desire to Share Experiences – Traditional Students**

All students demonstrated a desire to help one another by giving advice or sharing experiences. Christina said, “Me personally, I’m not trying to be mean or kick somebody out of the program. I would want them to know that I’m willing to help them. I’ve been here for awhile I know some of the professors if you need advice come talk to me.” It became clear that she was a very knowledgeable student because she was not only involved in the program but also worked in the program. She said, “I’m an open resource.”

### **Desire to Share Experiences – Post-baccalaureate Students**

Post-baccalaureate students also wanted to share knowledge from the experiences they had gained from their previous degrees and just life experiences in general. Debra said, “I have some experience with the way schools are run, classroom teacher expectations, and paper work. Fill them in on my experiences.” Michelle stated, “I want them to know that we’re still the same. We might be for the most part were definitely older but we’re still the same. Not to be intimidated by us just because we might be older or have a degree in something else that also doesn’t necessarily mean that we’re better students. Just because of that we’ve just had changes in our lives that make us want to do something different.” This general tone was exhibited by most post-baccalaureate students who all had some advice for traditional students based on their own past experiences.

## **DISCUSSION**

As a traditional student in the ASLS program I had always wrongfully assumed that the students who were taking the post-baccalaureate path did not have the same knowledge that traditional students did. Once I examined the curriculum it became clear that the differences in curriculum was slight and amounted to a few classes. While the post-baccalaureate students take a condensed version of 27-30 credit hours instead of approximately 40 credit hours as seen with the traditional path both student groups are on a competitive level for admission into graduate school.

I was intrigued by the responses from both student groups. It was evident while interviewing these individuals that they had positive outcomes in the program and all appeared to be successful in the paths that they had chosen. Traditional and post-baccalaureate students had different curriculum and unique capabilities that they incorporated into their educational experience. It was interesting to see that the experiences and perceptions of both student groups did indeed differ. This variation in experiences and perceptions was exhibited through prior knowledge and capability that each individual had attained throughout their academic or professional career. Similar to studies that focused on accelerated programs for post-baccalaureate students a higher maturity level was found among post-baccalaureate students (Suliman, 2006). The difference in maturity level was observed through interviews. Post-baccalaureate students appeared to be more focused and less affected by the competition between students.

As other studies have noted, there is a definite need for future research particularly with a focus on a variety of student outcomes (Suliman, 2006; Borges, Richard, & Duffy, 2007). This study has shown that there is great similarity among students that take different paths in terms of test scores and GPA, but these students all had positive outcomes in the sense that they were accepted into graduate school and made it to the end of their program successfully. It would be beneficial to see the outcomes of students that were not accepted into programs and how their experiences compare to those who were not accepted or chose another path after completing the traditional or post-baccalaureate program.

Some limitations of the study were leveling and post-baccalaureate students were combined for the outcome survey. This was a limitation of the study because both of these groups of students have slight variations in their degree process although they all meet the definition of a post-baccalaureate student. This may affect my analysis because students may have had slight curriculum differences and thus different experiences. All students who were interviewed

were graduate students, and thus all had positive outcomes in terms of admission to graduate studies. Further research should be done to determine whether students with negative outcomes had these same experiences. Six participants were used in the second stage of the study and it would have been preferable to have more participants to demonstrate a broader perspective of all student types.

The researcher also suggests that these findings be used to increase student relations and reduce animosity between traditional and post-baccalaureate students. As other studies have noted there is a lack of time available for differing student groups to get to know each other (Miklancie & Davis, 2005). This may be improved by incorporating informational sessions where students have the opportunity to learn more about each other and each academic path both traditional and post-baccalaureate.

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