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Social-Cognitive Influences Regarding Persistence and Achievement of Nontraditional Students In Higher Education

Kristy Renee Dykema

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SOCIAL-COGNITIVE INFLUENCES REGARDING PERSISTENCE AND ACHIEVEMENT OF NONTRADITIONAL STUDENTS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

A Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Has been approved as meeting the requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the College of Education and Behavioral Sciences in the School of Psychological Sciences, Program of Educational Psychology

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ABSTRACT


Due to a variety of factors, there has been an increase in nontraditional students enrolling in higher education. However, little information is available on how nontraditional students experience higher education and the unique barriers and supports they experience. Additionally, the current literature on nontraditional students is limited as many previous studies use age as the sole criterion for nontraditional status; recent research suggests these students fit a broader definition of variables beyond age. The purpose of this study was to utilize a sequential mixed-methods approach to investigate the characteristics of students \( n = 236 \) at a local community college, their rates of persistence and success, the predictive nature of demographic characteristics and social-cognitive factors in terms of student outcomes, and student perceptions following their first semester of college and how those perceptions may have played a role in their persistence and achievement.

Demographic data suggested that the typical newly enrolled student showed a delay in enrollment to college, employment in addition to attending college, and financial independence. Despite the fact that over half of the students were age 24 or less, the majority met other criteria for nontraditional student status identified in the literature. Through use of binominal logistic regression, it was determined that the most impactful variable on student outcome was age with older students performing more successfully.
Other factors that significantly explained variance in student outcome included self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed. Interviews showed that among students who withdrew, many reported that the main reason was a disjunct between goals. Students who were placed on academic probation often reported upheaval in their lives, which got in the way of their success. Many of these students also perceived a lack of social supports within the school. Finally, among students who were successful, it was noted that they still experienced barriers which impacted their education; however, in contrast to the less successful students, these students tended to have better self-regulatory abilities to juggle those multiple barriers and responsibilities. There are several implications that can be derived from this study. First, the findings suggest that there is a need to revisit institutional philosophies regarding student readiness in higher education. In addition, findings of this study can be used to inform programs aimed at increasing the likelihood of student success. Intervention programs would be of benefit to students if these programs included a focus on academic skills, mental wellness, self-regulation, and building a sense of community.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Based on current trends in higher education, it has become clearer that student demographics are shifting at a rapid pace while research has largely fallen behind. Much of the research in higher education has focused on the traditional student who, upon graduation from high school, enrolls at a four-year university. However, research has increasingly shown a trend for older and more nontraditional students entering higher education through potentially different paths (Brock, 2010; Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2010). Because much of the previous research has focused on an entirely different demographic of student, it is possible that interventions aimed at helping students succeed in higher education may not be adaptable to the unique needs of a newer, broader demographic. Additionally, there has not been much research on a clear definition of nontraditional student status, with the vast majority of research assuming that nontraditional students can be defined solely on the variable of age, while that might not be entirely accurate (Jinkens, 2009; Macari, Maples, & D’Andrea, 2005). With the cost of higher education on the rise, it is the responsibility of educators and administrators to ensure that all students have adequate resources to succeed in higher education. By focusing interventions that are tailored to a narrow demographic, it is possible that an increasing number of students may “fall through the cracks” of the educational system.
In addition to the factors that are facing nontraditional students as they increase their presence on college campuses, it is also important to note that there are added benefits for individuals that obtain a higher education. Benefits to completing college (over a high school diploma) include higher income (Autor, Katz, & Kearney, 2006; U.S. Census Bureau, 2007), better physical health (Ross & Mirowsky, 1999, 2010), and improved cognitive development (Kingston, Hubbard, Lapp, Schroeder, & Wilson, 2003). The benefits of higher education are not the individual’s alone. In fact, there are a number of benefits of having a well-educated population in terms of the impact on society, with research supporting the idea that drop-out rates in higher education pose as a significant cost to the United States (Belfield, & Levin, 2007). Because higher education can benefit both the individual and society as a whole, it is important to consider factors that might increase nontraditional student success in assessing and succeeding in higher education.

Many students seek a college education in hopes of a higher income. Research indicates that individuals who completed their college degree earned incomes that were three times higher than individuals who did not have a high school diploma and earned twice that of individuals who graduated from high school (Bricker, Kennickell, Moore, & Sabelhaus, 2012). Because of these issues, interventions aimed at increasing accessibility of higher education as well as providing students with supports aimed at success in higher education would benefit not only those students who go to college but society as a whole.

**The Role of Community Colleges**

Community colleges also serve an increasingly important role in communities across the United States. Since World War II, community colleges have served a role in
enhancing workers’ technical skills (Clotfelter, Ladd, Muschkin, & Vigdor, 2013). They can also serve a role in providing students with a “stepping stone” into four-year institutions (Dougherty & Townsend, 2006). According to the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC; 2014), there are 1,132 community colleges in the United States with an enrollment of over twelve million students, which is double from the figures released for the 2006-2007 academic year (Provasnik, & Planty, 2008). Slightly over half (60%) of community college students are enrolled part-time and the majority of students are also employed. Among community college students, the average age is 28 years and a little over one third (36%) of students in community colleges across the country are first-generation college students (AACC, 2014). While community colleges can play a vital role in the community by increasing the accessibility of education, the vast majority of research in higher education has relied on samples within four-year institutions. Therefore, beyond broad enrollment and demographic statistics of community college students, there is little information available in the literature about the unique characteristics of community college students and how those characteristics may influence persistence and achievement.

**Current Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the components of success and failure for the increasing demographic of nontraditional students within a community college setting. To do this, I explored the experiences of nontraditional students in the context of two related motivational theories that focus on the cognitive aspects of a student’s experience in education. One variable that has been shown to impact persistence and achievement among traditional students is self-efficacy, a major construct
of social cognitive career theory, which examines the relationship between achievement and factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and goals. Self-efficacy has been shown by research to impact a range of behaviors including choosing a college major (Pajares, 1996) as well as motivation levels and persistence (Bandura, 1989). Perceived academic control may also be a variable that impacts student performance in college. Research has demonstrated that among students, perceived control is positively correlated with achievement (Meece, Wigfield, & Eccles, 1990). While research supports that these two variables play a role in achievement, little has been done to determine how these variables influence the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students. Similarly, these variables can only explain part of the story in terms of persistence and achievement and therefore, it is important to explore other factors that may impact a student’s tendency to persist as well as to attain success in higher education.

For this study, I used a mixed methods design to investigate whether different student outcomes (persistence, persistence without academic success, and persistence with academic success) are related to such factors as self-efficacy, outcome expectations and perceived academic control. Additionally, because little is known regarding how various factors influence student persistence and achievement among nontraditional students, I utilized a qualitative approach of purposely interviewing participants about their perceptions of supports and barriers in higher education.
Research Questions

Q1 What are the characteristics of students at a local community college?  
Q1a What are the demographic characteristics of students at a local community college in terms of age, nontraditional student status, employment, language skills, and their reason(s) for enrolling in school?  
Q1b What are the social-cognitive characteristics of students at a local community college in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control?  
Q1c What are the rates of three distinct outcomes for students enrolled in their first semester of community college, which include the following outcomes: (a) persistence and achievement during the first semester (defined as completing the first semester with a GPA of 2.1 or above), (b) persistence without achievement (defined as completing the first semester with a GPA of 2.0 or lower, which results in placement of the student on academic probation), and (c) failure to persist (defined as students who withdraw or are reported by their instructors as stop-outs)?

Q2 Are there differences between the three groups of nontraditional students (students who persist and are successful academically; students who persist, but aren’t successful academically; and students who do not persist) in a community college setting?  
Q2a Do the three groups differ in terms of age, credit hours, number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed, language abilities, employment, self-efficacy, outcome expectations and perceived academic control?

Q3 Can demographic characteristics (age, enrollment status, number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed, language abilities, employment) and social-cognitive factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control predict student outcomes?  
Q3a Which variables predict the outcome of student group membership?

Q4 What other factors play a role in the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students in higher education?
Q4a  Do students differ in terms of perceptions of supports and barriers in higher education and purpose of returning to school?

Q4b  Are there common themes to the experience of persisting and succeeding in higher education? What are the experiences of supports and barriers of these students?

Q4c  What themes are common to the experience of persisting, but not succeeding in higher education? What are the experiences of supports and barriers of these students and what barriers are perceived by these students as the most influential in their lack of success?

Q4d  What themes are common to the experience of dropping out or withdrawing from higher education after enrolling? What types of experiences lead to the decision to drop out? What environmental experiences factored into the decision?

Hypotheses

There are some research questions for which I did not have any hypotheses due to a lack of research in those areas. My overarching hypotheses are as follows:

H1  There would be differences between the three student outcome groups in terms of academic self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. Specifically, students who persisted and experienced adequate academic achievement (as measured by grade point average) would score higher than the other two groups on all three of these variables.

H2  Together, academic self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control would help to explain part of the variance in student outcome group membership. I believed that, in line with theory and previous research, these variables would impact other unmeasured variables such as effort, which in turn, contribute to persistence and achievement.

H3  Demographic factors would also help to predict student outcome group membership, but that these factors would explain less of the variance than the variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. Based on the findings of previous research, I hypothesized that the variables that would show the most impact would be enrollment status (full time vs. part time), language abilities, and employment.
H4 Students in the different student outcome groups would show different trends in self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. Specifically, students who are successful and able to persist would show increases in these three variables while students who struggle will show decreases in these three variables.

H5 Experiences of supports and barriers would play a role in students’ decision to persist in higher education as well as their academic achievement.

Definition of Terms

Academic Probation--Probationary status that results from completing the semester with a grade point average (GPA) of 2.0 or lower.

Academic Achievement--Successfully completing the first semester of enrollment without being placed on academic probation (defined as receiving a grade point average of 2.1 or higher).

Attributions--Perceptions involving the cause of events.

Barriers--Perceptions regarding the obstacles that hinder success.

First Semester Enrollment--First semester of enrollment to college.

Nontraditional Student--Defined as a student that meets one or more of the nontraditional criteria set forth in the study, which includes the following: (a) delay in enrollment to college of at least one year, (b) financial independence from parents, (c) full-time employment in addition to college enrollment, (d) dependents (other than a spouse), (e) receipt of a General Education Diploma (GED) or high school completion certificate instead of a traditional high school diploma, (f) military veteran, (g) first-generation college student, and (h) over 25 years of age.

Outcome Expectations--Beliefs about the consequences of one’s behavior.
Persistence--Completing the first semester without withdrawing or being reported as a “stop out.”

Self-Efficacy Beliefs--The belief in one’s competence in a given domain.

Stop-Out--Being reported by an instructor as having missed two consecutive weeks of the term while completing no work during that period of time and having no contact with the instructor.

Student Outcome Group Membership--Categorization of a student following their first semester of college enrollment into one of three groups: (a) those who persist and succeed, (b) those who persist, but do not succeed, (c) those who do not persist.

Supports--Perceptions regarding the resources available to succeed.

Summary

Because of the rise in enrollment of nontraditional students, it is necessary to examine this population in further detail with regard to factors that might influence persistence and achievement in higher education. This type of research could help to inform pedagogy and practice when it comes to assisting these students in reaching their full potential inside and outside the classroom. Because community colleges are more accessible to a broader population of students, it seems appropriate to study these variables with respect to that particular setting. Therefore, using a mixed-methods design, the purpose of the current study was to examine students as they began their community college enrollment in terms of the factors that might impact their persistence and achievement across the first semester.
CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The major topics of interest in my study included persistence and achievement in higher education, particularly during transitional phases of education, such as the beginning of one’s college educational experience. Specifically, I was interested in identifying the differences among three distinct groups of students: (a) students who do not persist, (b) students who persist, but are not academically successful and are placed on academic probation following their first semester (GPA of 2.0 or lower), and (c) students who persist and are academically successful. I also aimed to explore whether there were pre-existing differences between these three groups of students in terms of age, gender, enrollment status, employment, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control and whether these factors predict success in college. My study also focused on additional variables that might play a role in the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students. This included students’ perceptions of supports and barriers of students in higher education and how these perceptions relate to persistence and achievement.

Recent Enrollment Trends

Research has supported the idea that due to economic, political, and social changes over the last several decades, there has been a tremendous increase in students enrolled in higher education (Brock, 2010; Kimmel, Gaylor, Grubbs, & Hayes, 2012).
According to the NCES (2012), between 1991 and 2001, there was an 11% increase in student enrollment in degree granting institutions. Enrollment increased yet again from 2001 to 2011, showing a 32% increase among students enrolled in degree granting institutions (NCES, 2012).

Alongside the increases in students enrolled in higher education, current trends show that there are substantial increases in older, nontraditional students (Brock, 2010). Additionally, current projections state that enrollment of nontraditional students in higher education will continue to increase. In fact, the fastest growing group of undergraduate college students in the United States is comprised of adults over the age of 25 (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). According to the NCES (2010), enrollment of students age 25 and older is expected to increase 19% through the year 2017, which is higher than the 10% projected increase for students under 25 years old. Therefore, based on these trends, it is important for individuals working in higher education to consider the unique needs and experiences of nontraditional students in an effort to better educate and serve this growing group of students. Additionally, these considerations can apply to administration in an effort to be more inclusive towards nontraditional students and tailor services to their unique needs. Gaining an understanding of these factors can help institutions of higher education better target the variables that make a difference to these students in terms of persistence and success.

**Redefining Nontraditional**

One of the first determinants in nontraditional student research has been the debate regarding what characteristics should be used to define the nontraditional student population. Previous research has typically defined the “nontraditional student” in terms
of age, specifically being over the age of 24 (Jinkens, 2009). However, it has been suggested by many researchers in the field that this may be inappropriate and may lead to excluding many students that may otherwise seem to be nontraditional in terms of family life, educational history, time between re-enrollment, employment, financial independence, and having dependents. One study found that by using age as the only criterion to define nontraditional status, they excluded 44% of those students that met another characteristic that might be used to define nontraditional status (Macari et al., 2005).

Because of these issues, researchers are making continued efforts to reach a consensus on the definition of “nontraditional” in the student population. Some time ago, Cross (1980) proposed that nontraditional students should include those who pursue higher education while maintaining other responsibilities, such as work or family. According to Jinkens (2009), one criterion that might help define nontraditional student status is a life-changing event, which can include anything from family, employment, financial changes, or other major life experiences. This differs from the previous classification of “nontraditional students” as those over the age of 24 (Jinkens, 2009). These life-changing events can alter an individual’s mindset and perceptions of higher education in terms of beliefs, values and approaches to learning. However, he also adds that “life-changing” is really a matter of perception and what one person may see as a life-changing event, another person may not. According to Jinkens, defining a “life-changing” event in this aspect can be difficult because of this perception. This leads to a gap in the literature on the definition of “nontraditional.” Clearly, as more and more students enroll in higher education, personal circumstances will vary greatly and those
situations should be taken into account. However, it is also important to investigate the circumstances that might lead students to perceive themselves as nontraditional as well as how those circumstances change their approach to education.

In a previous qualitative study (Dykema, 2014), I explored the perceptions of students that fit a broader definition of nontraditional student status. In contrast to using age alone, I recruited participants who met at least one of the following criteria that I set forth in determining nontraditional student status, which included: (a) delay of enrollment to college of at least one year, (b) financial independence from parents, (c) full-time employment in addition to being a college student, (d) dependents (other than a spouse), (e) receipt of a GED or high school completion certificate instead of a traditional high school diploma, (f) military veteran, (g) first-generation college student, or (h) over 25 years of age. In this study, I interviewed four men and three women who met at least one of the criteria listed above. All participants were enrolled as a student at a mid-sized western university. “Juan” was a 20-year-old male of Hispanic origin. He was a full-time, first-generation sophomore living off-campus; English was his second language. “Brett” was a 19-year-old Caucasian male who was also a first-generation college student; he was enrolled part-time and was a freshman. “Maria” was a 40-year-old Hispanic student who was currently a senior; she was a first-generation college student enrolled full-time and living off-campus with her significant other and three small children. “Tom” was a 64-year-old Caucasian male who was a full-time senior at the university and was a military veteran living off-campus. “Pablo” was a 30-year-old Hispanic, GED recipient, and first-generation college student who was a junior in college; in addition to being a full-time student, he was also employed part-time and was living with his fiancé and
three-year-old daughter. Pablo, Maria, and Tom were also transfer students from community colleges; Maria and Pablo transferred from a local community college while Tom attended a community college on the west coast and graduated before entering the workforce and then returned to school years later. The students included in this study were seen as being successful in college; while one participant (“Brett”) was a college freshman and therefore, just beginning college, the remaining participants had been enrolled in college for a period of time and had been academically successful.

Findings of this study indicated a number of themes that were brought up by each of the students. The first overall theme that tied all the participants’ experiences together was a sense of feeling different from the average college student. Each student indicated that they felt they were a nontraditional student based on their characteristics and experiences. It is easy to understand how older nontraditional students would feel different from their classmates in college; however, the younger nontraditional students also reported feeling that they were different from the other students. Juan pointed to ethnic identity, stating that when he thought of a college student, he thought of a white male attending college and not someone who was from his background. Tom shared that there was a difference between maturity and life experience that differentiated him from other students. Maria recounted an experience that she had when she went on a campus tour where she felt uncomfortable because it felt like she should be one of the parents instead of a student.

Another theme that emerged from the participants in this study was a sense of wanting a better future for themselves and their family. Juan pointed to how he wanted to give his future children more opportunities than he had and that he saw how hard his
parents worked and he wanted his children to have a different life. Pablo also mentioned wanting a better future for his daughter; in fact, Pablo had an extensive history with gang activity before enrolling in college and explained that the moment his girlfriend found out she was pregnant, he knew he had to change his life for the better. Brett mentioned that he understood that going to college would provide more opportunities to get the job he wanted and have the money to meet his goals in life. Maria entered into higher education to further her career goals; at the time of her enrollment, she was looking for another job that would pay better and a job that she really wanted required a degree or current enrollment in college, so she enrolled. While Tom was retired, he saw inherent value in education, talking extensively about the importance of education and how it has improved his ability to do the things he wanted to do in life.

Another important theme that emerged from this study was the idea that the participants felt that they weren’t adequately prepared for college. Juan described his experience as “scary” and that he had a hard time adjusting to college because he was the first in his family to attend. He had significant problems navigating the financial aid paperwork, which resulted in him acquiring a significant amount of debt during his first semester of college even though he qualified for federal grants; for him, the language barrier was a huge obstacle when it came to filing paperwork. Brett differentiated himself from his peers and told stories of how his peers knew what to do because their parents were there to help; since he was also the first in his family to attend college, he felt somewhat lost. Maria described how it was never communicated to her that college was even an option. She felt excluded from recruitments, particularly because of her ethnicity.
Tom joked during his interview that college should come with warning signs that you will be expected to work (Dykema, 2014).

The insights derived from this study show that perhaps, nontraditional student status is more complex than just age. Even for the younger students, particularly Brett and Juan, they felt the effects of being “nontraditional” and these perceptions played into their educational experience. If age alone were used as a criteria for nontraditional status, Juan and Brett would be excluded despite the notion that they would clearly benefit from services designed to help them navigate the unfamiliar terrain of college life. Juan had the added obstacle of experiencing language barriers, which resulted in severe financial consequences that could have been avoided. For Tom, Pablo, and Maria, their nontraditional status goes beyond just age. Pablo came from a different educational background, having earned a GED rather than a high school diploma. Tom was a retired military veteran that looked and thought differently from his classmates based on his life experiences. Both Pablo and Maria were trying to balance raising children with acquiring an education.

In light of this, it seems to reason that the research might benefit from a broader definition of nontraditional student status by incorporating some of the notions proposed by Jinkens (2009) as well as Macari and colleagues (2005). Therefore, I proposed the use of a broader definition that encompasses many different factors beyond age that could lead a student to approach education differently, including military service, educational history, family, employment, and financial factors.
Obstacles for Nontraditional Students

Nontraditional students are also of particular interest and concern because they face unique barriers in accessing and succeeding in higher education as compared to traditional college students. Because of this, it warrants further attention to this special student population. These obstacles and challenges may impact nontraditional students and influence their ability to achieve success in higher education. Barriers that have been supported by nontraditional student research include financial concerns, delays in college enrollment, differing educational backgrounds, enrollment status, physical health, and family obligations.

One of the first barriers that may be present for nontraditional students is the delay in college enrollment. Many nontraditional students return to school due to life transitions, which can include such things as changing goals and employment considerations that may require a change of job (Chao & Good, 2004). According to research, delayed enrollment in higher education is associated with lower degree completion rates (Jacobs & King, 2002), which means that nontraditional students are less likely than traditional students to complete their degree.

One particular study conducted by Bozick and DeLuca (2005) sought to examine the effect of enrollment delay on degree completion. The study utilized data collected by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the National Education Longitudinal Study of 1988, which was a nationally representative survey that tracked 24,599 high school students enrolled in over 1,000 public and private schools in the United States over the course of 10 years (1990 - 2000) starting when they were in 10th grade and concluded eight years after their high school graduation. Follow-up interviews
were conducted with these students in grades 10 (1990) and 12 (1992) along with two years following high school graduation (1994) and eight years following high school graduation (2000). Of this sample, the researchers found that approximately 67% enrolled in postsecondary education within seven months of high school graduation, while 16% delayed their enrollment more than seven months. Greater enrollment delay was seen for Hispanic and African American students, males, individuals from lower socioeconomic status (SES), older students, and those who have earned a GED rather than a traditional high school diploma. The researchers also found that delaying enrollment of just one year was associated with a 78% reduction in the odds of completing a bachelor’s degree eight years following graduation from high school. When controlling for other variables including socioeconomic status, ethnicity, gender, standardized test scores, and receiving a GED, the decreased odds of completion was still significant, showing that students who delay enrollment of one year are 64% less likely to complete a bachelor’s degree within eight years of graduating high school (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005). Therefore, even after controlling for other variables, the chances of degree completion among students who delay enrollment to college is significant.

Nontraditional students also tend to have differing educational backgrounds comparatively to traditional college students. Rather than completing high school in the traditional manner, nontraditional students are more likely to have earned their GED (Prohaska, Morrill, Atiles, & Perez, 2000). Despite this notion, many of the studies that focus on academic achievement among college students who have earned their GED in the literature are outdated (i.e., D’Amico & Schmidt, 1957; Hartung, 1948; Milligan, Lins, & Little, 1948; Wolf, 1983). However, Bozick and DeLuca (2005) found that
individuals who have earned a GED instead of a traditional high school diploma have lower rates of enrolling in higher education or completing a bachelor’s degree. Similarly, Kim and Joo (2013) found lower rates of bachelor degree completion among individuals who dropped out of high school and later earned their GED. Additionally, while Kim and Joo cited a significant increase in bachelor degree completion among Caucasian students with a GED along with a smaller, but significant increase in degree completion for African American students with a GED since the 1961, they noted that Hispanic students with a GED showed no significant increase in bachelor degree completion since 1961.

One particularly insightful longitudinal study that examined the differences between individuals who earn a GED and those that earn a traditional high school diploma is that of Maralani (2011). To explore this notion, Maralani examined the National Longitudinal Survey of Youth 1979 (NLSY), which took a nationally representative sample of 8,432 students between the ages of 14 to 22 years and found that individuals who earned a GED rather than a high school diploma are more likely to come from a disadvantaged background and have parents with less education. Those earning a GED also tended to score lower on a measure of cognitive ability, the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT), which measures cognitive skills including verbal ability, word knowledge, and mathematical reasoning. They were also more likely to have children by the age of 20 and take longer to complete their high school education. When they did enroll in college, they were more likely to enroll at later ages. The longitudinal data of this study demonstrated that at age 25, only 31 percent of individuals who had earned a GED had attended college compared to 65 percent of individuals that had earned a traditional high school diploma. At age 35, approximately 70 percent of individuals
with a high school diploma and 43 percent of those with a GED attended college. These gaps continued to remain significant, even when controlling for differences in family background and cognitive skills such as verbal and mathematical abilities (Maralani, 2011).

In addition to differing educational backgrounds, nontraditional students may be more likely to have different environmental circumstances, which may limit their access to information regarding how to access higher education. For instance, researchers have investigated the concept of “shadow education,” which refers to activities outside of the bounds of the formal education system and are designed to improve an individual’s chances at success in the education arena. Such activities can include, but are not limited to: extra classes, tutoring, and test prep resources that are available to some students but not others (Buchmann, Condron, & Roschingo, 2010).

Similarly, having parents that did not attend college could create a barrier for students in higher education (Bui, 2002) with studies showing that attrition is higher among students with parents that never attended college (Horn & Carroll, 1998). Martinez, Sher, Krull, and Wood (2009) investigated attrition rates among 3,290 college students over a period of four years and found that attrition was higher for first-generation students. In one longitudinal study (Chen, 2005), approximately 43% of first-generation students left college without completing their degree between 1992 and 2000. Wang (2014), through qualitative research, investigated the messages that first-generation college students received from their parents. Semi-structured interviews with 30 first-generation college students, between the ages of 19 and 64, revealed that the messages that students remembered most focused on the following ideas: to remember where they
came from, that family would be there no matter what, and not to worry about their family while they were away (Wang, 2014). This suggests that family can provide support to the first-generation student through the messages they communicate. However, it is important to note that while this qualitative study demonstrated family support among first-generation college students, this may be only true of certain populations. One of the limitations of this study was that, despite the ethnic diversity of the sample being representative of the overall population of the university, the majority (85%) of the participants were Caucasian, and therefore, there was little representation of other ethnic backgrounds, which may have shed light on how messages may differ among minority families.

Incidentally, another qualitative research study conducted by Blackwell and Pinder (2014) drew different conclusions. In this study, the researchers interviewed three African American first-generation college students and compared their interviews to responses to a telephone survey by two African American third-generation college students. The researchers found that while the third-generation college students felt that their family expected them to attend college, the first-generation college students indicated that they were not encouraged by their family to attend college (Blackwell & Pinder, 2014). It is important to note, however, that there were fewer participants included in this study and that the researchers used different methods of data collection for the two groups. Additionally, the participants’ ages in this study ranged from 41 years to 72 years, and therefore, the participants were more removed from their experience since they had attended college years earlier. There does seem to be some quantitative data that suggest that first-generation college students may perceive less social support
than those students that are not first-generation students. One study, which recruited 1,647 college student participants to respond to items related to social support, first-generation college students reported lower levels of family support than non-first-generation students (Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, & Duron, 2011). Unfortunately, this study did not examine the impact of socioeconomic factors or ethnicity, and further research is warranted on how family characteristics impact the perceived support experienced by minority students.

Many students also experience barriers related to financing their college education. Because of the downturn in the economy over the past decade, many nontraditional students (as well as traditional students) are concerned with accruing debt to attend college (Kimmel et al., 2012). As stated previously, the economy can play a major role in these trends. Research has found that nontraditional students who enrolled in the 2010 academic year were more likely to report lower household income and greater levels of concern surrounding payment of student loans than nontraditional college students who enrolled during the 2004 academic year (Kimmel et al., 2012). Research has also indicated higher rates of college delay among individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds (Goldrisk-Rab & Han, 2011), which illustrates specific financial barriers that could pose greater risk to nontraditional college students. According to the NCES (2007), not only were high school graduates from higher income families more likely to enroll in college, but these individuals are also more likely than their lower SES counterparts to enroll immediately upon graduation. Additionally, research by Palardy (2013) also demonstrated that students from higher socioeconomic backgrounds were 68% more likely to enroll in a four-year institution than those from lower socioeconomic
backgrounds. This also suggests that perhaps one reason for delaying enrollment is the inability to finance one’s education. Another possibility is the inherent social capital that comes from being part of a family from a higher socioeconomic status. For instance, parents with higher income or education levels are much more likely to encourage their children to pursue higher education (Veronneau, Hiatt, Fosco, & Diahiion, 2014).

Additionally, the costs of higher education have also risen drastically in recent years, making it much more difficult for a person to finance their college education. According to the NCES (2012), the cost of a public college education rose 42% between 2000 and 2010. Along with that, research by Paulsen and St. John (2002) showed that students coming from lower income backgrounds are much more likely to be employed while attending college, which could introduce multiple obligations for these students as they try to fund their education and maintain academic success. Dwyer, Hodson, and McCloud (2013) found that students who have higher levels of debt are more likely to drop out of college. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that some studies have found financial barriers to be a major reason why students will leave college even after enrolling (Bonham & Luckie, 1993).

Once enrolled, nontraditional students are also more likely to be enrolled part-time in college. This has been shown to decrease the chances that they will successfully complete their college degree (Jacobs & King, 2002; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Taniguchi and Kaufman (2005) noted that the effect of part-time status on degree completion could be due to, in part, decreased access to financial aid, interruptions in education, and decreased interactions with fellow students and instructors. Because part-time students spend less time on campus, they may have more difficulty than traditional
college students in accessing supports within the educational system. In a national sample of 28,000 undergraduate college students in the United States, Graham and Donaldson (1999) found that older students were less likely to be involved in campus activities such as clubs, organizations, and college-sponsored events; additionally, older students spent less time interacting with peers on campus and more likely to be focused on responsibilities at home, such as caring for family (Graham & Donaldson, 1999). Moreover, it may be more difficult for part-time nontraditional students to obtain financial assistance (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005) that can potentially hinder their success in school.

In addition, part-time college students are more likely to be employed full-time (O’Toole, Stratton, & Wetzel, 2003), which could serve as a barrier to success when students have to juggle work and school. In one study (Huie, Winsler, & Kitsantas, 2014) on first-year college students in the United States ($n = 591$), number of hours worked was negatively associated with academic performance. Similarly, Newton, Ghee, and Langmeyer (2013) found that among male and female African American students ($n = 114$) at a large urban university, employment barriers such as work responsibilities were negatively associated with grade point average. Yet another study (Brint & Cantwell, 2010), based on the University of California Undergraduate Experience Survey, found that among a sample of 6,300 students, off-campus employment was negatively related to grade point average. This could help to explain why the time-management strategies of part-time students are predictive of academic success (MacCann, Fogarty, & Roberts, 2012). However, in another study (Mounsey, Vandehey, & Diekhoff, 2013), no significant differences in grade point average were found between working and non-
working university students \((n = 110)\) even though working students reported higher levels of anxiety and stress. The connection between employment and academic achievement may be more complex, as one study (Wang, Kong, Shan, & Vong, 2010) found that, among Chinese undergraduate students \((n = 323)\), having employment related to one’s coursework was positively associated with grade point average while working long hours was negatively associated with grade point average.

Nontraditional students may also have family obligations that can serve as a barrier to accessing and completing higher education. It is important to note that over the last several decades, there has been a substantial increase in women enrolling in higher education. According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2011), between the years of 1971 and 2001, enrollment of women in higher education increased 256%. During the same time frame, enrollment of men increased 110% in higher education (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2011). For many of these female students, one of the more often reported reasons for returning to school is to improve the quality of life for their family (Babineau & Packard, 2006). Nontraditional students who are mothers have also been cited as conveying that returning to school has had positive benefits on their families, which include them serving as a role model to their children, motivating their children in their own schoolwork, as well as the possibility of motivating their children to attend college as well. Yet, they also cite that a negative consequence of them returning to school is that they spend less time with their children as a result (Wilsey, 2013). As a whole, nontraditional students report more obligations in the home than do traditional students (Dill & Henley, 1998). Studies have supported the notion that mothers over the age of 23 are more likely to be enrolled part-time when compared to student mothers.
under the age of 23 (Wilsey, 2013). It may be the case that multiple factors of nontraditional status have a cumulative effect as obstacles to education. Additionally, in one study, researchers found that the number one detrimental factor endorsed by nontraditional students was a sense of feeling conflicted and overwhelmed as a result of multiple role responsibilities (Hybertson, Hulme, Smith, & Holton, 1992). Leveson, McNeil, and Joiner (2013) found that caring for others was one of the reasons students reported for leaving higher education before completing their degree. Studies on the impact of multiple role demands have shown conflicting results, with some studies showing negative impact in terms of anxiety, depression, and stress for the nontraditional student (Backels & Meashey, 1997; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992) and other studies pointing to the possibility for improved sense of well-being (Johnson & Robson, 1999). Research has supported the idea that marriage has no effect on degree completion in higher education. However, divorce can be a factor in the chances of success for a nontraditional student. When individuals experience a divorce, it can result in disadvantages that can hinder a student, including loss of support, financial, and other resources (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Additionally, research has demonstrated that having young children can be an obstacle for both women and men (Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). These multiple roles can impact study skills and self-regulatory behaviors as well. For instance, Prohaska and colleagues (2000) found that there were higher levels of procrastination behaviors (i.e., procrastinating on writing term papers, studying for tests, and keeping up-to-date on weekly reading assignments) among nontraditional students, which may reflect the idea that these students may have
overloaded schedules as they try to juggle all of their responsibilities both in and out of school.

While research is available on some of the barriers experienced by nontraditional students, there is still a limited understanding. Furthermore, because many older research studies defined nontraditional status in such rigid ways, the current literature available may not be appropriate to explain the newly emerging definition of “nontraditional.” Therefore, further research is needed on the nontraditional student experience, particularly with concern to barriers and supports in accessing higher education and succeeding within that domain. Because these factors may influence student perceptions towards education and success, these experiences may provide an understanding into the outcomes of persistence and success for these students. Information gleaned from this research could help improve accessibility and support services for this population of students. Research has supported the idea that nontraditional students report a willingness to utilize services aimed at helping them succeed within a college environment (San et al., 2004). Gaining an understanding of the factors that influence these students’ academic beliefs, barriers, expectations, perceptions, and motivational factors can help institutions tailor intervention services toward the unique needs of these students.

Social Cognitive Career Theory

According to Bandura (1986), social cognitive theory focuses on the interplay between individual characteristics, the behavior one engages in, and the environment. Social cognitive theory holds the agentic perspective (Bandura, 2006), which holds that one acts as an agent over their functioning and the events that stem from their actions. He also distinguishes between three different types of environments that are present for the
individual, including: imposed, selected, and constructed environments (Bandura, 2012). Imposed environments are those that act upon an individual regardless of their desires; however, the individual does have choice in how they perceive or react to that imposed environment. On the other hand, selected environments are those that are purposely chosen, and can influence one’s life. Finally, constructed environments are those that are created by the individual for the purpose of exercising control in their life (Bandura, 2012).

Originally derived from Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, social cognitive career theory examines the triadic reciprocal causation between the individual, behavior, and the environment, and how they influence each other in a reciprocal manner (Zikic & Saks, 2009). Within social cognitive career theory, the three main constructs are self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and personal goals. Within education, one of the major applications of social cognitive career theory is that it can provide a lens for how students develop their interests in an educational setting and how those interests pave the way for academic choices and, later, career choices (Lent & Brown, 1996).

**Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

Self-efficacy refers to a person’s ability and competency beliefs surrounding certain tasks. These beliefs can be influenced by a number of variables including personal accomplishments, vicarious learning, environmental information, physiological variables, and interpersonal factors (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent, Brown, & Hackett, 1994). Because self-efficacy is seen as domain specific (Bandura, 1986; Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991), it is important to parse out academic self-efficacy as it refers to an
individual’s competency beliefs regarding their ability to perform academic tasks at acceptable designated levels of competence (Schunk, 1991; Zimmerman, 1995).

Within the educational realm, self-efficacy beliefs can impact various factors of student development, such as motivation levels and persistence (Bandura, 1989), academic behaviors and choices (Pajares, 1996), exploratory behaviors (Diegelman & Subich, 2001), selection of a college major (Pajares, 1996), and pursuit of certain occupations (Lent et al., 1994). Research has found that students are more likely to choose tasks and options in areas that they feel higher self-efficacy (Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010). Self-efficacy has been shown to have a positive relationship with enjoyment of learning (Pekrun, 2006; Pekrun et al., 2004) as well as an inverse relationship with negative emotions within education, such as test anxiety (Bandalos, Finney, & Geske, 2003; Preiss, Gayle, & Allen, 2006; Putwain & Symes, 2012). Additional research indicates that levels of self-efficacy in adolescence may help predict career achievement in adulthood. For example, one study (Lee & Vondracek, 2014) investigated self-efficacy beliefs among adolescents \( (n = 955) \) and found higher self-efficacy beliefs were related to later career achievement.

While studies are rather limited on the impact of self-efficacy on academic achievement among nontraditional college students, Jameson and Fusco (2014) explored the differences between traditional and nontraditional students in terms of self-efficacy. Participants included undergraduate students \( (n = 226) \) that were classified as either traditional or nontraditional students in terms of age and were measured on variables including math self-efficacy and math anxiety. Findings showed that nontraditional students, by their definition, reported greater levels of math anxiety and lower levels of
math self-efficacy in relation to traditional college students. However, it should be noted that in this particular study, like many, nontraditional status was classified using age alone. Additionally, this particular study did not go on to explore the impact of self-efficacy on academic achievement for these students, leaving a gap in the literature to be explored. Findings such as these lend themselves to questions regarding whether these differences would hold up if a broader definition of nontraditional status were to be used and whether the impact on self-efficacy on academic achievement would look similar for nontraditional students as it does for traditional students.

There has been research to suggest gender and ethnic differences in terms of academic self-efficacy. One study conducted by D’Lima, Winsler, and Kitsantas (2014) administered measures of self-efficacy to 591 freshmen college students at the beginning of their first semester of enrollment. Their results showed that males had higher self-efficacy beliefs than females. Additionally, Asian students had significantly lower levels of academic self-efficacy than did Caucasian students and African American students (D’Lima et al., 2014). Similarly, Peng, Hong, and Mason (2014) found lower levels of self-efficacy among females in comparison to males in a sample of Chinese high school students ($n = 442$).

Additionally, higher levels of academic self-efficacy have been found to be associated with increased self-regulatory abilities (Lee, Lee, & Bong, 2014; Pintrich, 1999). According to Zimmerman (2000), a student’s self-efficacy beliefs can help to motivate them in terms of setting goals, self-monitoring, self-evaluating, and the use of strategies, such as deep learning strategies (Ferla, Valcke, & Schuyten, 2008). Lee et al. (2014) examined interest and self-efficacy in terms of their predictive capabilities on self-
regulation and achievement among middle school students \((n = 500)\) in Seoul, Korea. Findings indicated that academic self-efficacy predicted self-regulation and academic achievement, with grade goals serving as a significant mediating variable in those two relationships.

Self-efficacy has been found to be a significant predictor of engagement, as demonstrated by Pellas (2014) who investigated the connection between self-efficacy and engagement in graduate and postgraduate students \((n = 305)\) in an online learning environment that utilized an online virtual world to complete projects. Another online study conducted by Chang and colleagues (2014) found that internet self-efficacy as measured at the beginning of the semester was related to perceptions of course relevance as well as higher grades on the final examination for the course. In this study, the authors also found a gender difference, with females demonstrating lower levels of internet self-efficacy than females.

In addition, self-efficacy has also been linked to feeling a sense of responsibility about one’s own learning, as was demonstrated by Zimmerman and Kitsantas (2005), who explored the relationship between perceived self-efficacy and homework behaviors. The researchers found that self-efficacy beliefs predicted the quality of completed homework as well as perceived responsibility for learning. Additional path analysis demonstrated that previous achievement predicted academic self-efficacy, which is consistent with other literature (Bandura, 1997; Zeldin, Britner, & Pajares, 2008). While this study was focused on female students \((n = 180)\) in an ethnically diverse middle class parochial high school located in a large city, the results are suggestive that self-efficacy can influence behaviors related to self-regulation.
Kennet, Reed, and Stuart (2013) also found that academic resourcefulness has also been shown to be related to self-efficacy among undergraduate students \((n = 481)\). Academic resourcefulness was defined by the authors as including behaviors such as using positive self-statements, avoiding procrastination, and problem-solving strategies. Findings indicated that students who had higher self-efficacy beliefs were more likely to report better abilities with the academic resourcefulness abilities. In addition, those students were also more likely to report higher adjustment to school.

Furthermore, self-efficacy beliefs have also been shown to be inversely associated with potentially problematic student behaviors such as academic procrastination (Chow, 2011; Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay, 1998; Mirzaei, Gharraee, & Birashk, 2014; Steel, 2007; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Waschle, Allgaier, Lachner, Fink, & Nuckles, 2014; Wolters, 2003) and self-handicapping behaviors (Zabihollahi, Varzaneh, & Lavasani, 2013). Research by Chow (2011) found a strong negative correlation between procrastination and socioeconomic status among Canadian college students \((n = 342)\). In addition, Lowinger, He, Lin, and Chang (2014) found that among a sample of Chinese International students in the United States \((n = 264)\), there was a significant positive relationship between self-efficacy and procrastination among female students. No significant relationship was identified between self-efficacy and procrastination among male students in their sample. Additional findings showed that among female international students, procrastination was positively correlated with culture shock and negatively correlated with English language abilities. Among male international students, procrastination was significantly correlated with discrimination and homesickness (Lowinger, He, Lin, & Chang, 2014). Finally, a meta-analysis conducted by Steel (2007)
which examined 533 sources for predictor variables related to procrastination and found low self-efficacy to be a strong and consistent predictor of procrastination.

In terms of self-handicapping behaviors, Zabihollahi et al. (2013) investigated the link between self-handicapping behaviors and academic self-efficacy among fourth grade students \((n = 387)\) and found that students with lower levels of self-efficacy were more likely to engage in self-handicapping behaviors. In a sample of Canadian university students \((n = 209)\), Gadbois and Sturgeon (2011) found that students with lower self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester demonstrated higher levels of self-handicapping behaviors including rationalizing low performance. Additionally, Odaci (2011) found that among a sample of college students in Turkey \((n = 398)\) between the ages of 18 and 28, academic self-efficacy was negatively associated with problematic internet use, which was characterized as internet use leading to negative consequences including academic consequences, as well as excessive use that could indicate internet dependence. Odaci (2013) found similar results with a sample of university students \((n = 556)\) in Turkey. A number of studies have linked poorer academic outcomes to internet and media use (Chen & Fu, 2009; Chen & Peng, 2008; Englander, Terregrossa, & Wang, 2010; Kernan, Bogart, & Wheat, 2011; Kubey, Lavin, & Barrows, 2001; Wainer et al., 2008; Walsh, Fielder, Carey & Carey, 2013; Wu & Li, 2005). Specifically, in one longitudinal study (Walsh et al., 2013) on media use among female college students during their first year of college \((n = 483)\), participants reported spending approximately 12 hours of media use per day, including using the internet, social media, and texting; research findings indicated that media use was negatively associated with academic outcomes as measured by grade point average. Kubey et al. (2001) found that heavy recreational use of the
internet was associated with poorer academic outcomes among a sample of college students \( n = 576 \) between the ages of 18 and 45. These findings suggest that self-efficacy seems to be related to heavy recreational internet and social media use and that internet and social media use may be related to poorer academic outcomes and may serve as a self-handicapping behavior.

Self-efficacy can also interact with task value information. According to Eccles and Wigfield (2002), individuals tend to become better at tasks that they perceive as having high value. One study (Lee, Bong, & Kim, 2014) investigating the link between academic self-efficacy and task value among high school students \( n = 591 \) coming from low-to middle-income families found that fear of failure significantly explained portions of the variance for defensive pessimism, academic cheating behaviors, procrastination, and self-handicapping behaviors. For students with higher self-efficacy, the tendency to rely on these four strategies was decreased regardless of the value that was associated with a particular task. Additionally, if high value was perceived for a task, students with low self-efficacy were more likely to engage in academic cheating behaviors and procrastination, which was not true of those students who had high self-efficacy (Lee et al., 2014).

Because of this, higher self-efficacy beliefs often lead to better performance (Bandura, 1989) with numerous studies demonstrating the link between higher self-efficacy beliefs and academic performance (Bandura, Barbaranelli, Caprara, & Pastorelli, 1996; Bong, 2005; Pintrich & DeGroot, 1990; Putwain, Sander, & Larkin, 2013; Sins, Van Joolligen, Savelsbergh, & van Hout-Wolters, 2008; Vrugt, Langereis, & Hoogstraten, 1997; Wolters, 2004; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). For instance, in a
more recent study (Putwain et al., 2013), undergraduate first-year college students \( n = 206 \) were given measures of self-efficacy at the beginning of their first semester and found that academic self-efficacy was related to better academic performance as measured at the end of the semester as well as to more positive emotions, such as joy, pride, and enjoyment of learning during the second semester of enrollment. Feldman and Kubota (2014) found that among a sample of college students enrolled in a Northern California university \( n = 89 \), academic self-efficacy was significantly correlated with grade point average. As stated previously, studies exploring self-efficacy in nontraditional students is rather limited. While Jameson and Fusco (2014) explored the differences between traditional and nontraditional college students, they did not explore the impact of self-efficacy on academic achievement for these students and how it may differ from traditional students. Furthermore, their study used age as the only criterion for classifying traditional and nontraditional students; therefore, this study may be rather limited in helping to understand the impact of self-efficacy on nontraditional students through the lens of a broader definition of nontraditional student status.

Furthermore, according to Bandura (1997), self-efficacy can be impeded by failures as well as enhanced through successes. As a student continues to pursue more challenging goals, self-efficacy should also improve (Locke & Latham, 2002). Therefore, it is believed that self-efficacy and successful performance work to reinforce each other over time (Zeldin et al., 2008).

**Outcome Expectations**

Another important construct in social cognitive career theory is outcome expectations, which are beliefs regarding the consequences of one’s actions and
behaviors (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004; Lent et al., 1994). If outcomes are perceived as attractive, it is more likely to motivate the behavior that one believes will lead to that specific outcome (Bandura, 1997). As the theory argues, it is not enough for an individual to have high self-efficacy in a given area if there are poor outcome expectations. For instance, a student may choose to pursue a college education with the expectation that it will lead to good job (Longwell-Grice, 2003). Another possibility is that students may have knowledge of others enrolling in college and succeeding or failing, which might influence their outcome expectations.

While self-efficacy has been researched extensively in terms of various outcome variables, less research is available regarding outcome expectations in relation to persistence and achievement. For instance, among a sample of high school students (n = 289), researchers (Levi, Einav, Ziv, Raskind, & Margalit, 2014) found that grade expectations predicted academic achievement. Perhaps one avenue explaining why this relationship exists is through the notion that academic self-efficacy was found to predict effort, which in turn contributed to hope (Levi et al., 2014).

Research also supports the idea that expectations predict college enrollment choices. For instance, Bates and Anderson (2014) found, using the Educational Longitudinal Study of 2002 data (n = 15,400), that expectations can help predict enrollment in postsecondary education. Moreover, the authors found that students who experienced low achievement in high school, but had high expectations were more likely to enroll in college than students who experienced high achievement and low expectations (Bates & Anderson, 2014).
Expectations for success have also been shown to affect utility value information (Durik, Shechter, Noh, Rozek, & Harackiewicz, 2014). In an empirical study of college students (n = 62), participants were measured on variables including math performance, math interest, and perceived competence in math. Following these baseline measures, participants were randomly assigned to one of two conditions and were taught a new technique for solving math problems. One condition served as the control condition while the other manipulated utility value information to participants, which are perceptions regarding the usefulness of a behavior or task (Eccles et al., 1983). In the group where utility value was directly communicated, participants were told at the beginning of the learning phase that the technique could improve working memory, and as a byproduct, improve their performance in college classes. In the middle of the learning phase, participants were told that the new technique could be used in a variety of occupations, with examples of the usefulness of the technique. At the end of the learning phase, participants were reminded of how the technique could be useful in math courses and future careers. In the control group, the communications of utility value were omitted. Participants were then measured on situational interest and number of problems correctly completed. Results showed that for those participants that had received the utility value communications, performance and interest were higher if their expectancies for success were high. However, if expectancies for success were low, interest in using the new technique was lower. In a follow-up study (Durik et al., 2014), randomly assigned college students (n = 148) to one of two conditions: a control condition and one where researchers gave participants an expectancy boost by telling them that they had “excellent potential” for learning and successfully using the math technique. The found that in the
case of a participant having lower competency beliefs along with an expectancy boost, communicated utility value improved their interest, task involvement, and performance (Durik et al., 2014). This suggests that utility value and expectancies may play a role in effort, which can in turn, influence academic achievement.

While there is some research on the role of outcome expectations, the literature is vastly lacking in this area. This leaves a gap in the literature revolving around one of the major proposed constructs of social cognitive career theory. Moreover, there is no research that explores the role of outcome expectations for nontraditional students in terms of the outcome expectations they hold or how those outcome expectations might influence academic outcomes such as persistence and achievement. Furthermore, it has been suggested that behavior is successful in leading to positive outcome expectations, it will further reinforce self-efficacy beliefs (Lindsley, Brass, & Thomas, 1995). However, there are no empirical studies to support this for nontraditional college students.

**Goals**

Goals refer to decisions toward particular activities, plans, or behaviors (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). These can be thought of as intentions to engage in particular activities (Lent & Brown, 1996) and ways to organize one’s behavior (Lent et al., 1994). Individuals tend to form goals related to activities that are associated with higher self-efficacy and more positive outcome expectations (Lent & Brown, 1996).

According to social cognitive career theory, as children grow, they are exposed to a wide range of different activities and tasks and receive feedback from others as well as their environment regarding their performance on those activities and tasks. This, in turn, influences self-efficacy for these activities. As a result, the individual becomes more
likely to engage in tasks and activities that they have high self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations for, leading to more exposure and practice in those areas, which reciprocally influences self-efficacy. Conversely, individuals tend to avoid activities where they hold low self-efficacy or negative outcome expectations (Lent & Brown, 1996), which also influences self-efficacy and outcome expectations. If self-efficacy is too low and outcome expectations negative (even if inaccurate), a person will avoid those activities (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004). Self-efficacy and outcome expectations can influence interests and goals, and later career choices and occupational behaviors (Zikic & Saks, 2009).

**Barriers and Supports**

Perceptions of barriers and supports are also important within the social cognitive career theory. These perceptions have been shown to influence self-efficacy expectations (Bandura, 2000). According to Bandura (2000), perceptions of barriers and supports are contextual variables that influence self-efficacy expectations. As far as career choices go, interests will only be translated to an occupational choice if barriers are perceived as possible to overcome. If barriers appear too cumbersome, career choices will typically be eliminated even if a person has performed well on occupation related tasks. Poor exposure to efficacy building activities, inaccurate self-efficacy, and outcome expectation beliefs can lead to a narrowing of career interests (Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

Because perceptions of supports and barriers play such a pivotal role in the framework of social cognitive career theory, it seems necessary to examine how perceptions of supports and barriers may differ between traditional and nontraditional students. Nontraditional students face specific challenges in both accessing higher
education and succeeding once they gain access to higher education. Furthermore, these specific barriers to higher education and the challenges that nontraditional students face may pose as barriers and thus, might relate to the major constructs of Social cognitive career theory.

Applications of Social Cognitive Career Theory

Social cognitive career theory has been used as a lens to investigate multiple populations including women (Swanson & Woitke, 1997), immigrants (Yakushko, Backhaus, Watson, Ngaruiya & Gonzalez, 2008), adolescents (Rogers & Creed, 2011), victims of domestic violence (Albaugh & Nauta, 2005; Chronister & McWhirter, 2003; Morris, Shoffner, & Newsome, 2009), and psychiatric populations (Fabian, 2000; Smith & Milson, 2001). Additionally, social cognitive career theory has been a lens in the academic literature, and has been applied to populations including ethnic minority students (Byars-Winston, 2006; Flores, Navarro, & DeWitz, 2008; Flores & O'Brien, 2002; Gainor & Lent, 1998; Gushue & Whitson, 2006; Hackett & Byars, 1996; Navarro, Flores, & Worthington, 2007), lesbian/gay/bisexual/transgender students (Adams, Cahill, & Ackerlind, 2005; Morrow, Gore & Campbell, 1996), and first generation college students (Gibbons & Borders, 2010; Gibbons & Shoffner, 2004).

Related to the current project, social cognitive career theory has been explored in terms of first-generation college students. For instance, Gibbons and Shoffner (2004) discussed how social cognitive career theory can be a beneficial lens in terms of assisting first-generation college students by focusing on four major constructs of the theory: self-efficacy, outcome expectations, goals, and barriers. However, their research in the article was limited to a case study of one 16-year-old African American high school student and
the experiences he faced as he made decisions about attending college. Concluding that article, the authors acknowledged a lack of research in the area of social cognitive career theory and first-generation college students. Gibbons and Borders (2010) investigated aspects of social cognitive career theory among a sample of middle school students ($n = 272$). Variables that were investigated includes self-efficacy for going to college, outcome expectations, perceived support, and perceived barriers to attending college. Findings indicated that prospective first-generation college students experienced more barriers to going to college, lower self-efficacy, and lower outcome expectations.

While social cognitive career theory has been proposed as a lens to view students in higher education, empirical support for this application is lacking. While two articles discussed the applications of this theory to first-generation college students, quality research to back up those decisions is not existent. Beyond that, there is no specific research on how nontraditional students fit into this theoretical framework and how their experiences may be impacting the major constructs of social cognitive career theory. Using an expanded definition of nontraditional students, there is no clear evidence of these constructs and how they impact the experiences of the nontraditional student, leading to a significant gap in empirical research to support the application of this theory.

**Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory is another theoretical framework that might help explain some of the variability among nontraditional students’ persistence and achievement. Research has demonstrated that attributional thinking style does indeed impact such variables as persistence (Banks & Woolfson, 2008; Carr, Borowski, & Maxwell, 1991). Attribution theory, like social cognitive theory, focuses strongly on cognitions and perceptions. This
theory focuses on how a person thinks about an event (Weiner, 1985) and focuses on the idea that individuals think like scientists in an attempt to understand events that occur, and; this in turn influences their subsequent behaviors (Weiner, 2000). Attribution theory emphasizes an individual’s beliefs regarding control and competence (Wigfield & Cambria, 2010) and focuses on the individual’s need to explain events that occur in their lives (Weiner, 1985), which may help to explain some of the processes that students experience in the face of failure. According to Weiner (1979), attributions are not made in isolation of one another; instead, individuals develop attributional patterns that influence how they behave. Furthermore, understanding what makes us successful can allow us to repeat success while understanding what has made us fail will allow us to attempt to avoid failure in the future (Weiner, 1980). While Weiner (1980) includes four attributional factors (ability, effort, task difficulty, and luck) as well as three dimensions of attributions (locus, stability, and controllability), the main component of this theory that will be examined in this research is perceived control, which is inherently related to locus of control.

Locus focuses on the origin of cause and whether the origin is internal to the person or external (Weiner, 1986). Effort and ability are seen as internal causes while task difficulty and luck are seen as external causes (Weiner, 2000). When an individual attributes the causes of success to an internal origin, it can result in increased self-esteem; in contrast, if a person experiences failure and attributes the causes of that failure to an internal origin, it can result in feelings such as guilt or shame (Wong & Weiner, 1981). For instance, if a student receives a good grade on an exam, they will feel pride if they perceive that the high grade is due to something that is inherent about them, whether they
have the inherent ability, or put forth the effort to get the good grade. In contrast, if they perceive the causes as external (such as the teacher only giving good grades or the test being remarkably easy), it would not result in the same feelings of pride. On the other hand, if a student experiences a low grade on an exam and attributes their failure to their lack of ability or effort, they might feel negative emotions as a result (Weiner, 2000).

Locus of control may also be related to the decision to pursue further education; Landrum (2010) found that among senior year psychology majors ($n = 348$), those with an internal locus of control were more likely to consider applying to graduate school.

Arazzini Stewart and De George-Walker (2014) examined the constructs of locus of control and perfectionism among a sample of college students ($n = 79$) and found that together, perfectionism and having an external locus of control predicted self-handicapping behaviors such as lack of effort and procrastination. Among a sample of online college students ($n = 897$), Joo, Lim, and Kim (2013) found that along with self-efficacy, locus of control and task value were able to significantly predict learner satisfaction; locus of control was not found to be a significant predictor of persistence (Joo et al., 2013). Similarly, Parameswari and Shamala (2012) found that among a sample of engineering students ($n = 470$), locus of control was not significantly related to academic motivation. Another study (Aspelmeier, Love, McGill, Elliot, & Pierce, 2012) of undergraduate students ($n = 322$) found that first-generation college students had small, marginally significant differences in locus of control with continuing generation students attributing more of their failures to ability as well as more of their achievement to external factors such as luck. Internal locus of control was not found to be a significant predictor of academic achievement as measured by grade point average, while external
locus of control was found to be weakly associated with achievement (Aspelmeier et al., 2012). Desle (2011) examined the differences between high-achieving college students and low-achieving college students \((n = 408)\) and found that high achievers were more likely to have internal locus of control while low achievers were more likely to attribute causes of success and failure to external sources such as chance or other people. In one qualitative study on Latino and Latina students \((n = 11)\) in higher education (Cavazos et al., 2010), all participants reported that they felt in control of their academic outcomes and expressed an internal locus of control, attributing their academic outcomes to effort.

Controllability refers to how much one feels capable of influencing outcome events; if individuals feel that they have control, they can alter their behavior, but if one feels that they have no control, they may feel helpless in the face of the future (Weiner, 1985). Within attribution theory, the only factor that is completely under one’s control is effort (Hunter & Barker, 1987). Therefore, this seems to be a particularly salient component of attribution theory that warrants further consideration within the realm of education.

Arguably, the most influential component of attribution theory to academic persistence and achievement has been the dimension of control. Perceived control has been an important and central part of attribution theory (Weiner, 2008). Perceived control involves perceptions of a link between an individual’s behaviors and outcomes (Perry, Hladkyj, Pekrun, & Pelletier, 2001), and is the extent to which an individual believes that they have the capacity to control events in their lives (Skinner, 1996; Stupinsky, Perry, Hall, & Guay, 2012). It has been shown to play a role in academic persistence (Cervone & Peake, 1986; Joo, Young, & Sim, 2011; Nunez, Gonzalez-Pumarega, Roces, Alvarez,
& Gonzalez, 2005), motivation (Martinez, 2003), self-regulated learning (You & Kang, 2014), and academic achievement (Meece et al., 1990; Perry et al., 2001; Ruthig et al., 2008). Additionally, perceived academic control has been shown to have an inverse relationship with boredom (Perry et al., 2001; Stupinsky, Perry, Renaud, & Hladkyj, 2013), anxiety (Pekrun et al., 2004; Stupinsky et al., 2013), procrastination (Howell, Watson, Powell, & Buro, 2006), and attrition (Morris, Wu, & Finnegan, 2005). Students who attribute events to something that is not under their control tend to be more pessimistic about their success (Nunez et al., 2005) and tend to be more likely to struggle academically (Schmulsky & Gobbo, 2007). This could be due to the idea that attribution styles influence students’ feelings, which leads them to behave in a certain manner (Weiner, 1979). Furthermore, studies have also shown that low academic control can moderate effective instructional strategies, suggesting that this variable could impact the ability of students to benefit from instruction, pedagogy, and interventions aimed at helping them succeed (Perry, 1991).

In one study (Ferla et al., 2008), freshmen college students \( n = 473 \) were asked to report on cognitions including academic self-efficacy, conceptions of learning, and attributions for success in their academics. Students that were found to have a reproductive learning conception (defined as a focus on learning as memorization) were more likely to attribute academic outcomes to uncontrollable sources. In contrast, students who were found to have a constructive learning conception (defined as a focus on learning as understanding) were more likely to attribute academic outcomes to effort, have higher levels of self-efficacy, and demonstrate higher self-regulation abilities. It
should be noted, however, that a large majority of the sample in this study was female \(n = 473\); therefore, male students were largely underrepresented.

Stupinsky et al. (2012) examined the construct of perceived academic control among first-year college students \(n = 242\). Findings indicated that students with higher levels of perceived control were more likely to have higher grades in their classes. In another study, You, Hong, and Ho (2011) investigated perceived academic control among a large representative sample of the United States adolescent population. Findings indicated that perceived academic control in grade eight significantly predicted academic achievement four years later in grade 12 for all ethnic groups represented in the study. However, the Asian American students in the study had more of a tendency to attribute success to the influence of other people, which the authors suggested might be a byproduct of a more collectivist culture. Perceived control was also found to significantly predict behavioral engagement in academics as well as time spent on homework (You et al., 2011). In line with these findings, Fishman (2014) found that perceived academic control was related to higher levels of student responsibility in a sample of undergraduate college students \(n = 152\). Similarly, Perry et al. (2001) found that among a sample of college students \(n = 524\), students that reported higher levels of perceived academic control were more likely to exert more effort toward their academics, believe that they were more in control of course assignments, use better self-regulation strategies (such as self-monitoring), exhibit more motivation, and received higher grades at the end of the semester in comparison to students that scored lower on perceived academic control.

Ruthig and colleagues (2008) found a similar relationship between perceived academic control at the beginning of the academic year and grade point average at the
end of the academic year in a sample of first-year university students (n = 620). In addition, the researchers found that students with higher perceived academic control demonstrated greater amounts of positive emotions and lower amounts of negative emotions in the academic context. Together, low perceived academic control as well as negative emotions predicted higher rates of attrition in these students. In line with this, perceived academic control has been found to negatively correlated with boredom and anxiety (Perry et al., 2001). Stupinsky et al. (2013) also found an inverse relationship between perceived academic control and feelings of boredom and anxiety in a sample of first-year college students, utilizing the Motivation and Academic Achievement (MAACH) database (n = 14,000).

Given that educational attributions can influence behavior (Weiner, 2000), this may help to explain the persistence and achievement of students above and beyond the constructs of social cognitive career theory. While the literature points to an important contribution of the dimension of controllability to behavior, the research is still lacking in how this construct might play a role in the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students specifically given that the majority of studies have been conducted on other populations and none have specifically examined the impact within the broader definition of nontraditional student status that is used here. Given the connections cited in the literature between perceived academic control, student responsibility, self-regulation, affective components, and academic achievement, it seems to reason that this might be an important factor in explaining the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students. This could also serve as a line of intervention given that effort is the one factor of attribution theory that is completely under individual control.
Academic Persistence of Nontraditional Students

One of the important, but difficult, questions within higher education is why some students are able to persist while others are not. There are a number of factors that appear to be related to academic persistence in higher education. First, research has shown that students who are successful academically in high school, as measured by grades and class ranking, are more likely to be successful in college (Pascarella, Duby, & Iverson, 1993). However, for nontraditional students, it may have been years since they were in the role of student, which can lead them to feel overwhelmed. Furthermore, a delay in college enrollment seems to be related to higher rates of attrition (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005; Jacobs & King, 2002).

Second, financial barriers seem to play a big role in ability to persist in higher education, with research showing that individuals from lower socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to access higher education (NCES, 2007; Palardy, 2013). Once they do enroll, level of debt seems to be related to withdrawing from higher education, particularly for male students (Dwyer et al., 2013).

Part-time enrollment status has also been shown in the literature to negatively impact successful completion of college (Jacobs & King, 2002; Taniguchi & Kaufman, 2005). Research supports the idea that nontraditional students can feel overwhelmed and conflicted due to facing too many conflicting responsibilities between school and home (Backels & Meashey, 1997; Hybertson et al., 1992; Leveson et al., 2013; Mallinckrodt & Leong, 1992). This can impact their decision to leave school before they complete their degree. In addition, perceptions of academic work-load being too great will lead students to doubt whether they should continue with higher education (Xuereb, 2014).
While there is research on academic persistence among students in higher education, it is important to note that student demographics are shifting and that the increase in nontraditional students in higher education may impact the persistence literature. Specifically, a newer population of students that are entering into higher education with built in vulnerabilities that previous research has shown to be related to decreased persistence. Thus, it will be important to understand how these factors play out for these students in terms of their ability to be successful in pursuing higher education, along with other motivational factors that have been explored with more traditional college students.

**Application to the Current Study**

The importance of self-efficacy beliefs has been widely supported in the literature investigating persistence and academic performance. Additionally, there is also a wealth of evidence that suggests that perceived control and attributional thinking style play a role in academic persistence and achievement. The commonality here is that both of these factors influence how students perceive their abilities in terms of education. Therefore, it seems to reason that the way students think about themselves and outcomes may influence the way that they behave, which relates to behaviors such as persistence. However, while these variables have been examined in depth with many populations, there is little research on how these factors might influence nontraditional students in their pursuit of higher education. Additionally, there is also little evidence of other factors that might influence nontraditional students and their persistence and achievement in higher education.
It seems clear from existing trends in higher education that the demographic of the college student is shifting. Due to a variety of factors, the student population in higher education doesn't look like it used to and we are seeing a broader array of students entering college and university campuses. However, it may be possible that these constructs apply in different ways to these students or that other constructs may better explain why some students succeed and some do not. Furthermore, it may even be possible that empirically sound interventions may not be applicable to these students in the same way due to the unique demands upon nontraditional students and more tailored interventions may be necessary in helping these students navigate the college environment.

Therefore, in the current study, I hoped to investigate the broader population of nontraditional students to examine social-cognitive factors that might play a role in their persistence and achievement in higher education. In determining whether the constructs of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, perceived academic control, and perceptions of supports and barriers are applicable to this population in terms of persistence and achievement, further research can be designed to investigate the unique experiences of these students and subsequent interventions can be designed to help improve their ability to both access higher education and succeed once they do enroll.
CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a mixed-method procedure with two phases (Phase I and Phase II) that was conducted sequentially. The first phase of the study (Phase I) took a quantitative approach with two time points, whereby participants were recruited to complete a questionnaire at the start of their first semester and involved collecting outcome variables at the end of the students’ first semester of enrollment, such as enrollment status, persistence and grade point average. The second phase of the study (Phase II) was qualitative in nature and included recruiting participants for interviews lasting approximately thirty minutes to one hour in length to explore additional issues that could have played a role in both persistence and achievement.

For the current study, I investigated the factors that played a role in persistence and achievement among nontraditional college students. While social cognitive career theory (SCCT) has been applied to a number of domains, and with various populations, to my knowledge, it has never been applied to nontraditional students, particularly with the broader definition of nontraditional that was used for the current study. Additionally, while perceived academic control has been found to be an important variable in terms of educational success, this is another variable that lacks scientific findings for the nontraditional student community. My hypothesis was that social-cognitive processes can help to explain some of the differences between students that persist in higher education
and those that do not. If this is the case, it seems to reason that interventions can be formed upon enrollment to a college or university that would help to address some of the social-cognitive issues that play a role in success or failure for nontraditional students. To explore these factors, I utilized a mixed-methods research design to investigate the main constructs of self-efficacy and outcome expectations within SCCT to examine whether this might be an appropriate lens to view nontraditional students and to predict their level of academic persistence and achievement. Additionally, I explored the role of perceived academic control in regards to students’ persistence and achievement. In order to do this, I administered measures to incoming students at a local community college upon enrollment. Participants, setting, measures, and procedures are explained. The data from the quantitative portion of this study was used to purposefully sample individuals from the subgroups identified for the qualitative analysis was used to answer subsequent research questions. In addition, methods for analyzing both the quantitative and qualitative data are discussed.

**Participants**

The target population for both phases of the current study was newly enrolled students at a local community college in the Western United States. The college is a fully accredited, public, two-year college. For Phase I of the study, participants were recruited during the first two weeks of their first semester of enrollment. This phase of the study aimed to recruit between 100 and 200 participants, and I ended up recruiting a total of 236 students, all of which were beginning at the college as a newly enrolled student or were beginning a new program. Of those students, a subsample of 145 reported no previous history of college enrollment.
Phase I of the study included two time points. The first time point was at the beginning of the first semester of enrollment to the community college or program. This took place during the first two weeks of the semester. Participants were recruited from lower level classes (introductory level classes as well as remedial classes) as well as through a program that is designed to assist new college students that have college preparatory needs. At this time, participants completed measures including demographic information (see Appendix A), self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. These measures were completed prior to the end of the first two weeks of their first semester of enrollment. Time point two took place following the conclusion of the participants’ first semester of enrollment when data were collected regarding their grade point average, enrollment status (number of credit hours), class load, and persistence. During the first time point of Phase I, participants provided contact information for purposes of carrying out Phase II of the study. Contact information included a name and an email address that was associated with the college. In accordance with Institutional Review Board (IRB; see Appendix B) standards, this contact information was provided on a voluntary basis.

For Phase II of the study, the original participants were separated into three categories following the end of the first semester of enrollment. The three categories were as follows: (a) students who do not persist (as measured by stop-out or withdraw), (b) students who persist, but are not academically successful (defined as those placed on academic probation at the end of the semester due to having a grade point average of 2.0 or lower), and (c) students who persist and are academically successful (defined as students who earn an adequate grade point average so as not to be placed on academic
probation). Once participants were placed in these categories, I separated students into quadrants based on their reported self-efficacy scores at the beginning of the semester. I then randomly selected students from each quadrant to represent high and low scores of self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester in order to interview for the second phase of the study. The goal was that three participants from each of these subgroups would be selected for a total of six participants in each of the three student outcome groups, resulting in a total of eighteen participants for Phase II of the study. However, due to the withdrawal student group having very low numbers, it was only possible to contact five students from that group; therefore, all students that were contacted were interviewed.

For the group of students that was placed on academic probation, a total of six students were interviewed, which consisted of all students that were willing to provide an interview following the semester. Finally, for the group of students that were academically successful in their first semester, a total of nine students were interviewed. These participants were contacted for a follow-up interview using the contact information that they provided during Phase I of the study. The interview explored their perceptions regarding their experience in higher education, in respect to the perceived supports and barriers. Participants in Phase II of the study also complete a re-test of the measures that were completed at the beginning of the semester (Phase I) to determine if there were changes in self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control over the course of their first semester of enrollment. Because qualitative research is focused on the extent of the richness of the information that is derived from the data (Kuzel, 1992), it was important to consider at this point if saturation has been met in the
data; research studies have demonstrated that these numbers can be sufficient in terms of
data saturation in qualitative research (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006).

**Setting**

The setting for this study is a fully accredited, public, two-year college, which maintains four campuses. The main campus has been in the community for over 45 years and the college also maintains three satellite campuses in surrounding communities. Because the college offers the lowest tuition in the area, it tends to attract students from a wide range of socioeconomic backgrounds. Approximately half of the students are enrolled full-time while the other half are part-time students. Upon enrollment, students are required to take a placement test to determine appropriate classes based on reading comprehension skills, sentence skills, and mathematics. These placement tests are computer based and are proctored through the college testing center on the main campus. Students with remedial needs are placed in a program that is aimed at helping students who have college preparatory needs adjust to college. Participant recruitment took place in the first two weeks of the semester when students were recruited to participate in the study by completing a series of measures related to their demographic data, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control.

**Instrumentation**

As this was a mixed methods study, both quantitative and qualitative data were collected to answer the research questions proposed in this study. Quantitative data were collected in terms of students’ self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control as well as their status based on persistence and achievement at the end of their first semester. Qualitative data were also collected in the second phase of the
study focused on other cognitive factors related to experience in higher education in terms of perceptions of supports and barriers.

**Individual Factors**

In line with the research questions proposed, I sought to measure the between-groups differences in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, perceived academic control, and demographic characteristics. These variables are seen as pre-existing variables upon a college student’s enrollment, and therefore, were measured at the beginning of their first semester of enrollment. In addition, I also explored whether outcomes at the end of the semester (persistence and achievement) could be predicted by these individual factors.

**Demographic characteristics.** In order to gain a better picture of the characteristics of students entering a local community college, I collected demographic information, which included variables such as age, gender, employment status, number of hours worked per week and enrollment status (number of semester hours). This was aimed at helping to provide a picture of the students that are enrolled at this particular community college, which helped to address the first research question. Additionally, this was to determine whether some characteristics of nontraditional students lead to more vulnerability in higher education, which helped to answer the second research question.

**Self-efficacy.** Self-efficacy was measured through means of the Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance Subscale (see Appendix C) of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ) for college students (Pintrich, Smith, Garcia, & McKeachie, 1991). This scale consists of eight items that center on students’ beliefs about confidence in their academic abilities. Students were asked to respond to the items on a seven-point scale ranging from “not at all true of me” to “very true of me.” The
Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire has been shown to have good internal reliability (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ ranged from 0.70 to 0.93) as well as good predictive validity (del Carmen Ramirez Dorantes, Canto y Rodrigues, Bueno-Alvarez, & Echazarreta-Moreno, 2013; Erturan Ilker, Arslan, & Demirhan, 2014; Phan, 2014; Pintrich et al., 1993) with various demographics. However, the only study found that has used this sub scale specifically with nontraditional students was a dissertation (Jacobson, 2000) that explored the differences between traditional and nontraditional students with age as the only differentiating factor (with nontraditional status defined as anyone over the age of 22 years). Conclusions drawn from that dissertation included that the instrument was appropriate for that population. This sub-scale has not been used in a study that specifically examines nontraditional students using the broader definition that I am using here.

**Outcome expectations.** Outcome expectations was measured using a brief five-item scale that was designed for the purpose of this study (see Appendix D). To date, there has been no scale proposed that reasonably measures outcome expectations; therefore, it was necessary to construct a scale for the purpose of this study. Items were rated on a 5-point Likert-scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree.” Items included statements such as (a) Going to college will help me meet my educational goals, (b) I will be successful in college this semester, (c) Going to college is going to be a waste of time, (d) Going to college will help me meet my career goals, and (e) I will do well in college this semester.

**Perceived academic control.** Perceived academic control was measured through the Perceived Academic Control Scale (PCAS; Perry et al., 2001). The scale consists of
eight items rated on a five point Likert-scale ranging from “strongly disagree” to “strongly agree” (see Appendix E). Items cover beliefs about whether academic performance is due to something that the student has control over. The scale has been found to have adequate internal consistency (Cronbach’s $\alpha$ ranged from .76 to .81 in previous studies; Perry et al., 2001; You & Kang, 2014). Research studies that have utilized this scale have predominantly focused on first-year university students in Canada and the United States. No studies have utilized this scale for purposes of investigating nontraditional students, particularly with the broadened definition proposed here.

**Outcome Variable**

For this study, participants were placed into three separate categories following the end of their first semester. These categories include (a) students who did not persist (defined as withdrawing from all courses), (b) students who persisted, but are not academically successful (defined as those placed on academic probation at the end of the semester due to a GPA of 2.0 or lower), and (c) students who persisted and are academically successful (defined as students who earn an adequate grade point average so as not to be placed on academic probation). The purpose of categorizing the students at the end of their first semester of enrollment was to explore the differences between these groups in terms of pre-existing characteristics including self-efficacy beliefs, perceived academic control, and demographic information.

**Qualitative Protocol**

While I believed that social-cognitive factors play a significant role in the ability to persist and succeed in higher education, I did not believe that it accounts for all of the factors that play a role in these two outcomes (persistence and achievement) for
nontraditional students. Therefore, a qualitative approach was used to help further explain some of the cognitive variables of self-efficacy and perceived academic control as well as other domains that would be hard to investigate using a quantitative approach. By separating students into the three distinct categories explained above, it allowed for the exploration regarding some of these influences through a phenomenological approach in respect to other potential factors that might influence academic success for non-traditional students. Also, by examining the three different groups, I was able to investigate whether there are potential differences expressed between the groups regarding supports and barriers.

A phenomenological approach seemed to be the most appropriate to the research questions of the study as it is important to understand the shared experiences of the nontraditional students that make up each of the three distinct student groups. This is a goal well suited to phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Using a phenomenological approach was aimed at helping me to understand emerging themes in the nontraditional students’ shared experience while exploring three separate groups of nontraditional students regarding the perceived success or failure of their first semester. Additionally, a phenomenological design has the benefit of being able to inform practice (Creswell, 2013), such as administrative policies and pedagogy through a discussion of the themes that emerge from these experiences. In doing this, I examined the shared experience of students within the three proposed groups and compare and contrast those themes to help better understand what might make the difference between success and failure in higher education. The theoretical approach that was used is constructionism, which refers to the idea that knowledge is not based on an objective reality, but is constructed by individuals
instead. Part of the construction of reality takes place through social interactions (Crotty, 1998), and so it was my goal to understand the perceptions that students hold.

**Data Analysis**

As this was a mixed methods study, the data analysis included both quantitative components as well as qualitative components, with the quantitative analysis addressing the first three questions and the qualitative analysis addressing the final research question. My first research question pertained to the characteristics of students entering a local community college. To answer this question, descriptive analyses were conducted on the demographic data obtained from incoming students at the beginning of their first semester. I also generated descriptive statistics for the measures of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. For the demographic data, descriptive statistics were used to report the mean and range of self-reported ages of participants. Additionally, descriptive statistics were broken down for each of the three student groups listed above. Also, I descriptively investigated the number of factors that each student selects for categorizing nontraditional status. Finally, I generated frequency rates for students in each of the three outcome groups to determine the rates of these three distinct outcomes.

My second research question focused on the differences between the three outcome groups in terms of demographic characteristics, self-efficacy beliefs, and perceived academic control. In order to answer these research questions, a MANOVA was used to analyze the differences between the three groups. A MANOVA is an appropriate statistical technique in this instance because it is designed to measure differences between groups in regard to a number of related variables (Tabachnick &
In this MANOVA, the dependent variables that were examined included age, number of hours of employment per week, number of credit hours of enrollment, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. The independent variable was the grouping variable of student outcome group membership.

One of the advantages of using a MANOVA to answer this research question is that I could test for main effects of the independent variables. However, it was important to test MANOVA assumptions before running this analysis to determine if the assumptions of MANOVA have been met. The first important consideration is that in MANOVA, it is necessary to have more cases than dependent variables in every cell due to the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices as well as ensuring power of the analysis (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Because I had nine independent variables, I needed, at minimum, ten cases for each of the three student outcomes to ensure power of my analysis. However, while I aimed to collect many more participants than the minimum requirement, it was important to pay attention to the numbers in each of the three student outcome groups, particularly the group that I anticipated having the fewest amount of participants, which is the group that consists of those participants that withdraw from the college. In the end, I was able to meet this assumption by having a minimum of 10 students in each group. However, as predicted, the numbers in the withdrawal outcome group were quite low. The next assumption that had to be met for this statistical procedure is multivariate normality, meaning that the dependent variable distributions of means are normally distributed (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

Additionally, MANOVA is sensitive to outliers, which can produce a Type I or Type II error (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), so it was important to test for outliers. Next, the
assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices must be met, which means that the dependent variable as well as covariances exhibit equal variance across the predictor variables (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013), which can be tested for using statistical software. MANOVA also assumes linearity, meaning that there are linear relationships for dependent variables and covariates in each cell; non-linearity can reduce the power of the statistical procedure (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). Additionally, it was important to be cautious of multicollinearity as this can produce redundancy in the analysis; therefore, it was important to assess multicollinearity between the dependent variables and reduce any redundancy that results by identifying and dropping redundant variables; in the event that a decision is made to retain all dependent variables, principal component analysis must be done (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013).

My third research question sought to examine whether outcome group membership could be predicted by various individual factors, such as demographic characteristics, self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. This was another way of looking at the relationship between the demographic characteristics, social-cognitive characteristics, and student outcomes in a meaningful manner. Whereas the previous research question sought to examine group differences in student outcomes with regards to these variables, this research question proposes to examine the predictive value that those variables may have in terms of the outcome of a student’s first semester. This gives a more well-rounded examination of how these variables fit into the outcomes that a student may experience. An added advantage of this research question over the previous is that it provides directionality in looking at this relationship. One additional difference in this statistical analysis over the previous
analysis was that student outcome groups were combined to form two mutually exclusive groups: students who completed the semester successfully and those who did not. For the purpose of this analysis, students who withdrew from all classes and students who were placed on probation formed the group of students who did not successfully complete the semester. Students who earned a GPA of at least 2.0 formed the group of students who did complete the semester successfully. In order to examine this research question, I utilized the statistical analysis procedure of binomial logistic regression. This statistical procedure aims to predict placement into a categorical membership of two categories (successful completion versus unsuccessful completion) based on multiple independent variables that may be discrete, dichotomous, continuous, or a combination (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2013). In this statistical analysis, the independent variables included the predictor variables of age, semester hours, gender, number of work hours, language abilities, first-year status, and nontraditional student criteria for the first three models which examined the whole sample of students. I also ran three models for the subsample of students that were in their first semester of college with the predictor variables of semester hours, gender, work hours, language abilities, age, nontraditional student status.

While I suspected, based on some of the previous research, that some of the individual factors would help predict membership in the student outcome groups, it was unlikely that all of the individual factors I identified together would help to explain much of the variance in group membership. Because of this, I utilized qualitative methods to help fill in some of the gaps in my quantitative data, which were aimed at answering my final research question. The purpose of the qualitative portion of this study was to examine and better understand the nontraditional student experience and the additional
factors that may play a role in persistence and achievement. To do this, I examined the self-efficacy scores and categorized them into four quadrants so that I could ensure selection of students from each quadrant to ensure representation of pre-semester self-efficacy scores. As explained previously, I aimed to have three outcome groups with six participants to each group for a total of eighteen participants.

I felt that using phenomenology would best help me to address the last research question I sought to answer. This research question focused on understanding the shared experience of students in each of the outcome groups, a goal which is well suited to phenomenology (Creswell, 2013). Using a phenomenological approach helped me to understand the themes that emerge in each of these outcome groups so that I could better understand the shared experience of those students who are able to persist and succeed, those who persisted but did not succeed, and those who did not persist. Additionally, a phenomenological study has the benefit of being able to inform practice (Creswell, 2013), and therefore may help to inform pedagogy and administrative policies by discussing the themes that emerge from the participants’ shared experience in each of these outcome groups.

I also used the theoretical approach of constructionism, which focuses on the notion that knowledge is not based in objective reality, but instead is constructed by individuals and that part of this construction takes place through social interactions (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, for qualitative analysis, it was my goal to understand the perceptions of students in terms of barriers, supports, and beliefs regarding education. It was not my goal to evaluate the accuracy of those perceptions, but rather, to facilitate that participant perspective by exploring their perceptions of their own experience.
Researcher’s Personal Stance

In qualitative research, it is also important to examine the researcher’s personal stance. Therefore, prior to data analysis, I examined my own personal stance with regards to education and the population of nontraditional students. My interest in nontraditional students began while I was teaching at a local community college in rural Illinois. At the time, there was a mass closure of a factory in the community and many residents of the community lost their jobs and made the choice to return to higher education. It was because of this that the demographics shifted considerably within the community college where I was working. This is how I became interested in how educators can help those students succeed in higher education. My interest has been maintained by the fact that I have continued to work as a psychology instructor at a local community college, which happens to be the college that is the focus of this research. Therefore, I have had contact with nontraditional students in this setting and have had experience with some of their barriers and supports. Throughout my years working with nontraditional students, I have maintained interest in how educators can help nontraditional students succeed in higher education. Perhaps nontraditional students have unique needs that can be met through changes in pedagogy or administrative policies. Because I have personal experience in educating nontraditional students, as well as the fact that I would have, by my definitions, met the criteria for a nontraditional student (being a first-generation student), it was important to engage in bracketing in order to remove my own experiences and fully hear the participant’s lived experience (Creswell, 2013) so that I could limit the presence of my own bias in my qualitative analysis.
The qualitative data consisted of a purposeful sampling of participants from each of the three outcome groups. The aim was to sample at least six participants from each of the three outcome groups. In the end, I interviewed five students who had withdrawn, six students who were placed on academic probation, and eight students who successfully completed the semester, for a total of 19 students. Interviews followed a semi-structured interview format with topics focusing on various perceptions that students had regarding their experience in higher education. Interviews were recorded and transcribed. I then went through each of the 19 interviews and highlighted important statements and quotations that provided an understanding of the experience of participants. From this process, clusters of meaning (Creswell, 2013), or themes, were derived through the process of content analysis of the interview transcripts. The important statements and quotations that illustrate each theme were organized and the most illustrative ones were chosen to include in the results section. The qualitative analysis helped serve as a means to further understand the experience of students in each of the three outcome groups.
CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics

Descriptive statistics were generated, first for the full sample of participants and then for the group with no prior college experience, in order to address the first research question:

Q1 What are the characteristics of students at a local community college?

This also allowed me to investigate specific questions about the characteristics of the students in my sample, including the social-cognitive characteristics of students in terms of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control as well as the distinct outcomes for students enrolling in their first semester of community college.

Full Sample

In total, 236 students participated in the first phase of the study. All students in the full sample were beginning at the college as newly enrolled students, or were beginning a new program. Over half of the students (n = 137, 58.1%) were female from 18 to 64 years old with a mean of 26.21 years (SD = 10.314). For the full sample, the vast majority (n = 191, 80.9%) indicated that English was their first language. Over half (n = 125, 53%) reported their race/ethnicity as Caucasian/White. The next highest race/ethnicity represented in the full sample was Hispanic/Latino (n = 66, 28%), followed by African American (n = 10, 4.2%), Asian (n = 7, 3.0%), and Native American/Alaskan
Native \((n = 1, 0.4\%)\). The remaining 11.4\% \((n = 27)\) reported more than one race/ethnicity.

In terms of nontraditional criteria, most participants \((n = 137, 58.1\%)\) were age 24 or less, meaning that they did not meet the age criteria for “nontraditional status”. However, I found that the vast majority of students \((n = 220, 93.2\%)\) met at least one of the nontraditional criteria other than age. Thus, by using age as the only criterion for nontraditional status, 83 participants would have been excluded from nontraditional status, which accounted for 37.7\% of nontraditional students in my sample. The mean number of nontraditional criteria endorsed was 2.68 \((SD = 1.543)\). However, in comparing the two age groups (those age 24 or less versus those over age 24), it was discovered that the groups did not differ significantly on measures of self-efficacy \((t = -.082 (220), p = .935)\), outcome expectations \((t = -.263 (223), p = .793)\), or perceived academic control \((t = -.515 (223), p = .607)\). Table 1 provides the number of nontraditional criteria endorsed and Table 2 provides the break-down of nontraditional criteria endorsed by the full-sample participants in the study.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Criteria</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>6.8</td>
<td>6.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>26.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>46.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>22.0</td>
<td>68.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>16.5</td>
<td>85.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>12.7</td>
<td>97.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2.1</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 2

*Nontraditional Criteria Other Than Age Endorsed By Full-Sample*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nontraditional Criteria</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delay in enrollment</td>
<td>124</td>
<td>52.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Independence</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>63.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>35.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents (other than spouse)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>27.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack traditional high school diploma</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>20.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Over half of the full sample \((n = 124, 52.5\%)\) reported a delay in enrollment of at least one year after high school. Roughly 63\% \((n = 149)\) indicated that they were considered to be financially independent from their parents, meaning that they are responsible for their own bills (including education expenses), are not covered by their parents’ health insurance, and are not claimed on their parents’ federal income taxes. The majority of students \((n = 161, 68.2\%)\) reported working while attending school. As stated previously, 35.2\% \((n = 83)\) of participants reported current full-time employment, while 33.1\% \((n = 78)\) reported current part-time employment; the remaining 31.8\% \((n = 75)\) were unemployed. Of those reporting employment, the mean number of hours reported was 31.93 hours per week, with a range of 5 to 70 hours per week. Approximately 27\% \((n = 64)\) of the full sample of participants indicated that they have dependents other than a spouse. Of the full sample, 20.3\% \((n = 48)\) did not have a traditional high school diploma, received a GED or other high school completion certificate. A small portion \((n = 21, 8.9\%)\) reported that they were a veteran of the military or armed services.

Of the full sample, 22.5\% of participants \((n = 53)\) earned a first-semester grade point average of less than 2.0, putting them on academic probation. Twelve students
(5.1%) withdrew from all classes. The remaining 72.5% \((n = 171)\) earned a grade point average of 2.0 or above. Approximately one-fourth \((25.4\%)\) earned a grade point average of 4.0. Approximately 10% \((n = 24)\) earned a grade point average of 0.00.

Of those with previous college enrollment \((n = 91)\), there was a mean gap of 3.77 \((SD = 6.26)\) years since their last enrollment. Approximately half \((50.5\%)\) of returning students had an enrollment gap of more than one calendar year. Close to 15% of returning students had an enrollment gap of five years or more. Slightly over 10% of returning students had an enrollment gap of 10 years or more. The number of students reporting that this was their first semester of college enrollment ever was 61.4\% \((n = 145)\) of the total sample \((n = 236)\).

**Sub-Sample of Students with No Prior College Experience**

With regard to the sub-sample with no prior college experience \((n = 145)\), gender was split fairly evenly with 46.9\% \((n = 68)\) male students, with a mean age of 25.8 \((SD = 9.903; \text{ranging from 18-62})\) years. Almost half \((n = 72)\) reported their race/ethnicity as Caucasian/White, 32.4\% as Hispanic/Latino \((n = 47)\), followed by African American \((n = 9, 6.2\%)\), Asian \((n = 2, 1.4\%)\), and Native American/Alaskan Native \((n = 1, 0.7\%)\).

Fourteen participants \((9.7\%)\) reported more than one race/ethnicity. Most students in this sub-sample \((n = 116, 80\%)\) reported English as their first language. Approximately 34.5\% \((n = 50)\) reported being unemployed, 32.4\% reported being employed part-time, and 33.1\% reported being employed full-time. In terms of nontraditional criteria, most students \((n = 137, 94.5\%)\) endorsed at least one nontraditional criterion (see Tables 3 and 4).
Table 3

*Number of Nontraditional Criteria Other Than Age Endorsed by Participants with No Prior College Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of Criteria</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Cumulative %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6.2</td>
<td>6.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13.8</td>
<td>20.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>17.9</td>
<td>37.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>23.4</td>
<td>61.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>80.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>96.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>100.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 4

*Nontraditional Criteria Other Than Age Endorsed by Participants with No Prior College Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nontraditional Criteria</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Delay in enrollment</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>66.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Independence</td>
<td>90</td>
<td>62.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employed full-time</td>
<td>51</td>
<td>35.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dependents (other than spouse)</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>32.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack traditional high school diploma</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>26.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Veteran</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Approximately 66% of the sample ($n = 95$) indicated a delay of enrollment to college by at least one calendar year. Those that indicated financial independence from their parents include 62.1% ($n = 90$) of the sample. Approximately 35% ($n = 51$) indicated current full-time employment and 32% ($n = 47$) indicated dependents other than a spouse. Those that had earned their GED of high school completion certificate rather than a high school diploma totaled 26.9% ($n = 39$). Fifteen students (10.3%) indicated military service, with the following branches being represented: Army ($n = 6$), Marines ($n = 5$), Navy ($n = 2$),
and Air National Guard ($n = 1$). One individual reported military service but did not indicate on which branch they served.

Between students who had previous college experience versus those with no prior college experience there were no differences on outcome expectations ($t = -.988$ (231), $p = .324$), perceived academic control ($t = -.675$ (231), $p = .501$), or academic self-efficacy ($t = -.878$ (228), $p = .381$).

Of those first semester students, 3.4% ($n = 5$) withdrew from their classes completely. Approximately 25% ($n = 37$) received a GPA of less than 2.0, and as a result, were placed on academic probation. The remaining 71% of students ($n = 102$) earned a GPA of 2.0 or higher, which resulted in being placed in good academic standing following their first semester. Similar to the whole sample, approximately one quarter of students ($n = 36$, 24.8%) received a GPA of 4.0.

**Differences Between Student Outcome Groups**

For my second research question, which pertained to possible differences between the three groups (students who persist and are successful academically; students who persist, but aren’t successful academically; and students who do not persist), a MANOVA was conducted. This analysis included a MANOVA between the three outcome groups, which examined the variables of age, number of credit hours, number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed, number of work hours per week, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. However, it is important to note here that in preliminary analyses to check assumptions for MANOVA, multicollinearity issues between the three scales (perceived outcome expectations [POE], perceived academic control [PAC], and academic self-efficacy [ASE]) were considered. First, scale
correlations were considered (see Table 5), showing moderate correlations between the three scales.

Table 5

*Scale Correlations Demonstrating Multicollinearity*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Scale</th>
<th>POE</th>
<th>PAC</th>
<th>ASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Academic Control</td>
<td>.573**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
<td>.575**</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Self-Efficacy</td>
<td>.584**</td>
<td>.575**</td>
<td>1.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* POE = Perceived outcome expectations, PAC = Perceived academic control, ASE = Academic self-efficacy.

As you can see from the table above, all three scales were significantly correlated with one another (p < .01). Therefore, it was important to further investigate whether there were multicollinearity issues with the dependent variables included in the analysis. This was done by examining the tolerance statistic and the variance inflation factor (VIF) statistic. The first statistical indicator of multicollinearity is tolerance, with higher levels of tolerance being desired. However, the tolerance value that can be used differs in the literature, with some researchers (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2001) suggesting a minimum tolerance value of .10; other tolerance value cut-offs suggested in the literature include minimum values of .20 (Menard, 1995) or .25 (Huber & Stephens, 1993). Another statistical indicator of multicollinearity concerns is the variance inflation factor (VIF), in which lower levels are desired. Similar to the tolerance statistic, different researchers have suggested different cut-off scores, but the most commonly suggested maximum VIF value is 10 (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1995; Neter, Wasserman, & Kutner, 1989). However, in analyzing the variables that would be used in subsequent analyses,
the tolerance statistic did reach the minimum criteria by all of these standards. In addition, the VIF fell well below the suggested maximum. Therefore, it was determined there were no multicollinearity issues with the data (see Table 6).

Table 6

*Tolerance and Variance Inflation Factor Values*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Tolerance statistic</th>
<th>Variance Inflation Factor</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>1.119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Semester Hours</td>
<td>0.917</td>
<td>1.090</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work Hours</td>
<td>0.827</td>
<td>1.209</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>0.766</td>
<td>1.306</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome_Total</td>
<td>0.505</td>
<td>1.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Total</td>
<td>0.507</td>
<td>1.972</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE_Total</td>
<td>0.495</td>
<td>2.021</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additionally, while checking for assumptions for MANOVA, it was found that the assumption of homogeneity of variance-covariance matrices was violated. Box’s M (73.039) was significant, *p* < .001, indicating that there was a significant difference between the covariance matrices. In addition, Levene’s Test of Equality of Error Variances showed that there were three dependent variables (age, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control) that violated this assumption. Thus, I rejected the null hypothesis that the groups had equal variance. Because of these violations of the MANOVA assumptions, it was more appropriate in using Pillai’s Trace statistic in
analyzing the results because it is more robust and not as highly influenced by the assumptions about the normality of the distribution of the data. Pillai’s Trace is also more appropriate to use when there are unequal sample sizes, which was true of the three groups. By examining the results of the MANOVA analysis, I concluded that the overall model was not significant, $F(12, 354) = 1.528$, $p = .099$, Pillai’s Trace = 0.114, partial eta squared = 0.057. This means that, according to this statistical analysis, students in the three outcome groups did not differ significantly in terms of the variables measured.

**Predicting Completion and Achievement**

For the next research question, I examined two distinct student outcomes, which were completion of the semester with an adequate grade point average versus not completing the semester with an adequate grade point average and whether these two distinct outcomes could be predicted by demographic characteristics (gender, age, number of credit hours of enrollment, number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed, language abilities, and number of work hours) and socio-cognitive factors such as self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control (RQ3). In order to answer this research question, I chose to conduct a binomial logistic regression for the entire student sample and then the sub-sample of students with no prior college enrollment.

**Full Sample**

In examining the full sample of students, it was discovered that the model helped to explain approximately 17.1% of the variance using the Nagelkerke R Square statistic. Table 7 shows the variance explained by each of the variables in the model; in this model, age helped to explain more of the variance than any other variable.
### Table 7

**Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 1 for Full Sample**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.062</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>1.146</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.284</td>
<td>.939</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.097</td>
<td>.369</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.792</td>
<td>.907</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.954</td>
<td>.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>.039</td>
<td>.440</td>
<td>.008</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.929</td>
<td>1.040</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age</strong></td>
<td><strong>.094</strong></td>
<td><strong>.034</strong></td>
<td><strong>7.835</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>.005</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.099</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First_Year</td>
<td>-.163</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td>.180</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.672</td>
<td>.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.248</td>
<td>.131</td>
<td>3.601</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.781</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome_Total</td>
<td>.148</td>
<td>.094</td>
<td>2.455</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.117</td>
<td>1.159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Total</td>
<td>-.007</td>
<td>.062</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.910</td>
<td>.993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE_Total</td>
<td>0.19</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>.355</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.551</td>
<td>1.020</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**No Prior College Experience**

In examining the students with no prior college enrollment, I found that the model helped to explain approximately 16.4% of the variance using Nagelkerke R Square statistic. Table 8 shows that, again, age helped to explain more of the variance than any other variable.
Table 8

Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 2—Participants with No Prior College Experience

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.023</td>
<td>.073</td>
<td>.099</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>.977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.223</td>
<td>.462</td>
<td>.232</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.630</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.394</td>
<td>1.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.270</td>
<td>.563</td>
<td>.229</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.632</td>
<td>.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td><strong>.076</strong></td>
<td><strong>.037</strong></td>
<td><strong>4.277</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>.039</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.078</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.277</td>
<td>.156</td>
<td>3.173</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.758</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome_Total</td>
<td>.090</td>
<td>.106</td>
<td>.721</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.396</td>
<td>1.094</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Total</td>
<td>-.030</td>
<td>.075</td>
<td>.164</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.685</td>
<td>.970</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE_Total</td>
<td>-3.806</td>
<td>2.909</td>
<td>1.712</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.191</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Full Sample Models

In addition to the overall models above, I also ran binomial logistic regression models where I could examine each of the personal factors (academic self-efficacy, perceived outcome expectations, and perceived academic control) separately for both the full sample of students as well as the sub-sample of students with no prior college enrollment.

I conducted this analysis first using self-efficacy and excluding perceived outcome expectations and perceived academic control. This logistic regression model helped to explain approximately 16.5% of the variance using the Nagelkerke R Square.
By examining the variables in Table 9 that were added into the model, age, and self-efficacy, and the number of nontraditional student criteria were the variables that added the most in terms of variance explained.

Table 9

*Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.057</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>1.014</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.314</td>
<td>.944</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.298</td>
<td>.345</td>
<td>.746</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.388</td>
<td>.742</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.997</td>
<td>1.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.080</td>
<td>.421</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.849</td>
<td>.923</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.100</td>
<td>.033</td>
<td>9.225</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>1.105</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First-Year</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>.376</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>1.136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.269</td>
<td>.128</td>
<td>4.408</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.036</td>
<td>.764</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE_Total</td>
<td>.049</td>
<td>.023</td>
<td>4.460</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.035</td>
<td>1.050</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the second model, I excluded self-efficacy and perceived academic control and added in perceived outcome expectations. This model was found to explain approximately 14.1% of the variance, so it was less successful than model 1 at variance explained. Based on the results, I was able to conclude that perceived outcome expectations helped to explain a portion of the variance. Similar to the previous model, age also helped to explain a significant portion of the variance; however, in this model,
the number of nontraditional student criteria was not found to significantly add to the model (see Table 10).

Table 10

**Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 4**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.042</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.584</td>
<td></td>
<td>.445</td>
<td>.959</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.021</td>
<td>.344</td>
<td>.004</td>
<td></td>
<td>.951</td>
<td>.979</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>-.001</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td></td>
<td>.902</td>
<td>.999</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td>.417</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td></td>
<td>.995</td>
<td>1.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.072</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>6.452</td>
<td></td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>1.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First_Year</td>
<td>.136</td>
<td>.367</td>
<td>.137</td>
<td></td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>1.146</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.231</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>3.499</td>
<td></td>
<td>.061</td>
<td>.794</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Outcome_Total</strong></td>
<td>.173</td>
<td>.074</td>
<td>5.423</td>
<td></td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>1.189</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the third model, I excluded self-efficacy and perceived outcome expectations and added in perceived academic control. This model was the least effective with regards to predictable capability, explaining 11.2% of the variance. As you can see from Table 11, the only variable that helped to explain a significant portion of the variance was age.
Table 11

Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.812</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.368</td>
<td>.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.131</td>
<td>.339</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.699</td>
<td>.877</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.945</td>
<td>1.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.081</td>
<td>.422</td>
<td>.037</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.848</td>
<td>.922</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td><strong>.069</strong></td>
<td><strong>.027</strong></td>
<td><strong>6.558</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>.010</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.071</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First_Year</td>
<td>.219</td>
<td>.364</td>
<td>.361</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.548</td>
<td>1.245</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.208</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>2.950</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.086</td>
<td>.812</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Total</td>
<td>.063</td>
<td>.044</td>
<td>2.082</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.149</td>
<td>1.065</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Sub-Sample Models

For the next three models that I ran with binomial logistic regression, I focused on the subsample of students that had no previous college enrollment. For the first of these three models, I included the demographic characteristics as well as self-efficacy. Similar to model 1, the explained variance for this model was 16.1%. Age and self-efficacy contributed significantly to the model while the remaining variables did not (see Table 12).
Table 12

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-0.023</td>
<td>0.072</td>
<td>0.100</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.752</td>
<td>0.977</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-0.266</td>
<td>0.442</td>
<td>0.364</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>0.015</td>
<td>0.894</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.344</td>
<td>1.014</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-0.321</td>
<td>0.546</td>
<td>0.346</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.556</td>
<td>0.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>0.078</td>
<td>0.035</td>
<td>5.066</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td>1.082</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-0.279</td>
<td>0.153</td>
<td>3.319</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.068</td>
<td>0.757</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SE_Total</td>
<td>0.060</td>
<td>0.027</td>
<td>4.796</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.029</td>
<td>1.061</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the next model, I excluded self-efficacy and perceived academic control and added in perceived outcome expectations as well as all the demographic characteristics. This model explained 11.2% of the variance. Table 13 shows none of the variables were found to be significant in this model.
Table 13

Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.014</td>
<td>.069</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.839</td>
<td>.896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.432</td>
<td>.019</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.890</td>
<td>.942</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.463</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.496</td>
<td>1.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.266</td>
<td>.530</td>
<td>.253</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.615</td>
<td>.766</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.041</td>
<td>.030</td>
<td>1.864</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.172</td>
<td>1.042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.239</td>
<td>.147</td>
<td>2.643</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.104</td>
<td>.789</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcome_Total</td>
<td>.152</td>
<td>.083</td>
<td>3.389</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.066</td>
<td>1.164</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the final binomial logistic regression model, I included all demographic
c characteristics but excluded self-efficacy and outcome expectations and added in
perceived academic control. This model was the worst in terms of predictive capability of
the binomial logistic regression models, explaining only 8.6% of the variance. Similar to
the last model, none of the variables were found to be significant in this model (see Table
14).
Table 14

Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 8

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.008</td>
<td>.067</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.901</td>
<td>.992</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.147</td>
<td>.427</td>
<td>.119</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.731</td>
<td>.863</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.014</td>
<td>.882</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.348</td>
<td>1.013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.290</td>
<td>.539</td>
<td>.290</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.590</td>
<td>.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.043</td>
<td>.028</td>
<td>2.367</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.124</td>
<td>1.044</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.252</td>
<td>.144</td>
<td>3.071</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.080</td>
<td>.777</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Control_Total</td>
<td>.058</td>
<td>.051</td>
<td>1.322</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.250</td>
<td>1.060</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Internal Consistency

Internal consistency was found to be adequate for the Perceived Academic Control Scale (Cronbach’s alpha = .781) and for the Self-Efficacy for Learning and Performance Subscale of the Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (Cronbach’s alpha = .934). For the Outcome Expectations Scale, the internal consistency was found to be lower (Cronbach’s alpha = .586). However, this could be due to the fact that the Outcome Expectations Scale was designed to measure expectations regarding two types of outcomes, namely expectations for success in college and expectations for the value that completing college would offer. When I separated out the two proposed subscales of the Outcome Expectations Scale, the internal consistency was found to be higher for both the
value subscale (Cronbach’s alpha = .767) and for the expectations of success subscale (Cronbach’s alpha = .868).

**Exploratory Factor Analysis**

I also conducted an exploratory factor analysis to examine the factor structure of the Outcome Expectations Scale in order to determine if the two sub scales separated for my sample. By doing so, I was able to examine the scree plot and the factors that were formed by using eigenvalues over one. First, the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy and Bartlett’s Test of Sphericity were found to adequately meet the assumptions of exploratory factor analysis. As a result, two factors were extracted with eigenvalues greater than one. In addition, the scree plot demonstrated that the slope of the curve leveled out after two factors, suggesting the same conclusion: two separate factors for the Outcome Expectations Scale. Finally, the rotated component matrix that was derived demonstrated the factor loadings for each variable (see Table 15).
Table 15

*Rotated Component Matrix from Outcome Expectations Scale Exploratory Factor Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Component 1 Loading</th>
<th>Component 2 Loading</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“Going to college will help me meet my educational goals.”</td>
<td>.262</td>
<td>.759</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I will be successful in college this semester.”</td>
<td>.858</td>
<td>.234</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Going to college is going to be a waste of my time.” (reverse scored)</td>
<td>.120</td>
<td>.825</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Going to college will help me meet my career goals.”</td>
<td>.194</td>
<td>.828</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I will do well in college this semester.”</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.190</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“I will be satisfied with my success in college this semester.”</td>
<td>.837</td>
<td>.179</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Because of the above information regarding the internal consistency of the Outcome Expectations Scale as well as the Exploratory Factor Analysis, I then revisited the binomial logistic regression models explained above and re-ran the models (models 4 and 7) that focused on this scale for both the full sample and then subsample with the separate factor loadings. For the full sample, it appeared that expectations for success (component 1) provided more explanatory value for end-of-semester outcome than did the value sub scale (see Table 16).
Table 16

Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 9

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.049</td>
<td>.057</td>
<td>.751</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.386</td>
<td>.952</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.229</td>
<td>.359</td>
<td>.407</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.524</td>
<td>.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>-.002</td>
<td>.011</td>
<td>.020</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.887</td>
<td>.998</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.003</td>
<td>.419</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.994</td>
<td>.997</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>.076</td>
<td>6.851</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.009</td>
<td>1.079</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First_Year</td>
<td>-.031</td>
<td>.378</td>
<td>.007</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.934</td>
<td>.969</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.241</td>
<td>.125</td>
<td>3.693</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.055</td>
<td>.786</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component 1</strong></td>
<td>.377</td>
<td>.115</td>
<td>10.805</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.001</td>
<td>1.458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Component 2</td>
<td>-.121</td>
<td>.154</td>
<td>.613</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.433</td>
<td>.886</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In examining the subsample of students that had no prior college experience, it was evident that expectations for success (component 1) also provided more explanatory value for end-of-semester outcomes than the value subscale (see Table 17).
Table 17

*Variance Explained in Binomial Logistic Regression Model 10*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>Standard Error</th>
<th>Wald</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
<th>Exp(B)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Semester_Hours</td>
<td>-.016</td>
<td>.070</td>
<td>.052</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.820</td>
<td>.984</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td>-.250</td>
<td>.453</td>
<td>.304</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.581</td>
<td>.779</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work_Hours</td>
<td>.010</td>
<td>.015</td>
<td>.454</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.501</td>
<td>1.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English_First</td>
<td>-.322</td>
<td>.534</td>
<td>.363</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.547</td>
<td>.725</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>.048</td>
<td>.031</td>
<td>2.407</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>1.049</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non_Total</td>
<td>-.264</td>
<td>.150</td>
<td>3.081</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>.079</td>
<td>.768</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>.315</strong></td>
<td><strong>.134</strong></td>
<td><strong>5.550</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>.018</strong></td>
<td><strong>1.370</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Component 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>.061</strong></td>
<td><strong>.169</strong></td>
<td><strong>.132</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td><strong>.716</strong></td>
<td><strong>.941</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

For my final research question that could be measured through quantitative analysis (RQ4b: Do students in each of the three outcome groups show differences in self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control at the end of the semester than the beginning of the semester?), I examined scores of these three variables for participants of Phase II of the study (see Tables 12, 14, and 16). Descriptively, students that withdrew from their first semester were more likely to show decreases in perceived outcome expectations ($n = 4, 80\%$), perceived academic control ($n = 3, 60\%$), and academic self-efficacy ($n = 3, 60\%$). Students who were placed on academic probation following their first semester were also more likely to experience decreases in perceived outcome expectations ($n = 4, 67\%$), and perceived academic control ($n = 4,$
60%); academic self-efficacy was shown to decrease for half of these students while the other half remained unchanged or increased. For the group of students who successfully completed their first semester, changes were more mixed. Interestingly, approximately half of these students (n = 4, 44%) showed decreases in perceived outcome expectations at the end of the semester. The same was true of perceived academic control and perceived academic self-efficacy.

**Qualitative Data**

Phase II of this study included an interview at the conclusion of the first semester of college enrollment. This phase of the study was integral to helping me answer research questions related to the other factors that play a role in the persistence and achievement of nontraditional students in higher education (RQ4). Inclusion criteria for participant interviews included (a) permission during informed consent procedures to be contacted for an interview (see Appendix F), (b) endorse at least one nontraditional criteria, and (c) have no prior college enrollment before the current semester. This resulted in 113 potential Phase II participants; of those participants, 20 participated in the follow-up interview. Of the total 113 potential interviews, 76 students earned a grade point average of 2.0 and above, 30 students earned a grade point average of less than 2.0 and were placed on academic probation, and six students withdrew. I proceeded to contacted all six students who withdrew and was able to conduct five interviews; the remaining student had a disconnected phone number. Despite contacting all 30 students who earned a grade point average of less than 2.0, only six participated in the interview. Finally, of the 76 successful students, I interviewed nine.
Following each semester, I conducted one-on-one, semi-structured interviews with select first-semester, nontraditional students from each of the three outcome groups. Interviews lasted between 30 minutes and approximately one hour. It was originally my goal to interview six students from each outcome group for a total of 18 students across the three groups. In the end, I ended up interviewing 20 students across the three groups. During the interviews, I asked students a number of different questions regarding their experiences with making the decision to enroll in college as well as their experiences during the semester and their perceptions of supports and barriers.

A Snapshot of Students Who Withdrew During Their First Semester

The five interviewees from the withdrawal group constituted 83.3% of possible participants. In addition to their follow-up interview, post-semester measures of perceived outcome expectations (POE), perceived academic control (PAC), and academic self-efficacy (ASE) were collected (see Table 19 for details). As you can see from the interview participants, ages ranged from 18 to 58 years (see Table 18 for demographic information). Three participants (Frank, Roberto, and Nancy) were working full-time at the beginning of the semester, while one (Allen) was working part-time and the other was unemployed. However, Colby identified that he began working part-time during the course of the semester.
Table 18

*Pre-Test and Post-Test Measures of Perceived Outcome Expectations, Perceived Academic Control, and Academic Self-Efficacy—Withdrawal Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>POE</th>
<th>PAC</th>
<th>ASE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 39</td>
<td>Phase I: 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: 25</td>
<td>Phase I: 36</td>
<td>Phase II: 49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 37</td>
<td>Phase I: 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: 29</td>
<td>Phase I: 34</td>
<td>Phase II: 46</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: 21</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 24</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: 19</td>
<td>Phase I: 31</td>
<td>Phase II: 33</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase II: 56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 38</td>
<td>Phase I: 55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase II: 14</td>
<td>Phase I: 36</td>
<td>Phase II: 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* POE = Perceived Outcome Expectations, PAC = Perceived Academic Control, ASE = Academic Self-Efficacy

Table 19

*Demographic Information from Interview Participants (Withdrawal Group)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>Oil/Gas Technologies</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Native American/Alaskan Native</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Roberto</td>
<td>Mechanical CAD cert.</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nancy</td>
<td>Marketing/Business Management</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colby</td>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allen</td>
<td>Liberal Arts AA</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As can be seen from Table 18, perceived outcome expectations, perceived academic control, and academic self-efficacy were higher at the beginning of the semester than following withdrawal from their courses. For Frank, Roberto, and Allen there was a decrease in all three variables from the beginning of the semester to their follow-up interview. Nancy experienced a decrease in perceived outcome expectations, but saw an increase in academic self-efficacy and a slight increase in perceived academic control from the first days of the semester to her follow-up interview. Finally, Colby showed no change in perceived outcome expectations, perceived academic control, or academic self-efficacy.

Frank is currently married with four grown sons and lives with his wife approximately one hour from campus. Frank shared that his primary reason for enrolling in college was that he had the time and means to do so, adding that he had put all four of his sons through college and felt that it was now his turn to get a college education. He is currently employed in the oil and gas industry and had enrolled in the oil and gas program on campus. He originally enrolled seeking an Associate of Applied Science Degree and was signed up for two classes during the semester, which included an English class as well as a AAA class. He has a stable career in the oil and gas industry, but has also been employed as a stockbroker, investment advisor, and financial planner in the past. Frank reported that the decision to go back to school was somewhat difficult because he had been out of school so long. However, he reported himself as a “lifelong learner,” so he felt that going back to school fit with his values. While he knew he was undertaking something that felt “unknown,” he stated that he was also excited about the opportunity upon enrollment and was “totally confident” in his abilities in doing well in
school, which he attributed to his previous career and life experience. However, he expressed disappointment in his college experience, which led to his eventual withdraw from the college within the first few weeks of the semester. This disappointment began the day that he arrived at the college to register for classes. Upon enrollment, he also anticipated that he would be able to complete his coursework online. However, once he began the enrollment process, it was explained to him that there would be some on-campus components to his program. During the enrollment process, he completed the assessment testing, which identified slight deficiencies in English and it was explained to him that he would have to take introductory courses, which he described as “off-putting.” However, he decided to try the courses and subsequently signed up for two: one class was an English class and the other was a AAA class. He stated that he did understand that the English class was beneficial to him, but that the AAA class did not seem to fit with his goals or reason for returning to school. He added that it was his perception, looking back, that he was being "forced" to do something that was not for his benefit, but instead for the college’s benefit.

Additionally, he expressed great disappointment with his experiences in his classes, stating that he felt that he was placed into a class with students he perceived to be like “little children” and that he felt it was not acknowledged that he has successfully held a career and already had important skills and abilities such as goal-setting and time-management. He added that the classes were “meaningless” to him and added several barriers in his pursuit to a college education, including that he felt that many of his classmates were not serious about college and that the classes did not fit with his goals of getting a meaningful education that was tailored to his career goals. He mentioned that
some students acted like they did not want to be there or were immature and disruptive during class. He also explained that he did not see the class as being cohesive, stating that he prefers to be in a group that can focus on the same goals and ideals. While he did report perceptions of strong supports, mainly through his family, he stated that he felt the brief time at the college was a waste of time and money. He ended up attending four classes and then withdrew. He had subsequently decided to enroll at another institution that he felt would better meet his goals and needs as a student; at the time of the follow-up phone call with him, he had followed through with his enrollment to that institution.

Roberto is an 18-year-old Hispanic male who was enrolled in his first semester of the Computer-aided Drafting (CAD) certification program at the college. He is a first-generation student just out of high school with a career goal of being a factory mechanic. He shared that he decided to pursue college because he saw it as a necessity in life in order to have a better job in the future and chose community college over a university because of the lower cost. While he had considered entering the military after high school, he stated that he changed his mind as he felt college would be a better choice for him. Roberto expressed that he was nervous to go to college because he hadn’t been a good student in high school, citing that he had poor attendance. However, he felt that since he would be paying for college, it might motivate him to work harder than he did in high school. Despite his experiences in high school, he later stated that he felt confident that college “couldn’t be too hard.” With the support of his family, he decided to enroll in college and signed up for two classes, but realized shortly after the semester started that it was not what he was expecting. Roberto clarified that he thought his classes would be more hands-on and was disappointed that all the work was done on the computer. He
stated that he was not interested in what was being taught in his classes. He attended approximately five or six of his classes prior to withdrawing completely. He did state that he planned on enrolling the next semester to pursue a different type of degree that would be more interesting to him and did subsequently enroll at the same college for the next semester. He stated that despite his experiences during this semester, his confidence in his ability of a student did not change.

Nancy is a Hispanic, 28-year-old married mother of two that is employed full-time with the Air Force National Guard. She shared that she enrolled in college primarily to encourage her husband to enroll, stating that he kept on putting off college; Nancy thought that if he saw her enroll, it would motivate him to enroll as well. She shared that this ended up being the case and that he did enroll in college as a result. Nancy expressed a lack of motivation for college, stating that at this point in her life, she didn’t want to be in college because she was unsure about what her career goals were and did not want to make the commitment to pursue a college education. Despite that, she did enroll and signed up for two classes, which were developmental education English classes. She shared that she felt that she could be successful as a student if she put forth the effort, but that she was not motivated to be successful. However, she also expressed that she did not feel confident in the specific classes she was in because it was not her "strong suit." In the beginning of the semester, classes were going “fine”, but then she stated that “life happened.” She explained that they bought a new house, her husband was injured, and she was trying to juggle taking care of him and their children. Nancy stated that in addition to time-management stressors, she also felt that additional barriers included the length of time that had elapsed since she was last in school as well as her level of
motivation. Despite the flexibility she received from her job and the support she received from her classmates, weeks in, she decided that it was better to withdraw than fail the classes she was enrolled in. She shared that she was happy with her decision to withdraw because it alleviated a lot of stress for her. While she stated that she planned to re-enroll in the future once she got her “ducks all lined up within work and home,” she did not do so after the interview.

Colby began his interview talking excitedly about hockey, which he plays. Colby is a 19-year-old Caucasian male who enrolled in his first semester of college during the spring semester 2015. He also was working at a doggy day care during the course of the semester, which he described as a “time killer.” He enrolled in a total of 4 hours for a developmental math class. Colby exhibited a lot of passion for playing hockey and stated that he was drafted by a professional hockey team in another state. However, before he was able to move there and play, he was injured and required hip surgery and was therefore currently recovering from that surgery and intended to move after his recovery so that he could join his team. His goal is to complete his education at a state university where he intended to receive a scholarship through hockey to help pay for school. Colby expressed interest in majoring in psychology, science, or an area in medicine and eventually go to medical school. He reported that his mother is a doctor, which has led to his interest in medicine. He stated that he would like to eventually be an orthopedic surgeon with specialization in a specific joint. His father didn’t attend college, but has a stable career in business and is CEO of a company. Overall, Colby stated that he felt strongly that a college education is important, explaining that he has read studies that demonstrate that lifespan is longer for people who attend college versus those who don’t.
He also indicated a belief that college is the “key to success.” He acknowledged that his career in hockey will not be long-term and that he can only play hockey until he is in his thirties; after that, having an education will help set him up for success after his hockey career has ended. After getting a low score in math on his ACT, his coaches told him that in order to keep his scholarship, he would need to attend a community college to take a developmental math course. However, he shared that he viewed attending community college as “one hundred percent a time killer” and merely enrolled to satisfy his coaches so that he could keep his scholarship. He stated that he started the semester with fairly high confidence, stating a belief that most of it depends on your mindset. He stated that his motivation also remained high, but that juggling the responsibilities of his class assignments with his hockey responsibilities was difficult. Specifically, Colby explained that he was traveling out of state frequently for hockey and that as a result, he missed classes frequently. While he described the class as helping to keep his math skills “sharp,” his coaches told him that the class would not transfer to a university and he made the decision to withdraw. He currently has plans to enroll at a state university closer to the hockey team he has signed with. Following the interview, he did not re-enroll at this specific community college.

Allen is a 24-year-old, first-semester college student that enrolled to pursue a Liberal Arts AA degree in the summer semester 2015. He currently lives with his younger brother. He was registered for ten credit hours and enrolled in three classes at the start of the semester, which included music appreciation, a developmental math class and a college student success course. Allen stated that he withdrew from the music appreciation class after the first day of the semester and then withdrew from the other two
classes near the middle of the semester and approximately one week before the withdraw date. Following high school, Allen entered the workforce rather than going to college and shared that he had many negative thoughts about college. He specified that some of those negative thoughts included the idea that while college is fitting for some people, he did not believe it is a fit for him or that it was necessary in his own life. He also shared that he is more of a hands-on person and doesn't really like the classroom. Additionally, he was hesitant about the cost of college and stated that he has seen examples of people who make the same amount of money without a college education as people do did go to college. In addition, Allen confided that he experiences social anxiety and feels uncomfortable around people, but felt that he could overcome that obstacle. Allen reported that he decided to pursue college to increase his career options; he added that he wanted to explore career options because he was unsure as to what he would like to do. He added that this was his major goal when he enrolled in college. The major factors that played a role in the decision to attend community college over a university were cost as well as the smaller class sizes. Allen shared that his confidence fluctuated throughout his first semester. On the first day of the semester, Allen described his confidence level as being pretty low; he felt overwhelmed in the beginning, but that he knew he wanted to give college a try. His confidence decreased even more after the first day of classes when he realized that it was going to be more difficult than he had anticipated. However, after attending a few weeks of classes, his confidence started to increase again. After that increase, he stated that he became more worried once again when the material in his math class became more difficult. According to Allen, that is when things started to go “really, really bad.” This seemed to coincide with Allen taking on another part-time job about
four weeks into the semester, resulting in him juggling two courses and two part-time jobs. He stated that he began taking extra shifts at one job, which caused him to miss some classes. After taking on the second job, it became hard to juggle everything and he felt that there wasn’t enough time in his day. This is when things started to go “downhill” by his recollection. He began to feel “uncomfortable” and “out of place” in his classes and started to question why he was in college. As a result of all this, he decided to withdraw, adding that he doesn’t like the fact that he quit, but doesn’t regret it either. He felt that overall, it was a matter of “bad timing” and that he wasn’t ready for college. At the time of his interview, Allen was still struggling with figuring out whether college was a good fit for him and felt that the likelihood that he would re-enroll was low. He added that despite attending three sessions with a career counselor, he is still unsure as to what he would like to do in terms of a career.

**Reasons for pursuing college.** All but one student cited the idea that college enrollment would benefit their life through increasing their opportunities for the future. Frank shared that his career was stable and his children were grown and how it was now his turn. He further explained that his goal upon enrolling was to get ahead in his career, which was in the oil and gas field. However, Frank shared that because it had been a long time since he had been in school, it felt “unknown” to him.

Roberto also acknowledged that his future would be better if he received a college education. For him, a lack of college education would prevent opportunities in the future and he viewed it as a vital necessity. Roberto saw college enrollment as necessary to his future. Like Frank, Roberto also mentioned that he was slightly hesitant about enrolling in college, stating that he wasn’t a good student in high school.
Allen also mentioned the idea that college would provide him with career options. While he was very unsure as to what career path he would like to pursue, he believed that attending college may allow him to identify what his interests were. Unfortunately, as you will read later, Allen continued to struggle with his lack of career direction during this first semester. He also struggled through the semester with ideas surrounding whether college was a right fit for him; he stated that these thoughts were present when he made the decision to enroll.

Colby identified that he felt strongly that having a college education is very important for one’s success in life as well as a career. While Colby was heavily focused on his hockey career, he understood that hockey couldn’t last forever, citing the short longevity of hockey player careers. He explained that a college education would help increase his career opportunities following the eventual end of his hockey career. When he discussed his decision to go to college, he stated that there was never really a decision because he always knew he would go to college. He explained, “No questions asked, I was going to school.” However, he did wonder whether he would have the time for school given his hectic hockey schedule.

Finally, Nancy shared that her main reason for enrolling in college was not to better herself, but to motivate her husband to enroll in college. In fact, she stated that she felt it wasn’t the right time for her to be in college because, like Allen, she wasn’t sure what career path she wanted to pursue. When asked her primary reason for enrolling, she answered, “It was to push my husband to enroll.” She subsequently stated that he did enroll, so her enrollment did motivate him. For Nancy, her biggest hesitancies were a lack of direction and motivation.
The decision to pursue community college rather than a university. For some, the decision was program-specific. Frank was already working in the oil and gas industry and the college had a program specific to his field whereas the university nearby did not. In addition, Roberto stated that he was pursuing a CAD certification, which was available at the local community college. Most students cited the main reason for enrolling at a community college versus a university in terms of cost. Roberto stated, “Basically, it's a lot less expensive than a university.” Allen also mentioned cost as well as class size in his answer. For Colby, it was clear that his primary goal was to transfer to a university. Due to his injuries, which required surgery, he was not able to start his enrollment at the university and was encouraged by his coaches to take a class at the local community college while he recovered. He shared that attending the community college was not near of a priority as attending a four-year university when he was able to following his recovery.

Self-efficacy in the beginning. For the majority of students, self-efficacy was reported to be high on the first day of the semester, with most reporting that they felt they could be successful in their classes. For Frank, he stated that he was “totally confident” at the beginning of the semester that he could do well. He went on to add later in the interview that part of his confidence came from his career history, stating that he had to take a number of different tests and engage in a number of different tasks for his past jobs, which included a stockbroker and a manager. Roberto stated, “I was pretty confident. I mean, it couldn't be too hard.” He added about his past: “In high school, I wasn't a very good student, but I felt that in college, I'd be more responsible because I'm paying for it.” Nancy stated, “I knew that if I put the effort that I needed to, I could
accomplish it." Colby also highlighted the importance of effort, stating, “I'm not your straight-A student, but I'll work hard and get good grades.” Allen was the only student from this group who reported feeling uncertain at the beginning of the semester. He shared, “From the first day, I was a little set back. It was a little bit overwhelming because it seemed like it was gonna be hard.”

**Evaluation of the semester.** When students were asked to reflect on how the semester went overall, there were mixed responses. Allen had the only outwardly negative response to the semester by stating, “It went really, really bad.” Colby indicated that the semester went "good" and that he had gotten out of it what he needed to, stating that he enrolled to strengthen his math skills and believes that he did just that, explaining that he feels more confident now in math. Nancy shared that the semester went “fine,” but added that she became busy, which she attributed to her need to withdraw. The other two students, Frank and Roberto, indicated that it was quickly clear that their program was not a good fit for them and that lack of fit led to their withdrawal.

**Perceptions of barriers.** There were a number of barriers reported for this group of students. Frank expressed that he didn't feel like he fit in with his classmates. For him, this stemmed from a perceived lack of maturity of his classmates. He recalled,

Well, I got put in with a bunch of kids who were just little children that need to have their hands held. And they... you know, they have kids come out of high school that, frankly, I was just surprised at how much they didn't know. I really felt as though I'm with a bunch of children.

Colby also mentioned not fitting in with his classmates due to their perceived lack of skills comparable to his own. He shared,

The tough part about the class was the people that are in there. It was a very low level class. I guess that in a classroom, who can teach you just as much as the teacher is the person next to you and that was an issue. Not trying to say that I
was smarter than anyone else in class, but I feel like I was a little bit more advanced. I felt like I had a better idea of what was going on.

Nancy felt that much of her barriers stemmed from a lack of motivation for college. If you recall, Nancy originally enrolled with the primary goal of motivating her husband to enroll in the college. She shared that juggling her multiple responsibilities made it hard for her to be successful in her first semester. She shared that during the semester, many obligations outside of school came up. For example, her husband was injured during the semester, which increased her responsibilities in taking care of him and their children. In the end, it became difficult for her to juggle her family, work, and school responsibilities.

Another barrier that students mentioned was a perceived lack of respect for their experiences and skills. Frank was perhaps the participant from this group that mentioned it the most. He shared the following story of his time in college prior to withdrawing,

I had one instructor that said, ‘We are professional here and we expect that we are going to act and talk professional. You will address me as Mrs. or professor.’ And so, in my mind, I think that’s reciprocal. Immediately, she turned around and started calling people by their first names. That was really off-putting to me. I’m a professional. I’ve paid my dues. I’ve earned everything I’ve got. And believe me, I came from a very poor background.

For Frank, this seemed to add more evidence that he didn’t fit in within this current college environment.

**Perceptions of supports.** With the exception of Roberto and Allen, all other students were able to identify supports that made the semester easier for them despite withdrawing. Roberto stated that it was a “short semester” for him and could not generate any supports available. Similarly, Allen shared that while there were resources available, he didn’t utilize them due to his short enrollment. Supports that were brought up by
students primarily included social supports. Frank shared that he obtained a lot of support from his wife and sons. Colby also shared that his family background served as a support because his parents instilled the notion that education is important to success.

In addition to family, instructors were mentioned by students in this group as social supports. Colby shared that his math instructor was very lively and motivated, which he perceived as a support to students. Nancy, too, mentioned her teacher, stating, that she appreciated his attempts at getting to know his students and help them. Nancy also shared that she experienced social supports with regards to her classmates, stating, “I made some friendships within some of the classes, so that helped.” She also found an additional social support in her employer, who allowed increased flexibility at work so that she could attend classes.

**Factors in the decision to withdraw.** One of the major themes for students regarding their decision to withdraw was a lack of fit or a mismatch between their expectations and goals and the expectations and goals of the college. For Frank and Roberto, the mismatch was at the program level. Frank entered college with a varied career background, but knew precisely what he wanted to do. He expressed disappointment that the classes that he was in were not tailored towards his degree or career goals. For Roberto, he enrolled in college to pursue a computer aided drafting certification, but it became clear in the first few weeks that it didn't match up with his goals of being a factory mechanic. Roberto also mentioned that his learning style did not match to classroom lectures, stating,

I thought it was going to be more hands-on, but everything was on the computer. It wasn’t quite what I expected. I didn’t think I was going to be using CAD. I thought it was going to be more like fixing stuff. Those weren't the right classes that I was trying to take. They didn't fit very well.
While Frank and Roberto saw a mismatch in goals at the program level, other students didn't see themselves as fitting in at college as a whole. For Nancy, it just wasn't the right time. She was struggling with what she wanted to do for a career and felt that her enrollment was overall, just bad timing. Finally, Allen also shared that he is uncertain as to whether college is a right fit for him overall. At the beginning of the semester, he was questioning the value of college and he explained that his experiences in his first semester helped to validate those “negative thoughts” he had about college. He explained,

The classes that I did make, I just started to feel really uncomfortable and out of place, like I shouldn't be here. I don't think it was the classroom or anything. It was learning. And then, all those ideas… they just crossed my mind. Like, “Why are you here?” I don't know.

**Thoughts on the nontraditional student.** In my conversations with these students, I asked them whether they felt like a nontraditional student. All students, with the exception of Allen, stated that they felt different than other students. For Allen, despite the fact that he was worried at the beginning of the semester, the diversity in his classes helped him feel less different than his classmates, stating that he was surprised at the diversity he observed in his classes. The remaining students all had insights into their own feelings concerning nontraditional status. Frank, the oldest student of the group, shared his thoughts on the nontraditional definition in the following way: “Nontraditional is such a wide variety. I mean, there's no way you can pinpoint any one thing because no one's the same.” He went on to suggest that college personnel take that into account when they interact with students, suggesting that they take a moment to simply “listen” rather than trying to fit all students into the same category. For Roberto, his nontraditional feelings stemmed from being a first-generation college student, sharing, that he felt that other students had people in their lives that could offer advice about college and how to
be successful. For Nancy, her feelings of being nontraditional stemmed from her motivation to attend college. She explained, that she felt that most people strive to complete college, but that wasn’t necessarily the case for her, so she felt out of place. Finally, despite the fact that Colby indicated the lowest number of nontraditional criteria, he explained that maturity plays a role into why he believes he is nontraditional and, therefore, felt different than his classmates.

**Self-efficacy following withdrawal and educational futures.** After withdrawing, students were asked about their self-efficacy. All students reported that they still believed that they could be successful in college. Frank identified that he was still very confident in his abilities as a college student and had pursued enrollment into another program better suited to his goals. Roberto shared that he was "pretty confident," adding, "I know I can do it." Roberto went on to enroll in a subsequent semester, majoring in a program that he felt better met his own goals. While Nancy didn’t feel like she was ready for college at this point in time and lacked motivation, she also still reported that she felt confident in her abilities if she put forth the effort necessary to do well. She reflected, “I think that some people take that as a defeat. As to me, I just didn’t care. I’m okay with withdrawing. I’m happy that I did it. It alleviated a lot of stress that I had, so I know that I made the right decision for myself and my family.”

Nancy shared that in the future, she plans to re-enroll once she identifies a career goal. Colby shared that he will be moving on from this experience to enroll at a four-year university. While he believed that he could be successful at a university, he also stated that he felt the community college did not prepare him for all aspects of university life,
particularly the social aspect of attending a university. He added that he felt community college was more of an “amped up high school.”

**A Snapshot of Students Placed on Academic Probation After Their First Semester**

The second group of students interviewed were students who endorsed at least one nontraditional criteria, consented to the post-semester follow-up interview, and earned a cumulative grade point average of less than 2.0, which resulted in being placed on academic probation. Of all student participants in Phase I, this amounted to 30 eligible for follow-up interviews. Of those 30 students, seven were unable to be reached due to their phone number being disconnected; the remaining 23 were contacted and six participated in the follow-up interview, constituting 20% of possible participants for this group. In addition to their follow-up interview, post-semester measures of perceived outcome expectations (POE), perceived academic control (PAC), and academic self-efficacy (ASE) were collected (see Table 20 for details). In addition, first semester cumulative grade point average was obtained through review of student transcripts. Ages ranged from 18 years to 26 years for interviewees (see Table 21). Most were employed over the course of the semester. Half of the students in this group failed all of their classes, earning a grade point average of 0.00. For the other three, grade point average ranged from 0.69 to 1.67.
Table 20

*Pre-Test and Post-Test Measures of Perceived Outcome Expectations, Perceived Academic Control, and Academic Self-Efficacy—Academic Probation Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>POE</th>
<th>PAC</th>
<th>ACE</th>
<th>GPA</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 39</td>
<td>Phase I: 53</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 24</td>
<td>Phase II: 38</td>
<td>Phase II: 34</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 43</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 28</td>
<td>Phase II: 40</td>
<td>Phase II: 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 36</td>
<td>Phase I: 50</td>
<td>0.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 26</td>
<td>Phase II: 33</td>
<td>Phase II: 48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 56</td>
<td>0.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 29</td>
<td>Phase II: 39</td>
<td>Phase II: 49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 39</td>
<td>Phase I: 53</td>
<td>0.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
<td>Phase II: 40</td>
<td>Phase II: 54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Phase I: 27</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 38</td>
<td>1.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
<td>Phase II: 39</td>
<td>Phase II: 47</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* POE = Perceived Outcome Expectations, PAC = Perceived Academic Control, ASE = Academic Self-Efficacy

Table 21

*Demographic Information from Interview Participants—Academic Probation Group*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jill</td>
<td>Liberal Arts AA</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hank</td>
<td>Pre-Aviation AAS</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mark</td>
<td>Computer Information Systems</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Liberal Arts AA</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Caucasian/White</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Martin</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>African</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Paula</td>
<td>Criminal Justice</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Hispanic/Latino</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Jill, Mark, and Austin experienced decreases in all three variables from the beginning of the semester to the follow-up interview. At a glance, it appears that self-efficacy took the biggest hit for these three students. Hank and Paula experienced a decrease in perceived outcome expectations, remained stable on perceived academic control, and showed an increase in academic self-efficacy. Martin remained relatively stable, but did show slight increases in perceived academic control and academic self-efficacy.

Jill is an 18-year-old, first-semester student with English as her first language. She was registered for seven credits at the beginning of the semester and was taking a developmental math class as well as a college preparatory class. Jill indicated that she earned her GED rather than a traditional high school diploma. She is also a first-generation college student. Out of high school, Jill wanted to become a doctor, but later changed her mind and decided that she didn’t really want to pursue that career goal. When she was 16, she was kicked out of her house and moved in with her best friend’s family. At the time, her best friend’s mother had just died and Jill reported that she helped to take care of the family until they moved recently. She cited the main reason for delaying college as the responsibilities in helping to care for this family. Jill currently lives with a family friend and works full-time as a lifeguard. She decided to attend college with the goal of becoming a dental hygienist and shared that she decided to attend the local community college because it is significantly cheaper than attending a university. Upon her enrollment, Jill recalled her confidence level as “pretty average.” However, she shared that the semester went “poorly,” adding that numerous other responsibilities came up during the semester. First, she moved three times during the
semester. Her brother, who was in Brazil, was having financial trouble, so she was trying to help him. Additionally, her grandfather was hospitalized during the semester. Following his hospitalization, he suffered two strokes and was then subsequently put into a care facility and now her grandmother lives alone. These issues made it difficult for Jill to attend classes on a regular basis. She shared that at the beginning of the semester, things were going well and then, “it just airplane dived into the ground.” At one point, Jill contacted one of her teachers by email and explained the situation. When her teacher responded, she perceived that her teacher didn’t care about her struggles and at that point, Jill said that she stopped caring about that class. However, she shared that another teacher was very helpful to her and tried to do everything in her power to help Jill make it through the semester. Jill stated that the day following the withdrawal deadline, she calculated her grade in each of her classes and recognized that she would not be able to pass either class. She approached her teacher to try to withdraw from the class, but her teachers explained to her that it was too late since the deadline had passed. At that point, she stopped attending her class and failed both of her classes. While Jill was registered for the next semester at the time of the interview, she stated that she intended to withdraw from those classes and move to Brazil to help her brother establish schools. She added that at the current time in her life, she was questioning whether college was a good fit for her since her life felt unstable.

Hank is a 24-year-old Caucasian male with English as a first language. During the semester, he was unemployed. At the beginning of the semester, he cited his primary reason for going to school as “to further my knowledge growth and gain a financially sound career.” His goals at the beginning of the semester were, “to finish the semester
with at least a B." Hank was enrolled in the aviation program. Hank had a delay of enrollment in college as he entered the military after high school and served a four-year term in the US Army. He is financially independent from his parents and has a young son. He is currently married, but he and his wife are in the process of separating, which occurred during the semester. His wife and son currently reside in a different state. He is also a first-generation college student. During his first semester, Hank registered for four courses: two English courses (including a developmental English course), music appreciation, and a college skills prep course. He received failing grades in all courses during his first semester and did not enroll in the subsequent summer or fall terms and is no longer a student at the college. While he indicated during his interview that the semester did not go as well as it could have and tended to minimize his failure by stating that he could have “done better” and that his performance was “kind of in the middle.” At the time of the interview, there were holds on his academic record, so he was not able to know his final grades in his courses. Therefore, his interview answers were provided with no knowledge of the actual outcome of the semester, but rather, his perceptions on how the semester went.

Mark is a 23-year-old Caucasian male with English as his first language. During the spring semester 2015, Mark was enrolled in three classes, for a total of nine credit hours. His courses included English, a developmental English, and a college skills preparatory course. He failed all three of his classes. During his interview, he was certain he failed all of his classes. He did not enroll in the subsequent summer or fall terms. Mark originally wanted to be a physicist and earn a doctorate in physics. However, when he enrolled for his first semester, he declared his major in Computer Information Systems
after a friend encouraged him to enroll in order to obtain a degree in “something related to cyber security.” Mark shared that while he desires for a "traditional" college experience that includes going to a four-year university and living in a dorm, he believed that was not possible for him at this point due to the fact that he has his GED and cannot afford the tuition for a four-year university. Mark identified that his main obstacle during his first semester pertained to severe alcohol abuse issues, describing himself as being “drunk” most of the semester. He shared that towards the middle of the semester, he was brought to the hospital emergency room by his grandparents. He was diagnosed with alcohol poisoning and had a very high blood alcohol level. Mark identified this event as the beginning of the downward spiral for his semester. He also reported losing interest in his English class due to a dislike of writing papers and seeing no value in writing. His English class was the first class that he stopped going to once he identified that he would not pass the class. While he stated that he did try to stick out his college orientation class, he realized that he would also have a difficult time passing that class and decided to try to withdraw from all classes. However, when he began to pursue withdrawing, he realized that it was two days after the course withdrawal deadline and was unable to do so. While he had not looked at his transcript prior to his interview, he was completely certain that he failed all his courses. Review of his transcript verified that he did, indeed, fail all courses for his first semester and was subsequently placed on academic probation. Despite failing all classes, he shared that he felt his confidence is higher now, explaining, “now I know what I’m getting into.” At the time of his interview, he indicated a desire to enroll in a subsequent semester, but has not done so.
Austin is a 26-year-old Caucasian male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the spring 2015 semester. Austin shared that he desired to become a chef, but that he understood that job prospects were slim, stating,

As a person, I definitely love food and cooking. That wouldn’t show by my major or anything to do with school. I actually wanted to become a chef for the most part for my whole life, but I found out that it really wasn’t lucrative. It’s a lot of hard work… if I wanted to become a top chef… it’s kind of hard to make it that far.

Instead, Austin enrolled in college to pursue a horticulture major, explaining that the reason was that “it’s a lot more progressive, I guess.” During his first semester, Austin was enrolled in 13 credit hours, with the following classes: Introductory Psychology, English Composition, a developmental math class, and a college skills preparatory course. Austin reported that he started off the semester with high self-efficacy, stating that he believed he would earn all A grades. However, approximately six weeks into the semester, he stated that things took a downward turn. He had significant issues with procrastination, stating that he put off his course work despite being told not to. In addition, he experienced health problems, some of which landed him in the hospital. Austin also stated that he had transportation problems during the semester, which made it hard for him to get to campus. Austin shared that eventually, he stopped attending his classes and by the time that he tried to re-engage with his classes, it was too late. He shared that the biggest reason for him to stop attending was his health issues that resulted in two separate hospital stays. At one point, he attempted to contact his teachers to explain the situation, but perceived their responses to be uncaring, which subsequently resulted in another decrease in motivation. He finished his first semester with a cumulative GPA of 0.69 and was placed on academic probation. He did enroll in the
summer term, repeating his college skills preparatory class and the developmental math class, earning a C and a B respectively. He did not enroll during the fall semester 2015 for unknown reasons.

Martin is a 23-year-old African male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the summer 2015 semester. Differing from the other interviews, this interview took place on the campus of a local university at the request of the participant to meet off-campus. Martin immigrated to the United States from Africa approximately two years ago for the purpose of marrying his wife. They now have two small children (ages two years and three months). He shared that he did not have the opportunity to go to college in his home country and that he is the first person in his family to attend college. He is currently employed full-time at a senior center in town. Martin shared that he is studying business administration and that his dream is to complete two years at a community college and then transfer to a four-year university. He would like to eventually start his own company. During his first semester, he was enrolled in two classes: a college skills preparatory course as well as a developmental math class. Martin shared that his self-efficacy was lower before enrolling because he is from another country and was worried that others would not be able to understand his accent. He stated that his confidence grew during his first semester and perceived that he did well despite earning a low grade point average, which he was aware of at the time of his interview. He acknowledged that math has always been a struggle for him and that he has never earned good grades in math. He attributed part of his confidence gain to the college skills preparatory class, which provided him an outlet to improve on skills related to college, including learning more about his career as well as time management skills. Some of the
struggles he focused on included having to juggle work and family with school as well as having difficulty turning in assignments when his computer broke. In addition, he stated that there were some cultural barriers for him in math because he learned the order of operations differently in Africa. Martin ended his first semester with a cumulative GPA of 0.857. He enrolled in the subsequent fall term for a total of thirteen credit hours.

Paula is an 18-year-old Hispanic student who was enrolled in her first semester of college during the spring 2015 semester. She had a delay of about 1 year since her high school graduation before she enrolled in college. She recalled her years of high school being difficult and explained that she found herself struggling to complete high school. In the end, she earned a GED rather than a traditional high school diploma. She added that since about the third grade, she has been diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder, which was verified during her enrollment in college. Following high school, she obtained a job as a cashier where she was employed part-time for the duration of the semester. However, she stated that about four months into that job, she realized that the work was “boring” and that was when she decided that she wanted to go to college. She also shared that she is the primary financial support for her household because her mother is currently sick. Paula mentioned that she chose the local community college over the local four-year university because she didn’t like the university and saw it as “really crowded.” She saw the local community college as being smaller, and thus, a better fit for her. Her current plan is to complete two years at the community college and then move to attend a university. Her career interests focus on crime scene investigation and she is currently pursuing a Liberal Arts Associates of Science degree with a criminal justice designation. During her first semester, she was enrolled in three classes for a total of
twelve credit hours. Her courses included a developmental English as well as a developmental math class in addition to a college skills preparatory class. She earned a cumulative GPA of 1.67 during her first semester of college enrollment. At the time of her interview, she was enrolled for classes during the subsequent fall semester.

**Reasons for pursuing college.** Similar to the participants from the withdrawal group, many of the participants that were placed on academic probation indicated their reason for pursuing college was to have more options in their future. This was probably the most true for Martin, who shared that he grew up in Africa and, while living there, did not have the opportunity to go to college. He added, “I think America is a blessed country. There’s opportunities and when I had the opportunity to go back to school, I was so excited.” He added that he saw college enrollment as necessary to allowing him better opportunities for himself and his family. Similar to Martin, Hank shared that his primary reason was to establish a solid career for himself. He also mentioned that his decision stemmed from seeing his own father work hard in life, adding, “I didn't want to be hurting myself every day just to provide that little bitty bit for the family that I had, so I was like, 'I'm gonna go to school and do something worthwhile with my life.’” Hank also mentioned that when his son was born, it shifted his career priorities from the military to a college education, sharing that he did not want to get deployed again and possibly be killed; college felt to him to be a much safer option. Jill also mentioned that her reason for pursuing a college education was to learn and establish a career. Jill added that she would have gone to college sooner, but when she completed high school, she moved in with a friend to help take care of their family, which led to her delaying college.
Interestingly, two participants indicated their primary reason for pursuing college as related to their level of boredom with their current life. Paula shared, “It was getting boring being a cashier.” She indicated that she was employed as a cashier for about four months when she made the decision to get a college education. Similarly, Austin stated, “I got bored, really. I was tired of not doing much.” For these students, enrolling in college was necessary to decrease the amount of boredom in their daily lives.

The decision to pursue community college rather than a university. Similar to those in the group that withdrew, many of the participants in this group reported that their primary reason for pursuing community college over a university was cost. In addition to cost, many reported that they did not believe that they could get into a university. Mark shared that he originally wanted to attend a university about forty-five minutes away, but that he didn’t believe he would get in. He stated, “I was kind of under the impression that I couldn’t get into a university. I only have a GED. I knew I could get into here, so it's like, well, let’s start somewhere. Similarly, Austin stated that he didn’t believe he could meet admission standards for a university, sharing, “I didn't really have much of a choice. I didn’t really do the greatest in high school and I think I had a flat B, but I really didn’t try too much so I didn’t really have like outstanding anything or any scholarships or anything like that, so it was pretty much the only basic building block to get started.”

Finally, Paula stated that her primary reason for attending the community college was that she didn’t like the local university because it was very crowded.

Self-efficacy in the beginning. When students were asked about their confidence level on the first day, some reported high self-efficacy while others had some hesitancies. Mark reported feeling confident at the beginning by noting, “Early on, I kind of came in
with the idea that I'm gonna do good. These are pretty easy classes. I should definitely have it." Paula also mentioned, "I was pumped. This was the biggest step to my new life. I was extremely confident. I wanted to see it through to the end and no matter what obstacle got in my way, I would overcome it." Austin also reported a high level of confidence at the beginning of the semester, stating that he predicted he would earn all A’s the first semester. He added, "That is not how it went."

Other students were more hesitant at the beginning of the semester. Jill felt that her self-confidence at the beginning of the semester was “pretty average” and that she wanted to “see how it went.” Hank was also hesitant about his performance in college due to poor performance in high school, explaining that he “skimmed by and did the bare minimum.” Still, he stated that while he was nervous, he “had a clear head and was ready to go.” For Martin, his hesitancies stemmed from being new to the American education system; he explained that he was intimidated particularly because his thick accent makes it difficult for others to understand him. He also explained, “everything seemed different from what I know from back home.” Martin’s self-efficacy was specifically lower for math, which he had struggled with in the past.

**Evaluation of the semester.** Interestingly, despite the fact that all students in this group earned a grade point average that placed them on academic probation, their perceptions regarding how the semester went varied. Jill, Mark, and Austin all identified that the semester didn’t go well. However, the other three perceived that the semester went more positively than it actually had.
While Mark started off the semester with high confidence, his overall evaluation of the semester was that "It didn't turn out great." He stated that his interest started to waver, particularly in his English class. Similarly, Paula recalled,

It was waverin. It was just kind of going down and then... I think it was after spring break... I wasn't doing very well in my English class, and I had seen my grade and was like, 'Okay... I gotta start getting my head back into the game.' I was just like, 'I can't do it.' I also realized that college isn't a game. You can't just fail and then move to the next class. It's just like, you fail... you get so many warnings, especially with financial aid. It's not a game.

In the end, Paula was able to pull her grades up a bit, but still received a grade point average which placed her on academic probation. However, she still perceived herself as doing satisfactory in the end.

While Jill reported her confidence at the beginning of the semester as "pretty average", she later indicated that the semester had gone "poorly." She explained, "At the beginning, it was actually going fairly well. And then it just kind of airplane dived into the ground." Hank also reported his beginning confidence as "in the middle." However, unlike Jill, he still reported the semester as going "not the best, but not the worst. Kind of in between" despite failing all of his courses. Finally, Martin seemed pleased that he did as well in math as he did, stating that he had never earned such good grades in math.

**Perceptions of barriers.** One of the biggest themes that emerged for this group was the circumstances that led them to not be able to attend class on a regular basis. This differed from student to student, but mostly centered around multiple responsibilities and instability in life. Jill shared that there were a number of issues that came up over the course of the semester which took her attention away from her classes. These issues included moving multiple times during the semester, and family problems including
hospitalization of her grandfather. Because of these events, she shared that it was “impossible” for her to attend class on a regular basis.

Hank also experienced instability in his life during the semester; specifically, he and his wife went through a separation in the middle of the semester. Prior to that separation, he talked about his family as mostly a barrier to his education rather than a support in that it gave him multiple responsibilities to juggle and made studying difficult at home. In addition to the separation from his wife, he experienced transportation issues due to his car breaking down.

Like Hank, Paula's instability largely came from her home environment, which included family problems. She shared, “My parents… they fight a lot at home. So it was kind of like, I don't want to go home, you know.” She added that her parents would often try to include her on their fighting, which made it impossible to concentrate at home. In addition, her mother was ill and she saw herself as the primary source of income for not only her parents, but also her brother. She stated,

It's really hard to try to support someone else and you're only working twenty five hours a week and you're getting paid nine dollars an hour… so it's extremely hard to build up that money and be able to pay rent, pay bills, phone bills, groceries… it is extremely hard.

She added that balancing her employment and school was difficult, which resulted in a lack of sleep and overabundance of stress. Even at the time of the interview, she admitted that she still struggles with time management.

For Mark, his primary barriers to success were significant alcohol abuse problems, which resulted in him being placed in the hospital during the course of the semester. Following his hospitalization for alcohol poisoning, he was unable to bring his grades back up. About the night he was hospitalized, he shared,
The hospital thing was kind of a big wake-up call. It was huge. That was probably like a month in when I just started going downhill. What happened was my grandparents came downstairs and I was trying to sleep. Well, I was sleeping, but they woke me up. And they woke me up and were like, 'You're really drunk.' I was stumbling around, so they were like, ‘You’re going to the hospital.’ And we went to the hospital and the hospital did a breathalyzer on me and they determined I should have been dead from the amount of alcohol that I had in my system at the time.

Mark shared that many times, he would be intoxicated when he would get to school, stating, “If my English teacher didn't know, she was a damn idiot.” The times that he wasn’t intoxicated while at school, most of his thoughts centered around going home to drink. He explained, “Just basically not being here mentally. I would be sitting there in class and I’d sit in class thinking that I could just leave right now and go home and get drunk. You know, it took my mind off the class.” He added, “If I didn't have that damn alcohol problem, I probably would have passed all my classes.”

Austin’s big form of instability was largely due to health issues and a lack of transportation. He indicated,

I have a lot of health issues. I have gastritis and a few things that limit my want to even get out of bed in the day. I have tension headaches with migraine tendencies. Migraines and also lots of different stuff. I wake up pretty much every other day throwing up stomach acid and stuff.

He added that when he was in the hospital, he didn’t contact his teachers to let them know what was happening. In addition to his health, like Hank, Austin also experienced transportation issues, stating, “I didn't realize it would affect school as much as it did not having a car… trying to get from here to school three times a week. I didn't realize it was gonna be that big of a burden.”

While Martin seemed to have the most life stability of the group, he also experienced a difficult time making the cultural transitions necessary to do well in the
American education system. In addition, he also struggled with juggling multiple responsibilities of caring for his family, working, and going to school. He shared, “American culture in the education sector… it’s totally different. That was pretty hard for me coming from a place where teachers are not that nice. It was a short semester too and it went pretty fast. I felt that there was a lot.” He added that his accent posed some problems with others understanding him, stating, “People didn’t understand me as well so I had to say one sentence like four times before somebody could understand what I’m saying.” While managing cultural transitions, Martin’s computer also broke during the semester, leading him to begin to miss assignments and deadlines. He added that due to his work schedule, he wasn’t able to use the school resources when this happened, stating that the schedule for the library and computer lab conflicted with his work schedule, making it difficult for him to be on campus when these resources were available to him.

Along with this life instability, some students reported that they perceived their teachers as not caring, which served to further push them to disengage with school. If you recall, Mark admitted that on many occasions, he would attend classes while intoxicated. He was certain that his English teacher recognized this, but noted that she never said anything. This led him to believe his English teacher did not care about him; he stated, “She kind of reminded me of one of those typical college teachers. ‘Well, you show up… you don’t show up… I don’t care. I get paid anyways.’ She never talked to me.” While Jill was experiencing multiple forms of stressors in her life, she also perceived her teacher to not care. She recalled one instance where she attempted to contact a teacher to explain her stressors, but didn’t feel that she received a supportive response. As I result, she concluded, “Okay, I just don’t care. She doesn’t care. I’m not going to.” When Austin
contacted his teachers about his chronic illness, he also perceived an uncaring response. He recalled, “They were like, 'well, whatever.' It seemed pointless. Like, if they don't care and I'm sick… the motivation just wasn't exactly flowing through me to get up and go.” Finally, Martin also perceived his teacher to have given up on him in the end after he started to fall behind, citing the fact that his teacher often did not respond to his emails at the end of the semester. Interestingly, of those students that perceived their teachers as uncaring, only Martin re-engaged with school.

Another barrier that was reported by some participants included difficulty with self-regulatory skills. Paula, diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder since the third grade, stated that her symptoms posed as a barrier to her success in school despite the fact that she was using accommodations. She went on to explain that it was difficult for her to remember directions and pay attention in her classes. Austin, on the other hand, shared that he struggled with procrastination despite being warned not to put things off. Mark struggled with maintaining motivation for a subject that he had little interest in, which was writing. He identified that he found no value in improving his writing, and quickly lost interest.

Finally, Austin, like some of the students that withdrew from their classes, mentioned social anxiety serving as a barrier to his success. He shared,

I had my jaw broken so I have anxiety and stuff like that. I had three south-siders break into my house and break my jaw with a bat. So, like, just anxiety in general is a pretty big deal. And I don't really go to the doctor or anything for it, so it's not something that's... like.. taken care of either. But with school, it gives me a pretty high level of anxiety.
Austin did mention that after reading some of his journals, one of his instructors recommended for him to go see the counselor on campus; he reported that he did meet with the counselor once and that he found it helpful.

**Perceptions of supports.** Compared to the group of students who withdrew from their classes, this group of students tended to mention more supports in the form of resources at the college. However, while they mentioned social supports, they were less likely to mention specific family members serving as social supports in their academic pursuits. Like with the previous group, one of the biggest themes that emerged with regards to supports was the presence of social supports, including friends, family, and teachers. Most students mentioned teachers as a primary social support, while family members and friends were mentioned less often. Jill shared that one of her instructors was very supportive of her, stating that she recognized the help her teacher provided to her to help her be successful. Mark also mentioned a teacher that went above and beyond to help him. He recalled,

> I kept showing up to school and I had my books and my papers and it was just a stack. I had nothing to put them in. And she took me into her office and found some... she found like a carry satchel backpack thing and she got me pens, highlighters, a notebook... Like, she did everything she really could. And she was like, “Here. Have it.” And I still use the damn thing.

On another occasion, Mark recalled a teacher calling him at home one day to check up on him and see if he was going to come to class. Because he was intoxicated at the time, he told her he would not be coming that day, but appreciated her efforts in reaching out to him. He added that personal connections with teachers at the school were motivating for him to try to stay engaged. Similarly, Paula recalled a time when one of her teachers was seen as a support because she took the time to explain an assignment to her. Austin
shared, “All my teachers were pretty adamant about me passing my classes and getting back in school and stuff like that. I just didn't necessary do it, which I regret.” Finally, Martin shared that his teacher's openness to diversity helped him adjust to a new culture and feel valued for his own cultural background.

Social support from family and friends was mentioned less often for this group, with Paula being the only student to mention these specific social supports. Paula shared that she received support from her brother, boyfriend, and grandmother in her college endeavors. She added that despite the fact that her grandmother was deceased, she still provided a support to her given that she always supported her decisions, particularly the idea of attending college. She added that her best friend also worked to encourage her when she experienced a decrease in confidence.

Social support from classmates was also mentioned specifically by Martin. While Martin acknowledged his teacher's openness to cultural diversity as a support, it appeared that support also came from his classmates, which he described as being open to his culture as well. Mark also mentioned other students, stating, “I definitely got to know some of the students and we got to talking and they knew who I was whenever I walked in the room.” He shared that this contributed to a sense of community that he felt in that particular class, but stated that he did not feel that sense of community in his other class.

One final area of support that was mentioned focused on advising services. Paula shared, “Whenever I had my first meeting with her [advisor], she just asked me how classes went and I told her… I just let it all out and she was really understanding about everything.” For Paula, it was helpful to have someone to vent to about when things weren’t going well in her classes and she saw her advisor as that support on campus.
Resources that were available at the school were also mentioned as a support by some students. Paula indicated that she was diagnosed with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder in the third grade, and that diagnosis was verified when she began her college enrollment. She shared that she received accommodations as a result, such as extra time on testing as well as a quiet room for testing. She also mentioned that during the next semester, she would also receive help with note taking, which she believed would be of benefit to her. Martin also mentioned the tutoring services and computer lab that was available. Mark shared that he saw the college as offering a lot of resources to students, noting that, “One thing I loved about this place…is the resources that I have.”

While Paula was less likely to use the computer lab and library on campus, she shared that the community library was important to providing her a quiet place to do her homework when her home environment was not conducive to studying.

Finally, Martin mentioned that some of the specific assignments given in his college skills preparatory class were helpful and served as supports. He recalled specific assignments where he did research for his career and constructed a vision board. For Martin, these assignments allowed him to feel more fully prepared for being successful in the American college system. In particular, he shared that it as a confidence-boost to him when he received positive feedback from others in the class. From that experience, he concluded, “I thought that I can make it through this different system.”

Interestingly, while most students shared concerns over financing their education, only Martin mentioned financial aid as a support. He shared, "I got financial aid, so I didn’t have to worry about the money for college even though I didn't get the full amount because I only took seven credits."
**Other factors that may have contributed to failure.** Through analysis of the six interviews, the biggest theme that emerged was the idea that life instability got in the way of these students’ engagement with their classes. Each student experienced life instability in some way during the course of the semester, which may have contributed to their lack of ability to manage those stressors along with their coursework. In addition to that, there were some interesting comments from a couple of the students. Overall, it seemed that this group of students, as compared to the other two groups (i.e., those that withdrew and the others that completed the semester and were not on academic probation), perceived college to be easier than it actually is. For instance, Hank enrolled in college thinking that it would be a lot more laid-back than the military. He described school in the following manner, “It’s very relaxing and just kind of soothing, I guess, in a weird way.” He also shared that, unlike the military, you can decide not to show up and no one cares.

Similarly, that theme emerged in Mark’s discussion of college. He emphasized the social aspect of college, comparing college to the movie, *Animal House*. He mentioned,

> Unfortunately, I kind of want the traditional route where you go to a four-year college and live in a dorm and all that. I’ve been told by a bunch of people, “Why would you want to go to a dorm There’s a bunch of young kids there.” and I’m like, “Is there, really?” I don’t know. I always think of… have you ever seen *Animal House*? I always think of that. I want that experience… I want the fun.

It took Paula realizing that she was going to fail all of her classes to help her realize that “college is not a game.”

**Consideration of withdrawal.** Throughout the course of the semester, many students shared that their self-efficacy fluctuated based on the feedback they received from their environment. Only two of the students, Mark and Hank, considered withdrawing. Mark actually tried to withdraw, but missed the withdrawal deadline by two
days. He stated that when he first noticed that he was failing all of his classes, he tried to make an effort to pull his grades up, but that he was not successful in doing so. Finally, Mark looked at his grades and saw that there was no possible way to pass his classes. He stated, "I looked online. I kind of did some calculations in my head and I was like, 'Yeah. Even if I ace everything right now, I'm not gonna pass.'" He added, "Basically, once I knew I was gonna fail, I just stopped going. There's no point in me going. I'm going to fail. It's the difference between a 30% and a zero." While Hank did not attempt to withdraw, he did seriously consider it. When asked if he considered withdrawing, he stated, "Oh, yes ma'am, I did. I was close." He added that his stressors had become overwhelming, which led to the consideration, stating,

Just going home and having to deal with everything… and when my car broke down and I was having to bum rides or have to call a cab to come take me home… I was just thinking, "Why am I trying to do this? Why don't I just stop and just continue working again and get my finances all back in order." But I just kept telling myself, "You just need to push through it."

For the rest of the group, withdrawing from their classes was not a consideration because they perceived that they would be able to pass their classes until it was too late. As an example, when Jill realized that she was not going to be able to pass her classes, it was the day after the withdrawal deadline, which prevented her from withdrawing.

**Thoughts on the nontraditional student.** Similar to the previous group of students, most reported feeling different based on their nontraditional status. Jill was the student who felt less "nontraditional" than the rest, sharing that she imagines a "nontraditional" student as a mother who is older and has four kids at home. However, Jill noted that going to college was a “difficult transition” for her and wondered whether it would have been different had she enrolled right out of high school. Hank
differentiated himself from what he called “lifers,” who he saw as people (such as lawyers and doctors) that go to school for a long time; however, because he didn’t anticipate going to college and instead spending his career in the military, this made him feel more like a nontraditional student. He also shared, from his perspective as a nontraditional student as "Yeah, I mean those types of people usually come into thinking, 'I don't know if I can do this This isn't my cup of tea I'd rather be out there working or something.' Because I thought the same stuff and I always told myself that I'm not smart enough to go to college.” For Paula, she did feel like a nontraditional student and differentiated herself from the many students in her graduating class that went straight from high school to college. Similarly, Austin noted his delay in college enrollment as classifying him as nontraditional. Finally, Martin stated that his responsibilities outside school set him apart from other students, explaining,

Coming out of high school, you don't have a lot of responsibilities in your life. You’re not tired from home. Sometimes you don’t have a babysitter and you’re late in class because you’re trying to find somebody to watch your kids. I think that the responsibility part of it made me… set me apart from the… If I was 18 and came from high school into college, I would be… maybe I would be getting everything in class, you know.

**Self-efficacy following failure and educational futures.** Following their first semester, half the group enrolled in a subsequent semester, while the other half did not. It is noteworthy to add that those that did not enroll in a subsequent semester were the students that failed all classes. Those that showed some success as evidenced by passing at least one class did enroll for a subsequent semester. For Jill, her first semester made her consider whether college is a good fit for her right now. She stated that one of the major reasons is because her life does not currently feel stable. She stated, "To be completely honest with you, I think I’m just going to have to withdraw. My life if just
kind of in that place where it's just not stable enough.” She added that her first semester experience also made her consider whether she wants to pursue a college education, explaining, “Now that I’ve gone through it, I’m really kind of questioning whether this is even something I really want to do.” Hank, similarly, reported that he retained his confidence for school and stated that he was “ready to go” for next semester; however, he did not enroll in a subsequent semester. For Mark, attending one semester meant that he had more knowledge about what college was about, which served to boost his confidence. He stated, “Well, I know a lot more about what I’m getting into.” However, like the other two students, he did not enroll in any classes following his first semester.

Paula, Austin, and Martin all registered for classes for the following semester. Austin enrolled during the summer term, but then stopped attending after that. Paula continues to be actively enrolled at the school. At the time of her interview, she described herself as being “pretty pumped” again for school. She believed the next semester would be different since she has learned how to manage her time better. Despite the fact that she did poorly in math, she stated that her confidence had gone up because she knew she could utilize tutoring resources at the college. Finally, while Martin also experienced struggles, he believed that his experiences and the skills he learned during his first semester would help him in the next. He stated, “It’s possible. It’s do-able.”

**A Snapshot of Students Who Were Successful During Their First Semester**

The last group of students interviewed endorsed at least one nontraditional criteria, consented to post-semester follow-up contact, and successfully completed the semester as defined by earning a grade point average of 2.0 or higher (i.e., not being
placed on academic probation). Of the 74 eligible participants from Phase I, nine were selected to participate in the interview process, which constituted 12% of the available sample (see Table 22 for demographic information). In addition to their follow-up interview, post-semester measures of perceived outcome expectations (POE), perceived academic control (PAC), and academic self-efficacy (ASE) were collected (see Table 23 for details). In addition, first semester cumulative grade point average was obtained through review of student transcripts. The range of grade point averages for this group of students was 2.0 to 4.0.

Table 22

Demographic Information from Interview Participants—Successful Students

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Major</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
<td>Computer Information Systems</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Psychology</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Welding Technology</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
<td>Aviation</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Julio</td>
<td>Welding Technology</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gene</td>
<td>Welding Technology</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
<td>Business</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Undeclared</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Caucasian</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23

*Pre-Test and Post-Test Measures of Perceived Outcome Expectations, Perceived Academic Control, and Academic Self-Efficacy—Successful Students*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>POE</th>
<th>PAC</th>
<th>ACE</th>
<th>GPA</th>
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<tr>
<td>Trevor</td>
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<td>Phase I: 33</td>
<td>Phase I: 44</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 21</td>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
<td>Phase II: 38</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tina</td>
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<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 45</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
<td>Phase II: 35</td>
<td>Phase II: 50</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tyler</td>
<td>Phase I: 25</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 56</td>
<td>4.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 28</td>
<td>Phase II: 40</td>
<td>Phase II: 42</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tom</td>
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<td>Phase I: 34</td>
<td>Phase I: 45</td>
<td>3.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 25</td>
<td>Phase II: 34</td>
<td>Phase II: 54</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>Phase I: 53</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 30</td>
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<td>Phase II: 56</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Juanita</td>
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<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 49</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>Phase II: 40</td>
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<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gene</td>
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<td>Phase I: 43</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
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<td>Phase II: 36</td>
<td>Phase II: 52</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Alicia</td>
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<td>Phase I: 39</td>
<td>Phase I: 37</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 26</td>
<td>Phase II: 37</td>
<td>Phase II: 44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kathy</td>
<td>Phase I: 30</td>
<td>Phase I: 40</td>
<td>Phase I: 56</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Phase II: 29</td>
<td>Phase II: 39</td>
<td>Phase II: 48</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In terms of perceived outcome expectations, four students endorsed a higher rating following their first semester, four students endorsed a lower rating following their first semester, and one student remained the same. In terms of perceived academic control, two students endorsed a higher rating, four students endorsed a lower rating, and the ratings for the final three students remained the same. Academic self-efficacy
appeared to show the most gains of the three variables, with five students showing endorsing higher ratings following their first semester; the remaining four students, however, endorsed lower ratings following their first semester despite their success. Julio was the only student of this group that endorsed higher ratings for all three variables following his first semester while Trevor was the only student that endorsed lower ratings for all three variables following his first semester, despite earning a 4.0 grade point average.

Trevor is a 22-year-old Caucasian male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the spring semester 2015. During the semester, he worked part-time for approximately twenty hours per week. Trevor endorsed three nontraditional criteria: delayed enrollment to college, financial independence from parents, and first-generation college student. Following high school, Trevor shared that he wasn’t sure what he wanted to do in terms of a career. While some tried to push him to go to culinary school, Trevor stated that he doesn’t like to cook and didn’t want to pursue that. He shared that he has always been interested in technology and video games, which was the main reason for pursuing a Computer Information Systems AAS degree. Trevor shared during his interview that he currently lives with his mother and younger brother; he shared that he spent a great deal of time helping to raise his younger brother while his mother finished her own college degree. During his first semester, Trevor was enrolled in four classes, for a total of thirteen credit hours. His courses included a college skills preparatory course, a developmental math class, English Composition, and Introduction to PC Applications. He earned straight A’s his first semester. He perceived his first semester as successful, but stated that he was nervous for the current semester. At the time of his interview, he had
already begun the summer semester and was enrolled in two classes for a total of seven credit hours. He shared that he was concerned about his math course, which seemed to be the reason for the decrease in his perceived outcome expectations, perceived academic control, and perceived self-efficacy following his first semester despite earning a 4.0 grade point average.

Tina is a 36-year-old Hispanic female who was enrolled in her first semester of college during the summer semester 2015. English is her first language. During the semester, she worked part-time for a total of ten hours per week. Her goals for her first semester were “to pass a class.” Tina has an extensive history of drug use, most notably methamphetamine. She is currently involved in the Drug Court System due to being arrested for possession of a controlled substance (methamphetamine). At the time of her interview, she had been clean for over seven months. During the semester, she was living with her 17-year-old daughter and her mother. She is currently pursuing her Associate’s degree in Psychology and was enrolled in a total of eight credit hours, which consisted of two classes: a college skills preparatory class and a developmental English class. Tina completed the semester with a grade point average of 4.0 and shared that she was enrolled in the following semester. Her future plans include completing her two-year degree at the community college and then transferring to the local university. She would like to pursue a career in substance abuse counseling, adding, “not in this county though. I’ve used with too many people.”

Tyler is a 28-year-old Caucasian male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the summer semester 2015. During the semester, he was unemployed. He is financially independent from his parents and earned a GED at the age of seventeen
rather than a traditional high school diploma. While his father attended college, his
mother did not. His father has a four-year architectural degree, which Tyler stated he still
uses, but is not in the field any longer. During his first semester, Tyler was homeless and
was living out of his truck in various parking lots. On the day of his interview, he was
excited because he was able to find an RV, which he described as “fucking awesome…
moving up.” Prior to enrollment, he was living with his mother and stepfather, but stated
that he doesn’t get along with his stepfather, which resulted in him leaving the home and
becoming homeless approximately two months prior to the interview. He also shared that
prior to his enrollment, he was making money by dealing drugs and added, “but yeah, the
pot scene changed and I want to make some real money.” Tyler also reported an
extensive history of substance abuse including alcohol, methamphetamine, and
marijuana. He saw his substance use as the primary reason why he did not enroll in
college sooner. Tyler finished the semester earning a 4.0. He shared that following this
semester, he will continue with his education at the community college and was already
enrolled for the next semester. He said that his long-term goal is to graduate and open up
a welding fabrication shop.

Tom is a 27-year-old Caucasian male who was enrolled in his first semester of
college during the spring 2015 semester. English is his first language and he was
unemployed during the semester. He is a medically retired infantry Marine who delayed
enrollment to college, is financially independent from his parents, and is a first-
generation college student. Tom stated that he spent 8 years in the Marines after he joined
right out of high school. He is married with no children. Currently, his wife is working on
completing a graduate degree. Tom indicated that following his medical retirement, he
worked in the construction business to rebuild homes after a massive area flooding. However, a few years later, the work contracts ended, which left him wondering what to do next. Originally, he planned on enrolling at the local university, but after there was a problem with his GI Bill paperwork, he decided to enroll at the local community college. He decided to pursue the aviation program at the local community college and enrolled in his first semester within that program. He stated that he had heard good things from other students about using the GI Bill at the college; in addition, the college was the only place in the area where he could pursue aviation. However, following a change to his GI Bill which would require him to pay all his fuel costs out of pocket, he applied to and was accepted into the fire science program. Unlike many students, Tom perceives a lack of value for higher education. While he acknowledges that you need a college education to establish a career, he felt that his courses were not relevant to him. In addition, he experienced a hard time transitioning from military life to being a student. While he sees the process of going to college as merely “getting a piece of paper,” he indicated that his goal is to complete two years at the community college and then transfer to a university. Tom completed his first semester with a 3.77 grade point average.

Julio is a 20-year-old Hispanic male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the spring semester 2015. He currently works full-time in the oil industry and typically works sixty hours per week. He reported that he earned his GED in 2013 and has been working in the oil field since then. A few of his coworkers began to encourage him to take classes in welding, which led him to enroll at the community college in the welding program. Julio also indicated that he is a first-generation college student. He stated that he also delayed his enrollment to college because he believed he
might not be successful; in addition, he wanted to be financially secure prior to enrolling in college because he did not want his parents to have to pay for it. During his first semester, he enrolled in the welding program and was successful, earning a 3.69 grade point average. He was awarded his welding certificate following this semester. While Julio states that he would like to continue with his college education, following his first semester, he will have to put his education on hold due to financial limitations.

Juanita is a 34-year-old Hispanic student who was enrolled for her first semester of college during the spring 2015 semester. Spanish is her first language. She is employed full-time and works forty hours per week in addition to taking three classes during her first semester, which included a college skills preparatory course, an English course, and a developmental English course. She was enrolled for a total of 9 hours. Her goals at the beginning of the semester included “completing three current courses with at least a B average.” Juanita indicated that she delayed enrollment to college and that she is financially independent from her parents. Juanita is originally from El Salvador. Growing up, she shared that she did all her basic courses in Spanish. In 1992, when she was about twelve years old, she moved from El Salvador to the United States and lived in California until 2009. At that time, she began learning English and stated that despite being held back a grade due to her English when she arrived, she was able to learn to speak English in about six to eight months. At the time of her interview, she spoke fluent English. When she was living in California, she completed up through her junior year and then dropped out because there were family issues that made it difficult. She shared, “The dynamics weren’t the most healthy of environments. She later shared, “I got pulled out of high school by my stepdad. He was very abusive to my mom… and to the family as well…
and he basically isolated us. So, my high school was in the middle of town and then he ended up moving us out of the area completely and into an Indian reservation basically. And from there, we were put on basic lock-down.” She stated that not finishing high school led to a lack of confidence for her. Juanita did end up earning her GED later, but states that she still experiences a stigma over not completing high school. In 2009, she moved to where she currently resides. Since about the age of 21, Juanita worked in the medical industry, which is the sector in which she is currently employed. She currently lives with her husband and their two dogs. While they don’t have any children, Juanita shared that they would like to start a family later on this year. Juanita shared that she has been thinking about completing the two years at the community college and then transferring to the local university for a business degree. She states that her long term goals are to pursue either economics or accounting and get a job on the financial side of the medical industry.

Gene is a 53-year-old Hispanic male who was enrolled in his first semester of college during the spring 2015 semester. He completed the 9th grade before later going on to complete his GED in the late 1970’s. He then worked for a number of years before returning to school for the welding program in which he is currently enrolled. He is currently unemployed. Gene reported that he perceived the spring semester as somewhat successful. While he was happy with his grade in one class, he stated that his grades in another class suffered due to all the attention he was giving to one class. As a result, he was earning a D in his developmental math class and had to withdraw prior to the end of the semester. He was enrolled for the same developmental math class in the following
semester. He shared that after he completes he welding program, he may pursue the auto mechanic program as well.

Alicia is a 31-year-old Hispanic student that was enrolled in her first semester of college during the spring semester 2015. She identified English as her first language and was unemployed during the semester. In addition to a delay in enrollment to college, she is financially independent from her parents, has dependents other than a spouse, earned her GED, and is a first-generation college student. She is currently married with four children, ages 14, 13, 10, and 7 years. Her main concern when returning to school was that she wasn’t aware of what the expectations were and was worried about time-management with juggling her family life and school. Her primary goals this semester were “to pass with decent, if not great grades.” During her first semester, she was enrolled in a total of thirteen credit hours. She was taking a college skills preparatory course, an English course, and a developmental English and math course. She shared that the semester went well with the exception of her math class, which she didn’t do well in. While she failed her math course, she was still able to complete the semester with a grade point average of 2.54. Alicia shared that she didn’t think she needed a math tutor during the semester, but now it is clear that she did need one.

Kathy is a 28-year-old Caucasian female who was enrolled for her first semester of college during the spring 2015 semester. She is currently married and lives with her wife; they have no children. She reported that during the semester, she was employed full-time and worked approximately forty hours per week. She reported that she would like to seek a bachelor’s degree at a local university in biology and enrolled at the community college in order to “find out if this is my true interest as well as learn
something new.” Kathy’s main interest is in marine biology and shared that she had thought about taking a few classes at the community college to figure out if she really liked biology and then eventually transfer to a university; however, she stated that she wanted to “take it one class at a time” to see if she really liked it, adding, “That’s my plan, but we’ll see how it works.” She reported that English is her first language. In addition to delaying her college enrollment, she is financially independent from her parents, is employed full-time, has served ten years in the Colorado National Guard, and is a first-generation college student. During her first semester, she was enrolled in a total of four credit hours and was taking an introductory science class. She received a C in that class and finished the semester with a 2.0 grade point average. She did not register for subsequent semesters at the community college. At the time of her interview, she stated that she wanted to continue working full-time through December and then planned to go back to school.

**Delaying college.** Most students in this group cited specific reasons for their delayed enrollment to college. Many finished high school or earned their GED and then decided to go straight into full-time employment. For others, they simply weren’t sure what type of interests they had. Trevor stated, “The reason why I didn’t really go to college was because I didn’t know what I wanted to do. I always thought, ‘How can you know?’ There is no way you know unless you started at a young age.” Similarly, Julio mentioned, “I didn’t have a future to follow when I graduated high school.”

For others, like Gene, family obligations got in the way of pursuing college sooner. Tina had planned on enrolling in college, but was unable to do so when she became pregnant with her daughter. Gene also mentioned that there was no expectation
for him to go to college when he was younger. He added that those expectations are changing in our society, stating “My kids are going to college. That’s just like brushing your teeth. You have to.” He added, “When I grew up, it wasn’t expected for me to go to school. I didn’t even have to graduate… and I didn’t. I got a GED and I went to work… and I kind of regretted it all these years and I wanted to go back to see what I was missing.” For Juanita, she stated that life got in the way and it became too easy to make excuses.

**Reasons for pursuing college.** For most students in this group, their primary reason for enrolling in college stemmed from the possibility of improving their employment opportunities. For Trevor, the motivation to enroll in school came after he had gotten fired from a job and realized that he wanted more stability in his career. He went on to explain that he felt that technology would continue to grow and remain stable as a career in the future; that coupled with his interest in technology and video games led him to begin exploring the possibility of going to college by researching programs on the internet. He stated, “It didn’t happen all at once, but it was just that one click that led to two clicks, that led to the third click.” For Gene, Julio and Tyler, they wanted to learn a specific trade, which was welding. While Tyler was initially interested in blacksmithing and glassblowing, one of his friends told him that they were “a dying trade” and encouraged him to enroll in the welding program; Tyler sees the welding program as helping to achieve his goals of financial stability so that he can eventually buy that piece of land he desires.

Others were at a crossroads in their employment and wanted to broaden their opportunities. Kathy shared that while she had been in the Colorado National Guard for
ten years, she wasn’t sure of what she wanted to do next; knowing that she would not always want to be in the military, she decided to enroll in college to try something that captured her interests. For Juanita, even though she has been working with the same employer for years, she hasn’t been able to move up in the company even though she sees others doing so. She stated,

I’ve been with my job for five years almost in November and saw everybody around me moving up, and I wasn’t being promoted and I wondered why. And I know that… you know… a college education is very important, but even people that were not college educated were moving up and I just felt like I needed an edge, so I felt that in order to get looked at in a more positive manner, I should show interest in the fact that I’m trying to better myself… trying to further my learning. Being a drop-out kind of puts a dent in your confidence as a person, so I didn’t want to feel that anymore.

Tom was medically retired from the U.S. Marines; he recalled that he had spent that last few years “kind of floating around.” After losing a construction contract because work opportunities died out, he decided to see what the local community college had to offer to help him use his GI Bill and broaden his career opportunities. He added, “I just didn’t see much option left out there without having a degree.” Interestingly, while Tom acknowledged that having a degree was important for getting a job, he felt less of a value in obtaining higher education than the other students in this group. He stated, “I think that a lot more life experience and stuff like that does a lot better for the job, but apparently, you have to have a piece of paper now and this is the only way to get it… so, I’m here for my pieces of paper, basically.”

As Kathy touched upon, other reasons stemmed from a feeling of boredom, or just feeling like “it was time” to go back to school. While she stated that she was not sure if college would be a good fit for her, she was more or less testing the waters, stating, “just one class and then go from there.” Similarly, Juanita said, “It was just time.” Gene said,
“Basically to better myself. I was getting stagnant. You know, your brain gets old after a while and you get tired. I had been wanting to do it for many years. I’m getting old, so it’s time to do it.”

For Tyler and Tina, the main reason was to help better themselves while they tried to maintain their sobriety. Due to being involved with the Drug Court system, Tina was given the choice to go to school or work full-time. She decided to pursue both employment and college. Similarly, Tyler felt that going to college was his opportunity to get “out of the pot scene” and into a new, healthier environment. He added that just prior to enrollment, he was facing a difficult time with maintaining his sobriety and was encouraged by a friend to enroll. He recounted,

Earlier this year, I was kind of in a bad place, you know. Drugs. So fucking spun. I ended up leaving town for a month and a half getting clean and talking about my blacksmithing and glassblowing and stuff I was into. It just really stuck in my head and my buddy mentioned welding. He was like, ‘There’s a school right up the road from your house. Why don’t you go apply?’ So he kind of put me in that direction.

Finally for Alicia, her main drive to enroll stemmed from feeling a lack of competence with certain subjects. She shared that when her children would come home with their homework, she would have a difficult time helping them. She also mentioned a specific worry: “I think just the learning part of it. I was scared to see how far behind I was.”

The decision to pursue community college rather than a university. When deciding to enroll at the local community college rather than the university, four main factors went into play: cost, program availability, location, and uncertainty about the ability to get into a university. Gene, Julio, and Tyler all stated that they enrolled at the community college because it had the welding program that they wanted to pursue.
Similarly, Trevor stated that he also wanted to enroll in the community college rather than a university “because there’s no place to really get a BA in computer science.” He added that he did know of one place, but that the school was expensive. Similarly, Tom initially enrolled to complete an aviation program. He stated, “They had the aviation program. No other school really had that.” Finances also played a big role in the decision to enroll at a community college versus a university with Trevor, Juanita, and Kathy mentioning financial reasons specifically. For Tom, the financial reasoning came from a past negative experience with the local university filing his GI Bill paperwork incorrectly and hearing that many students had good luck using their GI Bill at the local community college.

For some, it seemed that community college served as a safer alternative than the university. For instance, Trevor mentioned that he struggled with math and was worried that if he went to a university, he would end up spending a lot of money and possibly have to retake courses. Instead, he felt that it would be a safer alternative for him to take those classes he felt less confident in at the community college and then transfer to a four-year university.

Mentioned far less often in this group were ideas about not being able to pursue an education at a university. This reason was only mentioned by one student in this group versus several in the group of students that were placed on academic probation. Tina mentioned being uncertain if she could meet the admissions standards at a university. She expressed concern over a felony conviction and how that might affect admissions to a university. She also believed that her academic background may not be strong enough, particularly in math.
**Self-efficacy in the beginning.** Most students in this group reported their self-efficacy to be low in the beginning of the semester. Tyler articulated his thoughts on the first day of classes as “Shit.” He added, “I was real nervous.” When asked about her confidence at the beginning of the semester, Tina stated, “I don’t think it was that good.” Alicia expressed that she was scared at the beginning of the semester and stated, “I was nervous because it’s been a while.” She added that her math self-efficacy was the lowest and stated, “Math is still like a foreign world to me.” Gene shared that he did not feel confident in his own abilities at the beginning of the semester, stating, “I felt alienated. I haven’t been to school in forever.” Julio stated that he had no idea what to expect from college because he is a first-generation student. He shared, “Coming to college was kind of scary at first because I didn’t know what to expect. I thought everything was going to be too advanced for me. I was like, ‘What do I do?’” Similarly, Juanita stated, “I was so nervous!” and mentioned that she was even considering whether she should show up. For Trevor, his lower self-efficacy stemmed from math. He stated that he has always been worried about math and didn’t feel like he would do well in that subject. In contrast to the others, Tom and Kathy indicated that they felt fairly confident with their abilities as a student. Despite having the lowest grade point average of the group, Kathy reported the highest levels of self-efficacy at the beginning of the semester in her self-report measure.

**Evaluation of the semester.** Like the students in previous groups, self-efficacy tended to fluctuate during the semester; however, most students reported that they felt the semester went well. Trevor and Gene both stated that they felt happy, overall, with the semester. Julio mentioned, “I had a 4.0 last semester and I’m pretty proud of myself. I got my certificate in the mail.” Tom also pointed to his grade point average when reflecting
on the semester, saying, “I finished this semester with a 3.7, so it wasn’t hard. It was easy.” For Juanita, she indicated that she became less nervous as the semester went on and perceived the semester as a positive experience. She stated, “Now, I’m like, ‘Okay, whatever. I can go to class.’ So now, I don’t hesitate like that first day. It was huge for me.” She added that she felt proud of herself and that her first semester served to bolster her confidence. Tina shared similar sentiments, stating that it was overwhelming at first, but got easier. Alicia also described the semester as going “really well.” Finally, Kathy stated that she thought the semester went well despite her obstacles. She stated, “I think it went well considering the hiccups that I had.” She added that she learned an important lesson in her first semester: “I’ve realized that it’s a lot more work than I thought.”

**Perceptions of barriers.** Some participants reported that multiple obligations would sometimes pose as a barrier to their educational goals. Kathy, Julio, and Juanita all expressed that it was difficult for them at times to juggle their school and work schedules. Trevor, on the other hand, experienced difficulty juggling school and family and explained that he was living with his mother and younger brother, which often posed as a distraction.

Another barrier reported by multiple students included financial barriers. Gene, Julio, and Kathy all expressed that they worried about how they were going to pay for their college tuition and expenses. Despite being eligible for the GI Bill, Kathy also paid for her class out-of-pocket. She shared, “I was kind of like, ‘How am I gonna pay for this?’… because I actually paid for it out-of-pocket instead of the Army doing it because it was just cheaper doing it that way than wasting my time waiting until next semester to do it.” While Tom did use his GI Bill, he found out towards the end of his first semester
that, due to a change, it would not cover all his expenses, which made it difficult for him to afford his college expenses. Instead, Tom decided that he would pursue the fire science program instead, which his GI Bill does cover.

For Tyler, financial issues were so drastic that he became homeless during the semester and remained homeless for the duration of the semester. This was due partly to financial barriers as well as a lack of support from his family. For part of the semester, he was living in his truck in the parking lot to try to stay close to the school. However, he further explained that he was confronted by school security for staying in the parking lot over night. He added that after security told him he could no longer camp in the parking lot, they tried to provide him resources. However, Tyler felt that by staying in homeless shelters, he may be exposed to further drug use. He shared that while he was staying in parking lots and truck stops, he was still exposed to rampant drug use around him, which posed as another barrier.

Many of Tom’s barriers stemmed from a lack of confidence in the school system as well as a difficult transition from the military. He shared,

I wasn’t very confident, honestly, in the school itself. How do I put this? I know the banter of teachers and stuff like that, and to me… it doesn’t make sense that I’m being taught by someone who doesn’t even have a teacher’s certificate. I mean, if you can’t get the certificates that are needed for a kindergarten teacher, why are you here at the college level teaching me… when half the time, I’m listening to these teachers and they don’t know what they’re doing half the time… it seems like a lot of the stuff we get taught here… there’s a lack of common sense and that’s what worries me.

This was his biggest barrier, which stemmed from perceiving a lack of value in higher education. To him, college was something that he just had to get through to get that piece of paper that he needed to move on. He felt that many of his classes didn’t seem to have relevance to his career and differentiated this with his experience in the military when he
saw his classes as having relevance to the skills that he needed. He added, “You have to
do it. Literally, you have to do it. If you don’t do it, you’re not getting that piece of paper.
So yeah, it’s definitely being forced. Without a doubt. And part of me feels like it’s now
one of those ways to get you to spend more money in college.”

Finally, another barrier that was expressed by Tom included the “extremely
rough” transition from the military to being a student. He shared that when he got to
college, he felt that he was not acknowledged for the experience and skills he had. He
stated,

When I was in the military… like I said, I was medically retired. I was in eight
years in the military and I was already a sergeant. I was about to be advanced to
staff sergeant. I was in leadership positions. I was already teaching classes. I
wasn’t getting classes anymore, you know. I was already at that point. So going
from that to having no responsibilities to being just some average schmo in the
classroom… it’s really hard mentally to get over. You know, because if I had
been in the classroom as a sergeant or staff sergeant back in the days, I still would
have had a lot of respect just because of the rank that I hold. I would have had a
lot of respect because of my rank. Just because of that. And I did not get that
what-so-ever. You know what I’m saying? I’ve been through a lot more stuff than
any of these kids have ever seen in their life and you don’t get any of that respect
anymore. You don’t get any of that stuff anymore; so mentally, it’s a roadblock.
You kind of sit there for the first month or so and it was really hard for me
because I just had to sit there and not be in that leadership position. You don’t
step up. You don’t say things. You just get through. That was just that, you know.

He added that, thinking about the people that served in the military, many of them have
skills and experience that he feels are not respected within the higher education
atmosphere. Regardless, he said, military members deserve respect and he feels he was
not shown that in his college experience.

One last barrier that was mentioned by students in this group was difficulty-reaching out for help when it was needed. This was mentioned in Alicia’s interview,
which contrasted with the other students in this group. Looking back, Alicia had wished
she would have used tutoring services when she began to struggle in math. She shared that she felt her primary barrier was a difficulty with reaching out for help when she needed it, stating that she didn’t feel that she needed a tutor, but that it turned out that she did. She shared that the primary reason that she didn’t use tutoring was scheduling conflicts, explaining, “It was just that I came in full-time trying to get my classes done during the day, so when they had their tutoring, I always had another class. If they were in the evening, I could have used them.”

**Perceptions of supports.** The students in this group all reported social supports through friends, family, teachers, and classmates as being one of the most important supports in their college pursuits. In terms of family supports, Trevor stated that he lives with his parents, so he doesn’t have to pay rent and the only bills he has to worry about are his phone bills and the gas for his car. Gene stated that his whole family was also supportive of his decision to enroll, stating that his kids were excited for him. Julio shared that his parents were very encouraging of him when he enrolled and proud when he completed his certificate. According to Kathy, her biggest supports were her mother, her wife, and her grandma, adding that they all jumped in to help when she had to have knee surgery during the semester. She recounted a time when her wife even came to class with her to help her get around and take notes. Similarly, Juanita shared that her friends and husband have been very supportive of her education, stating that her husband started taking on more chores at home so that she could focus on her schoolwork. Tina stated that she also got support from her family, who were understanding of her need to study. For Tom, the desire to provide a better life for his family served as a big motivating
factor for him. He said, “I want to make a life for me and my wife. I don’t want my
family broke. I don’t want that for my future or my kids.”

In addition to family members, many of the students in this group mentioned
supports from teachers and classmates. Interestingly, all students in this group mentioned
at least one specific teacher that was supportive of their educational goals. Many students
also shared stories of receiving supports from classmates and using peers in their class as
“study buddies” and getting help from their peers. Trevor, Gene, and Kathy all discussed
how they would work with other students to learn the material. While Tyler didn’t
mention studying with other students specifically, he stated that it was of great
importance to him that he made connections with other students and felt that he had
friends at the school.

Finally, in terms of social supports, Tina mentioned that being involved in the
Drug Court also provided her with support not only with maintaining her sobriety, but
also with encouraging her to do well in school. She stated, “The whole Drug Court
team… all my friends.. even the people in my classes are all very supportive.” About the
Drug Court specifically, she said, “Overall, they’re sometimes encouraging. Who wants
to go to court? But I got myself into a jam.” While she joked that they randomly drug test
her, she added, “They give me a peer specialist who’s like, my go-to person if I am in
crisis mode. Stuff like that, which is good for me because I can be in crisis mode.”

Specific classes were also mentioned in the list of supports generated by this
group of students. Alicia saw one of her classes as important to teaching her about
expectations within college and the skills necessary to succeed. She stated specific things,
such as identifying how many hours a student is expected to work on assignments and
suggestions on study strategies were very important to her. Juanita also mentioned a specific course on her list of supports, stating that her developmental English course helped her improve her writing and see what areas she needed to improve on. She reflected that she was able to see a big difference in the papers she wrote at the beginning of the semester and those she wrote at the end.

**Thoughts on the nontraditional student.** It was clear that many of the students in this group also felt “nontraditional” in some way. Trevor was the only student who felt that he didn’t quite fit into the “nontraditional” college student label. For Gene, Kathy, Tina, and Juanita, it was age. He shared that because he is older and has been out of school for a long time, he felt he had to work harder. He also mentioned that, at times, he didn’t feel like he fit in, stating, “I can remember sometimes sitting in class and thinking, ‘What am I doing here?’” Kathy stated that she felt nontraditional because of her age and the fact that she didn’t go to school right away out of high school, but shared that it is better to wait if you aren’t ready. For Juanita, age also played a role. She stated, “I’m way older than a lot of students, but I actually found it comforting that there’s actually people older than me. I was always afraid that I would be the oldest person and then you see that you’re not. But that was one of my huge concerns. You know, was I gonna be a grandma in there?” She recalled, “I was just trying not to be too obvious that I’m older and then looking around… trying to fit in, basically.” To contrast, Trevor stated that he didn’t feel “nontraditional” because, even though he would have completed college by now if he had enrolled right out of high school, he still felt that he was in that age gap of eighteen to twenty-five years. He went on,

I feel like eighteen to twenty-five… that’s the standard thing. Twenty-five to thirty-five… that’s like you’re going for your doctorate or you kind of went
through a career that you don’t quite like. Thirty-five to forty-five… you’re just going to college for yourself. Not for anything. That kind of thing.

Tyler shared that he felt that he didn’t fit in at first, but became more comfortable, stating, “I felt like a sore thumb. Not like I thought… well, I do stick out. I thought I stuck out because of my age, but then I met a few people that were around my age. So that ended up being pretty cool.”

**Factors that may have contributed to success.** While the students in this group appeared to have similar types of barriers to their education than the other two groups, it was clear that these students also appeared to have better strategies to navigate those barriers. For example, Trevor had difficulty with his brother wanting attention from him when he would be studying. To address this, he came up with a strategy that addressed the problem by setting aside time for homework and time to play with his brother. While he also reported liking to play Dungeons and Dragons, he stated that he was able to effectively prioritize his academics over that during the semester, effectively minimizing his biggest reported hinderances. For Kathy, one of her biggest obstacles was managing her responsibilities with school, work, and her drill weekends. However, she was able to strategize to ensure that all her obligations were met. She recalled working ahead on assignments and planning ahead in her schedule to account for drill weekends when she would not have time for homework and studying. While Juanita mentioned having to juggle multiple obligations at home and work, she also realized that she could prioritize the things that were most important to her. In comparing the group of students who were successful with those that were not, it wasn’t a matter that this group had fewer barriers, but instead, seemed to consciously strategize how to address those barriers.
**Self-efficacy following success and educational futures.** Trevor did enroll in the following semester and the new semester had already started by the time he participated in his interview. Much of his self-efficacy focused on his poor math abilities, which is why he showed a decline despite earning a 4.0 in his first semester. He stated that poor math performance in high school was still playing a role in his lack of self-confidence, but that he now realizes that he can ask for help when he needs it. He pointed to his 4.0 grade point average the previous semester in explaining how he knows he can accomplish his goals if he puts forth the effort. Trevor looks forward to completing his two years at the community college and then transferring to a university to work towards a computer science degree of some sort.

Even though Gene had to withdraw from his math class due to poor grades, he still retained his confidence. He attributed his failure in that class to putting his priorities too much towards one course, while his math homework suffered because of it. He shared that he continues to maintain his confidence in doing well in that course, stating, “It’ll be easy. There’ll be nothing to it. I made bad choices. I made a couple bad choices… that’s what it boiled down to.” He also stated that based on his first semester, he was now more confident in his abilities as a student overall “because I know what I’m doing now.”

Julio now sees college as a possibility for him and believes that his confidence has increased as a result of his first semester. He stated, “After graduating high school, you think, ‘Oh, college… it’s not for me.’ But I guess it can be for everybody. You just gotta give it a try.” Julio has completed his welding certificate and states that he may return to
school someday to pursue more higher education; he added that he won’t at this time due to financial constraints, but that he is proud of himself for completing his certification.

At the time of the interview, Kathy was still determining whether her major and college was right for her at this point in time. She stated that due to work constraints, she was going to hold off on future enrollment for the time being. She shared that she wanted to take another class related to biology to determine if it does fit her interests and if it turns out that it doesn’t, she may pursue something related to technology.

Tom stated that he is still confident in his abilities as a student and looks forward to getting his coursework done so he can get “that piece of paper.” His plans are to complete two years at the community college and then transfer to a university to complete his four-year degree.

Despite the fact that Juanita enrolled in school feeling very uncertain of herself, she stated that she has now started to consider transferring over to a university for a business degree when she completes her program at the community college. She states that her self-efficacy differs depending on the subject. For example, she stated, that she feels confidence in history, but still struggles with anxiety surrounding math classes. She expressed, “I do still have apprehension with mathematics just because it’s something I struggle with.” She believes that her first semester has helped her to gain confidence in English, and explained that she now believes her mindset plays a role in her success. She shared, “With English, I saw that if I research the material and try to work on it and not just think that I’m bad at math and I don’t do well… if I stop thinking that way, then it will go well for me.” Juanita shared that she was registered for some computer classes, but they were too basic, so she dropped them. At the time of our interview, she was
scheduled to take an introductory business course, history, and another course she couldn’t remember.

Alicia also planned on continuing her education after this semester. She reported that she felt that her confidence had improved and showed increases in outcome expectations and academic self-efficacy. About her level of confidence, she stated, “I think better. Just knowing what to expect and what’s expected of you.” She expressed that the college skills preparatory course really helped to teach her those expectations.

Tina and Tyler are both registered for classes next semester. They both expressed concerns over the bigger class sizes that they would be in the following semester due to their anxiety. Tina shared, “I have anxiety, which… I gotta figure out how I’m gonna get that under control.” She added that she wants to continue her education, stating,

I know a lot of people who have started and they quit and they’ve never come back and I don’t want to be one of those people. I figure if I can’t do full-time, I’ll do the best I can this semester and then the following semester, drop back to part-time if it’s too much for me. I figure, I’m old enough… I can take a few years to do this.

Tyler also was concerned about the bigger class sizes. When asked about his feelings going into the next semester, he stated, that he was nervous and stressed, but that he felt he was more excited and couldn’t wait for the new semester to start. He added, “I’m sure that everybody else is going to be just as nervous.”
CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

The quantitative and qualitative results reported in Chapter IV offer insights into how community college students experience higher education and the factors that contribute to persistence and success. In this chapter, I will discuss and interpret the findings and discuss the implications of these findings, limitations to the current study, and recommendations for future research.

Characteristics of Students Enrolled

My first research question pertained to the characteristics of students at a local community college including the demographic characteristics, social-cognitive characteristics, and the rates of the three distinct outcomes for students enrolled in their first semester of community college. To answer this research question, I examined the full sample of community college students \((n = 236)\) that were beginning at the college as newly enrolled students or beginning a new program as well as the specific sub-sample of students that had no prior college experience. The typical newly enrolled student at this particular community college demonstrated a delay in enrollment to college, financial independence from their parents, and some type of employment in addition to going to school. Approximately one in four students entering into their first semester of college enrollment reported an educational history that did not include a traditional high school diploma. Among the students that participated in this study, most \((n = 191, 80.9\%)\)
reported English as their first language. While there was diversity among the sample, the largest race/ethnicity to be represented was Caucasian/White, followed by Hispanic/Latino. Over half of the students were age 24 or less, excluding them from the previously set forth age criteria for “nontraditional” student status (Jinkens, 2009). However, upon further examination, the vast majority of students met nontraditional student status in other ways even if they did not meet the age criteria. This is in line with the previous research that has shown increases in nontraditional students in higher education (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). The demographic findings in this study also suggest that examining other criteria for nontraditional status might be worthwhile given that using age as the sole criterion could exclude students that might otherwise appear nontraditional in nature. Students who met other nontraditional criteria, including a delay in enrollment, financial independence, employment obligations, having dependents, military veteran status, or lack of a traditional high school diploma may have experiences that don’t fit the traditional notion of an incoming college student who just graduated from high school and entered directly into higher education. These students may have specific and unique barriers in higher education which may benefit from specific interventions targeted towards those obstacles. In addition, it is worth noting that in a previous qualitative study (Dykema, 2014), younger students that met the expanded definition of nontraditional still felt separate from their peers despite the fact that they were around the same age. The same was true of these participants as well; in the interviews, 10 students did not meet the age criteria set forth for nontraditional status, but did meet some other criterion. Of those 10 students, over half reported feeling different than their peers. For some, this had to do with being a first-generation student where they
did not have access to people in their lives that could give them advice about college. Others reported that they felt different simply because they didn’t enroll in college right after high school like they believed others had. Some didn’t even anticipate going to college and thought they didn’t fit within the college environment. Others pointed to life experiences that set them apart in terms of maturity levels. And finally, some students felt that the pressure to juggle multiple responsibilities (such as family, work, and school) set them apart from students that they perceived as being able to focus solely on school. Had age been used as the sole criterion for nontraditional status, these perceptions from younger students would have been overlooked, which could possibly lead to gaps in interventions that might make a difference for these students. Among the full sample, using age along as a criterion for nontraditional status resulted in exclusion of 37.7% of nontraditional students, which was slightly less than the 44% that was found in previous research (Macari et al., 2005). However, in comparing the two age groups (those age 24 or less versus those over age 24), there were no differences in social-cognitive factors, including self-efficacy, outcome expectations, or perceived academic control. Additionally, there were no differences found between students who had previous college experience versus those with no prior college experience. Therefore, this study’s findings suggest that there might not be that many differences among these students after all with respect to the variables examined in this study.

Finally, with regards to this research question, it was discovered that, among the students enrolled in their first semester, most \( n = 102, 71\% \) were able to successfully complete the semester in good academic standing. In fact, one quarter of students in this sample completed the semester with a perfect 4.0 grade point average. Most of the
remaining students \( n = 37, 25\% \) were placed on academic probation and very few (3.4\%) withdrew from all of their classes completely.

**Differences Between Outcome Groups**

I hypothesized based on previous research that the three outcome groups would show differences in terms of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control and that those students who persisted and experienced academic success would score higher than the other groups on those three variables at the beginning of the semester. To do this, I specifically examined the full sample of students to investigate any possible differences between the groups. However, in analyzing the results of the study, I found no significant difference in these variables among the three outcome groups of students examined. Additionally, there seemed to be no differences in age, semester hours, work hours, or nontraditional criteria endorsed.

**Prediction of Student Outcomes**

Following up on question two, I was interested to know whether demographic and socio-cognitive factors would help to predict student outcome group membership. I expected that these factors would explain less of the variance than the variables of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. To investigate this question, I ran several binomial regression models for the full sample and the sub-sample of students. Examining across all models, it was interesting to see that age parsed out as one of the variables that helped to explain most of the variance, with older students performing better in terms of academic outcomes. Interestingly, this can be interpreted as somewhat contradictory to previous research (Bozick & DeLuca, 2005) that suggests such drastic decreases in successful completion associated with a delay in enrollment.
since one would assume that older students would be more likely to have larger delays in enrollment. However, in line with the findings of this study, previous research (Lammers, Onweugbuzie, & Slate, 2001) has shown positive correlations with academic success and age. This could be due to the fact that older students may have more life experience, higher levels of self-regulatory skills, and more solid educational goals than younger students.

Among all models, the variables of semester hours, gender, work hours, language abilities, age, number of nontraditional student criteria endorsed, self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control together helped to explain between 8.6% and 17.1% of the variance. The three social-cognitive factors of self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control did not become significant until they were separated and added into the model individually, most likely due to the fact that they were moderately related to one another. This is consistent with previous research which has looked at these variables. For example, previous research has found self-efficacy to be related to motivation and persistence (Bandura, 1989), self-regulatory abilities (Ferla et al., 2008; Lee et al., 2014; Pintrich, 1999), responsibility in homework completion (Zimmerman & Kitsantas, 2005), academic resourcefulness (Kenna, Reed, & Stuart, 2013), and inversely related to academic anxiety (Jameson & Fusco, 2014) and problematic student behaviors such as procrastination (Chow, 2011; Haycock et al., 1998; Mirzaei et al., 2014; Steel, 2007; Strunk & Steele, 2011; Waschle et al., 2014; Wolters, 2003) and academic self-handicapping (Zabihollahi et al., 2013). Furthermore, a number of studies have demonstrated the link between self-efficacy and academic performance (Bandura, Caprara, Barbaranello, Gerbino, & Pastorelli, 2003; Bong, 2005; Pintrich &
DeGroot, 1990; Putwain et al., 2013; Sins et al., 2008; Vrugt et al., 1997; Wolters, 2004; Zimmerman & Bandura, 1994). Perceived academic control has also been shown in previous research to be related to positive academic outcomes including persistence (Cervone & Peake, 1986; Joo et al., 2011; Nunez et al., 2005), motivation (Martinez, 2003), self-regulated learning (You & Kang, 2014), and academic achievement (Meece et al., 1990; Perry et al., 2001; Ruthig et al., 2008). As stated previously, the research on outcome expectations is vastly lacking with regards to academic outcomes and, therefore, there is a lack of research findings with which to compare.

Number of nontraditional student criteria also became significant for one model, showing that the more nontraditional criteria that were endorsed, the less likely students were to be successful. This could be due to the fact that as the number of nontraditional criteria increase, the more potential for multiple barriers, obligations, and responsibilities to get in the way of completing academic tasks. This seems to be in line with the findings of the qualitative portion of the study in that many students reported difficulty with juggling multiple obligations such as work and family with school.

**Other Factors That Played a Role in Persistence and Achievement**

Understanding that quantitative analyses could only provide a narrowly focused lens, I was also interested in other factors that were common to nontraditional student experience in higher education. To answer this question, I used qualitative analysis with students following their first semester. While further research would be needed to look at comparisons of social-cognitive factors of students at the beginning and the end of the semester, descriptively, I noticed that students who withdrew showed decreases in all three social-cognitive variables from the beginning to the end of the semester following
their withdrawal. Students who were placed on academic probation also showed decreases in perceived outcome expectations and perceived academic control; half of these students also showed decreases in academic self-efficacy. These findings are in line with previous research that shows that self-efficacy can be influenced by previous success (Bandura, 1977, 1997; Lent & Brown, 1996; Lent et al., 1994). The group that showed the most interesting trends with regards to these variables were those that were successful; about half of these students showed decreases in perceived outcome expectations, perceived academic control, and academic self-efficacy at the end of the semester when compared to the beginning of the semester. Upon further discussion with regards to these variables, those students that showed increases were likely to state that the act of experiencing success helped to boost their beliefs in these areas. Those that showed decreases in these variables were more likely to discuss how they felt the next semester would be more difficult to a variety of factors such as larger class sizes, taking a greater number of credit hours, or taking more difficult classes.

**Students Who Withdrew**

In comparing the interviews of students who withdrew from their first semester of college, there were many similarities. All but one of the students mentioned returning to college to benefit their life in some way. Most enrolled at the community college because they were pursuing programs such as oil and gas or CAD that were offered at the local community college rather than the local university. Others reported cost-saving reasons. Self-efficacy tended to be reported as high at the beginning of the semester, with mixed evaluations of how the semester went. Barriers that were reported included not feeling like they fit in, a lack of motivation, and perceived lack of respect. Social supports were
by and large the most mentioned support by students in this group even though two students reported that they had no supports. Finally, the overarching theme that led to withdrawal for these students appeared to be a lack of fit, whether it was on the program level or college as a whole. Some students shared that the program did not meet their expectations, while others felt that they just didn’t fit in at college. Of these students, those who felt a lack of fit at the program level anticipated re-enrolling in a new program or a different college. Those that felt that college “wasn’t right” for them did not anticipate re-enrolling. However, all students reported that they still felt they could be successful in college and this might be due to their perceived lack of completion in terms of this lack of fit.

Students Placed on Academic Probation

In comparing the interviews with students who were placed on academic probation at the end of their first semester of enrollment, there were also noticeable trends. Similar to those that withdrew from their classes, these students were also likely to state their reason for enrolling as providing options for their future. However, two students reported their major reason for enrolling was that they were bored with their current life. Cost was the number one reason for choosing community college over a university, but these students were also more likely to state that they didn’t believe they could get into a university. Perceptions were mixed with regards to the evaluation of the semester; three students reported that the semester didn’t go well while the other three perceived the semester as having gone better than it had. Overall, while the barriers experienced by these students differed, they tended to follow a specific trend in that it caused upheaval in their lives, which made it difficult to focus on school. This falls in
line with previous research which has shown that stress can have a negative impact on academic persistence (Chartrand, 1992; Perrine, 1999). From difficulty juggling multiple responsibilities to family problems, health issues, problematic home environments, cultural transition issues, and substance abuse problems, all students reported at least one significant event which made it difficult for them to give priority to their schoolwork. In addition, these students were also more likely to perceive their teachers as uncaring of their difficulties, suggesting that they didn’t feel support from these individuals. Finally, another trend centered on issues with social anxiety, suggesting that this might have made it more difficult for them to get motivated to attend class. In terms of supports, this group tended to mention resources at the college and were less likely to mention social supports such as family members. Despite the fact that many felt specific teachers were uncaring, some still mentioned certain teachers as primary social supports. Interestingly, compared to the other two groups, students who were placed on academic probation had a tendency to perceive college to be easier than it actually is (i.e., based on their current standing with the institution). They were more likely to perceive college as laid-back, a version of the movie Animal House, or a “game.” Only the students that showed success in passing one class re-enrolled for the following semester.

Only two of the students recognized that they were not doing well and considered withdrawing. However, when they tried to withdraw, they had missed the withdraw deadline. This could help to explain some of the variables that may be implicated in these students’ difficulty with successfully completing the semester. First, most students in this group seemed to lack the self-regulatory abilities to understand that they were not performing well in the class. Some shared that they hadn’t realized they were doing
poorly, which suggests a difficulty with self-monitoring in terms of academics. For others, they recognized that they were doing poorly, but felt that they would turn things around to be successful despite the fact that for most, this realization came at a time where it was too late and would have been virtually impossible to pass the class. For all of these students, this suggests that they may have difficulty registering feedback from their environment regarding their academic performance and adjusting their strategies to meet that feedback.

**Students Who Were Successful**

It was clear that the group of students that was successful during their first semester was the most diverse group of students but there were still notable trends. Improving employment opportunities was the most cited reason for pursuing college. Many in this group had delayed college because they weren’t sure of their goals, had family obligations, or had entered full-time employment after finishing high school. Two students reported that they felt college would help them better themselves by motivating them to maintain their sobriety. As with the previous groups, the main reasons for enrolling at a community college were cost and specific programs. For some, community college seemed like a safer alternative that would provide a better starting point with smaller classes, less risk, and more one-on-one attention. Contrary to the previous group of students, these students felt that they could pursue an education at a university if they wanted to. Self-efficacy in the beginning of the semester tended to be a little lower for this group of students, suggesting that they were more cautious going in. They shared that they experienced feelings of being nervous and that college felt “scary.” This is an interesting finding that suggests that those students who are slightly more cautious in the
beginning might have more of a tendency to look out for feedback from the environment regarding their performance and might be better at adjusting their behaviors in light of that feedback. While self-efficacy tended to fluctuate throughout the semester, students in this group reported that it went well overall. In terms of barriers, it wasn’t the case that this group experienced fewer barriers than their less successful counterparts; in fact, barriers that were mentioned included juggling multiple obligations, financial barriers, homelessness, lack of confidence, difficulty transitioning, and difficulty reaching out for help when it was needed. However, in contrast to the students who did not succeed, it was clear that these students had more skill in managing these multiple barriers to their higher education. They mentioned far more social supports in the form of friends, family, teachers, and classmates. They seemed to feel more included in their classes and the school as a whole. They formed bonds with peers in their classes and utilized study groups. Overall, they seemed to be better integrated in the school and feel less alienated than those students who did not succeed.

**Implications**

One of the main goals of this study was to better inform pedagogy and practice in working with nontraditional students in higher education. As such, there are several implications that can be derived from the findings of this study. The first implication surrounds the ideas that students are either “college ready” or they are not. However, in the case of community colleges across the country, the purpose is to serve as an accessible source of higher education. It is not necessarily the case that students enrolling in higher education will have the skills necessary to be successful. Overlooking this fact could do a disservice to the students who enroll and disenfranchise students that might
otherwise benefit from higher education. Perhaps the question should shift from the traditional “Is this student ready for college?” to the question of “Are our colleges ready for the students that will come?” Students in this study demonstrated that availability of healthy coping skills and self-regulation skills often make the difference between whether a student can be successful or not in higher education. However, these skills are often overlooked. By providing outreach resources to students to develop coping and self-regulation skills, administrators in higher education may be helping to boost some of the more subtle factors that increase the chances of success. In addition, it is important to point out that no two students are alike. This study demonstrated that when you give a student a platform to discuss the barriers that they face, they do so with an honest approach that can provide insightful information. While it is difficult to form individualized intervention programs to these unique needs, it is possible to address some of the barriers that came out for many. This might include skills in how to manage one’s time effectively, how to seek out resources when help is needed, how to deal with possible mental health issues including substance abuse or social anxiety, and how to understand the feedback that one obtains from the environment on progress towards goals. It is also important to note that students who were not successful tended to perceive a lack of supports in their educational environment, which can help inform intervention programs aimed at building community among nontraditional students and fostering development of peer and teacher relationships to improve success. Finally, with the students that withdrew, there was a clear trend in their reasoning. While it is true that some felt unprepared for college in terms of motivation, it is also true that a lack of fit at the program level or college level led to them withdrawing. Identifying student goals and
understanding the alignment between those student goals and the goals of the institution is important in ensuring that those students can be successful.

**Limitations**

There are several limitations that should be taken into consideration with the current study. First, while every effort was made to collect a diverse sample of the student population, there is still a low representation of certain subgroups which should be further examined. For instance, there was a low representation of veteran students, ESL students, certain race/ethnicities, and students that are not United States citizens. Given that these subgroups of students might show differences with regards to the variables in question, it is worth noting that findings might differ when looking at some of these specific groups.

In addition, one of the surprising findings of the study was the lack of differences observed in the student outcome groups with regards to the social-cognitive factors, particularly self-efficacy. However, it is important to note that limitations of the study could have contributed to the lack of significant findings. For instance, the vast majority of the sample ended the semester successfully with a grade point average of 2.0 or higher. There were less students that ended the semester placed on academic probation and very few students who withdrew from all of their courses for the semester. While this lack of significant findings could be due to there being no real differences between these groups of students, it could also very well be the case that the lack of significant differences is due to the unequal outcome groups where two of the three groups were poorly represented.
Finally, another limitation arises from the dynamic nature of self-efficacy beliefs, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. First, self-efficacy is seen as very specific to the task at hand; for instance, a student may have different levels of self-efficacy when it comes to math versus when it comes to writing a college-level paper. While this study examined self-efficacy, it did so on a more general level by asking students to think about their self-efficacy when it comes to completing their classes successfully that given semester. However, students may have differing levels of self-efficacy for their different classes, or even different tasks within each class. Therefore, while their self-reports show a general picture of their self-efficacy beliefs in terms of college, it displays little about how that might change from task to task and how those changes might impact their persistence.

Future Directions

There are also a number of future directions that should be explored for this line of research. Given that much of the research on college persistence and achievement is focused more on traditional students, this study serves as a first step in examining some of the variables that may play a role in the success and persistence of nontraditional students which are a growing population in community colleges and universities across the country. Because many students who did not fit the age criteria of nontraditional status felt different and set apart from their peers, it is noteworthy to examine a broader definition of nontraditional student status to identify appropriate interventions that may benefit a broader group of students that are entering the classroom. As one student explained in his interview, no two students are alike, so using limited criteria could mean that some students fall through the cracks of the system. In addition, there are certainly
unique barriers that certain subpopulations of nontraditional students face that warrant further investigation. Parents discussed issues pertaining to difficulty finding and maintaining childcare as well as balancing their family. First-generation students discussed the barrier of not having a mentor available to them who has gone to college and knows how to navigate the “ropes” of the system. Military veteran students shared that they often felt alone and undervalued for their experience and faced a difficult transition from the military to the classroom. Some students shared that, due to their ethnicity, they didn’t think college was the place for them. If future research can examine these experiences of specific nontraditional students, interventions could be tailored to those groups and offered at specific places on campus and in the community to engage a broader group of adults who could benefit from higher education. In addition, the finding that the number of nontraditional criteria endorsed by participants was inversely related to success, it is important for administrators pay close attention to what barriers might impede their students. A closer examination of the differences between these nontraditional criteria might offer insight into the factors that most get in the way of nontraditional student success in higher education.

Another future direction that would be beneficial to this line of research would be to examine program interventions that are aimed at increasing the success of nontraditional students, such as recruitment methods to engage students who may be nontraditional in nature as well as interventions aimed at helping those students with successfully completing their degree. These might include outreach programs, mentoring programs, and other programs to help improve the success of these students in attaining their degrees. Given the findings that students who were placed on academic probation
may have difficulty managing instability in their lives as well as possible deficits in self-regulatory abilities, it would be beneficial to examine programs that might help students to improve these skills. By examining these programs, it can be determined which programs better foster the success of these students and how to adapt them to the changing needs of students in higher education.

One notable finding that certainly requires further exploration is the finding that students who were not successful seemed to perceive themselves to be less supported and more alienated, whereas students who were successful seemed to be able to manage multiple barriers by relying on multiple social supports both inside and outside of the school. This seems to fall in line with the Self-Determination Theory (Ryan & Deci, 2000) which holds that conditions that support motivation include autonomy, competence, and relatedness. It would seem that, given these findings, examining the importance of these three variables with regards to nontraditional student success in higher education would be worthwhile.

Additionally, this study merely looked at a snapshot of students as they entered higher education to determine the predictive value of a number of different variables as they related to persistence and achievement. While it is understood that some of these variables are already in place when a student begins college, it would be interesting to examine the dynamic changes that may take place across a semester with regards to self-efficacy, outcome expectations, and perceived academic control. By examining these variables in depth more specifically, it might provide further insights into how a student experiences their first semester of college and how these variables might change. Asking students more specific questions that pertain to certain tasks or even asking students to
rate these variables multiple times during the semester would help to demonstrate the
dynamic nature of these variables and how they impact students in the moment. This
would also provide an opportunity to compare students from the beginning of the
semester to the end of the semester with regards to these variables.
REFERENCES


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Brint, S., & Cantwell, A. M. (2010). Undergraduate time use and academic outcomes: Results from the University of California undergraduate experience survey 2006. *Teachers College Record, 112*(9), 2441-2470.


Dykema, K. R. (2014). “In spite of it all, it’s worth it in the end”: Experiences of the nontraditional student. Unpublished manuscript, Department of Psychology, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley.


APPENDIX A

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION SURVEY
1. Gender
   - Male
   - Female

2. Age: ________ years

3. Ethnicity (check all that apply)
   - Caucasian/White
   - African American
   - Asian
   - Native American/Alaskan Native
   - Pacific Islander/ Native Hawaiian
   - Hispanic/Latino
   - Other: ____________________________

4. Is English your first language?
   - Yes
   - No

5. Do you work?
   - Unemployed
   - Part-time
   - Full-time

6. How many hours per week do you work? ________

7. Is this the first semester that you have enrolled in college?
   - Yes, this is my first semester.
   - No, I have enrolled in college before. (What year was your last enrollment?): ______

8. What is your primary reason for returning to school?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

9. What are your goals for your first semester in college?

_____________________________________________________________________________________

_____________________________________________________________________________________
Part Two: Nontraditional Status Checklist

☐ Check this box if you have delayed enrollment to college (there is at least one year between your high school graduation and your entrance into college)

☐ Check this box if you are financially independent from your parents (i.e., you are responsible for your own bills including education expenses, are not covered by your parents’ health insurance, and your parents do not claim you on federal income taxes)

☐ Check this box if you are currently employed full-time in addition to being a student

☐ Check this box if you have dependents (other than a spouse)

☐ Check this box if you do not have a traditional high school diploma (such as a GED or high school completion certificate)

☐ Check this box if you are a veteran of the military/armed services
   Indicate which branch: ____________________________

☐ Check this box if you are a first generation college student (neither parent has earned a college degree)
APPENDIX B

INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVALS
Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this project. The University of Northern Colorado (UNCO) IRB approves this project and verifies its status as EXEMPT according to federal IRB regulations.

Kristy,

Hello and thank you for a very clear IRB application and provision of permission documentation from personnel at Aims Community College.

As an important point of clarification, your entire study is categorically 'exempt' as audio-recordings of interviews with proper data handling and no vulnerable population participants do not require categorization as 'expedited' as noted in your application.

There are two small changes to your consent forms that need to be made before use in your project. Revised consent forms do not need to be resubmitted for subsequent review.

1) please add Page 1 (of 2), _______ (please initial) at the bottom of the first page of each consent form given that the signature is on the second page.

2) the contact information if a participant feels s/he was mistreated in the study is 'Sherry May, Office of Sponsored Programs,.......970-351-1910'. Please change accordingly to your forms are updated.

Best wishes with your research. Please don't hesitate to contact me with any IRB-related questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Dr. Megan Stellino, UNC IRB Co-Chair

We will retain a copy of this correspondence within our records for a duration of 4 years.

If you have any questions, please contact Sherry May at 970-351-1910 or Sherry.May@unco.edu. Please include your project title and reference number in all correspondence with this committee.
Date: December 02, 2014
To: Kristy Dykema
From: Aims Community College IRB
Project Title: First Semester College Experiences 201410DYK
Category: Exempt Review
Action: APPROVED
Approval Date: December 1, 2014
Expiration Date: None

The Aims Institutional Review Board has approved your proposal for the research project titled "First Semester College Experiences". We believe your project proposal falls into the federally approved Category of Exempt: "Research involving the use of educational tests (cognitive, diagnostic, aptitude, achievement), survey procedures, interview procedures or observation of public behavior."

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others and SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

If you have any questions, please contact Lee Ann Sappington at 970-339-6223 or leeann.sappington@aims.edu. Please include your project title and reference number on all correspondence with this committee.
APPENDIX C

SELF-EFFICACY FOR LEARNING AND PERFORMANCE SUBSCALE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Not at all true of me 1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>Somewhat true of me 4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>Very true of me 7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I believe I will receive an excellent grade in my classes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I’m certain I can understand the most difficult material presented in the readings for my classes.</td>
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<td>3. I’m confident I can learn the basic concepts taught in my classes.</td>
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<td>4. I’m confident I can understand the most complex material presented by the instructor in my classes.</td>
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<td>5. I’m confident I can do an excellent job on the assignments and tests in my classes.</td>
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<td>6. I expect to do well in my classes.</td>
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<td>7. I’m certain I can master the skills being taught in my classes.</td>
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<td>8. Considering the difficulty of my classes, the teacher, and my skills, I think I will do well.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Pintrich et al., 1991
APPENDIX D

PERCEIVED OUTCOME EXPECTATIONS
<table>
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<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Going to college will help me meet my educational goals.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. I will be successful in college this semester.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Going to college is going to be a waste of my time.</td>
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<td>4. Going to college will help me meet my career goals.</td>
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<td>5. I will do well in college this semester.</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. I will be satisfied with my success in college this semester.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX E

PERCEIVED ACADEMIC CONTROL SCALE
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Strongly disagree</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>Strongly agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I have a great deal of control over my academic performance in my courses.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. The more effort I put into my courses, the better I do in them.</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. No matter what I do, I can’t seem to do well in my courses. *</td>
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<td>4. I see myself as largely responsible for my performance throughout my college career.</td>
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<td>5. How well I do in my courses is often the “luck of the draw.”*</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. There is little I can do about my performance in university.*</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. When I do poorly in a course, it’s usually because I haven’t given my best effort.</td>
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<tr>
<td>8. My grades are basically determined by things beyond my control and there is little I can do to change that.*</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Perry et al., 2001
* Items that are reverse coded
APPENDIX F

CONSENT FORM FOR HUMAN PARTICIPANTS IN RESEARCH
Informed Consent for Human Participants in Research
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: First Semester College Experiences (Phase I)

Lead Researchers: Kristy Dykema, M.S.
Email Contact: kristy.dykema@unco.edu
Research Advisors: Dr. Michael Phillips; michael.phillips@unco.edu; (970)351-1296

Please read this form carefully and if you have any questions, please email or call one of the researchers listed above before participating in the study. If you decide to participate in the study and have no questions, please provide agreement to participate by signing your name and today’s date at the bottom of this page.

This study investigates the experiences of students in an educational setting. Your participation in this study will consist of giving permission to use your responses to an online survey. The survey will ask you about your feelings with regards to going to college. In addition, you will be asked questions regarding general information about yourself (age, gender, ethnicity). Responses to the survey are confidential and none of your identifying information will be tied to your data. Following your first semester of enrollment, your grade point average and academic standing will be collected as well as your enrollment status as a part-time or full-time student. Once collected, identifying information will be omitted and replaced with your participant identification number so that your name will not be tied to this information. It is also important to understand that your participation in this study and your answers will not have any impact on your ability to go to school here or on your placement in courses.

If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in a survey that is expected to take between less than thirty minutes. Your responses to questions on the survey will be kept confidential and your name will be removed and replaced with an identification number. All data will be treated with strict confidence and your name will not be used in any reporting of the research findings. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. If you would want to know the results of the study (within these restrictions) you should notify one of the researchers listed above.

There are minimal discomforts and risks associated with participating in this study. Due to the nature of this study, which requires filling out a survey to report your information, it is not expected that you will be physically harmed by taking part in this study. It is not expected that your participation in this survey will bring about any discomfort. However, care has been taken to keep participant discomfort minimal during this study. As a
participant in this research study, you may benefit from the ability to discuss your experiences as a nontraditional college student.

Additionally, some participants will be chosen randomly for a potential follow-up interview at the conclusion of the semester to discuss your experiences as a student. Participation in that portion of the study will take one hour or less and you will be compensated with a $20 gift card for your time if you decide to be interviewed. If you choose to participate in the follow-up interview, your responses will be audio recorded with two devices. The audio recording will then be used to transcribe the interview, after which, the audio recording will be destroyed.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact Sherry May at the Office of Sponsored Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-1910.

Participant Name (printed):
__________________________________________________

Participant Signature:
__________________________________________________

Today’s Date: ______________________

Contact Information (For follow-up interview purposes):
Participants will be randomly selected at the end of the semester for a follow-up interview, which is expected to take approximately one hour or less. Those participating in the interview will receive a $20 gift card as compensation for their time.

Phone Number: __________________________________________

Email Address: __________________________________________
(please use an email address that is not affiliated with Aims Community College)
Informed Consent for Human Participants in Research
University of Northern Colorado

Project Title: First Semester College Experiences (Phase II)

Lead Researchers: Kristy Dykema, M.S.
Email Contact: kristy.dykema@unco.edu
Research Advisors: Dr. Michael Phillips; michael.phillips@unco.edu; (970)351-1296

Please read this form and if you have any questions, please feel free to ask the interviewer before consenting. If you decide to participate in the study and have no questions, please provide agreement to participate by signing your name and today’s date at the bottom of this page.

This study investigates the experiences of students in an educational setting. Your participation in this study will involve an interview, which will take approximately one hour or less. Your interview will be audio recorded with two devices. The audio recording will then be used to transcribe the interview, after which, the audio recording will be destroyed. No identifying information will be tied to your interview transcript and your confidentiality will be maintained with strict data handling procedures. All data will be treated with strict confidence and your name will not be used in any reporting of the research findings. Your privacy will be protected to the maximum extent allowable by law. If you would want to know the results of the study (within these restrictions) you should notify one of the researchers listed above.

There are some potential discomforts involved in this study. For instance, during the interview, you will be asked questions pertaining to your experiences as a college student. For some, discussing obstacles and barriers to education may be difficult. In these cases, you will be provided with a list of available resources.

As a participant in this research study, you may benefit from the ability to discuss your experiences as a nontraditional college student. Another benefit is that you will be compensated with a $20 gift card for your time.

Participation is voluntary. You may decide not to participate in this study and if you begin participation, you may still decide to stop and withdraw at any time. Your decision will be respected and will not result in the loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Having read the above and having had an opportunity to ask any questions, please sign below if you would like to participate in this research. A copy of this form will be given to you to retain for future reference. If you have any concerns about your selection or treatment as a research participant, please contact the Office of Sponsored
Programs, Kepner Hall, University of Northern Colorado, Greeley, CO 80639; 970-351-2161.

Participant Name (printed):
__________________________________________________

Participant Signature:
__________________________________________________

Today’s Date: ____________________
APPENDIX G

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS/TOPICS
Due to the nature of a qualitative approach, follow-up questions may be asked to further address the topics of interest in this study. The following are preliminary questions and topics to be covered:

Follow-Up Questions For Group 1 Students (defined as students who completed the semester with a GPA of at least 3.0):
1. What made you decide to go back to school?
2. Was that a difficult decision for you? Why or why not?
3. Did you have any fears going back to school? What were they?
4. How confident did you feel in your ability to go back to school at the beginning of the semester?
5. How do you think the semester went?
6. What would you say was the most influential factor in your level of success this semester?
7. Was there anything that made the semester harder for you? What were your barriers?
8. What do you think made the semester easier for you? What were your supports?
9. What do you think was the reason for your success?
10. Did you ever struggle with school? What do you think was the reason for your struggles?
11. Did you ever have doubts in yourself as a student over the course of the semester?
12. What do you think could have been different to make it easier on you this semester?
13. How confident do you feel now in your ability as a student?
14. Is there anything that we didn’t talk about that you think is an important part of your experience as a student?

Follow-Up Questions for Group 2 Students (defined as students who completed the semester with less than a 2.0 GPA)
1. What made you decide to go back to school?
2. Was that a difficult decision for you? Why or why not?
3. Did you have any fears going back to school? What were they?
4. How confident did you feel in your ability to go back to school at the beginning of the semester?
5. How do you think the semester went?
6. What would you say was the most influential factor in how you did this semester at school?
7. What made the semester harder for you? What were your barriers?
8. Was there anything that made the semester easier for you? What were your supports?
9. When did you struggle with school? What do you think was the reason for your struggles?
10. Did you ever have doubts in yourself as a student over the course of the semester?
11. What do you think could have been different to make it easier on you this semester?
12. How confident do feel now in your ability as a student?
13. Did you think about dropping out of your classes, or just to simply stop going?
14. What was the outcome of that decision (did you drop out or stop going, or continue)? What played a role in your decision?
15. Do you think that you will continue going to school after this? Why or why not?
Follow-Up Questions for Group 3 Students (defined as students withdrew from classes or were reported as a stop-out)
1. What made you decide to go back to school?
2. Was that a difficult decision for you? Why or why not?
3. Did you have any fears going back to school? What were they?
4. How confident did you feel in your ability to go back to school at the beginning of the semester?
5. How do you think the semester went?
6. What would you say was the most influential factor in how you did this semester at school?
7. What made the semester harder for you? What were your barriers?
8. Was there anything that made the semester easier for you? What were your supports?
9. When did you struggle with school? What do you think was the reason for your struggles?
10. Did you ever have doubts in yourself as a student over the course of the semester?
11. What do you think could have been different to make it easier on you this semester?
12. How confident do you feel now in your ability as a student?
13. What played a role in your decision to withdraw (or stop going to classes)?
14. Do you think that you will continue going to school after this? Why or why not?