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THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE BACCALAUREATE AND ADULT STUDENTS:
A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS

by

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A proposal submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Doctor of Education
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ABSTRACT

The focus of this qualitative research was to investigate the motivations, experiences, and constructs of non-traditional adult students who elected to enroll in community college baccalaureate programs. The participants in this investigation were a homogeneous sample of adult students who had priorities other than school, such as employment and families. The research questions which guided the study sought to explore the narratives adult students shared of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program, how they described meaning to having access to these new degrees, and what impact the community college baccalaureate had on the decision to return for the bachelor degree. The voices of the students were captured during semi-structured individual interviews.

Six central themes emerged from the data gathered: Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life, Finding Self Through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors, The Community College Degree as Key to Economic Stability, Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment, Importance of Communality to Adult Students Feelings of Belonging, and Neither Difference nor Disadvantage to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree.

The study's results led to recommendations and implications for legislators, higher education faculty and administrators, and admissions and marketing specialists.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Several years ago, my good friend, Kay Delk, gave me a copy of Joyce Landorf Heatherley's *Balcony People*. The premise of the book, as you might guess, is the value of being surrounded by people who support and cheer you on. I have been blessed in this life by having a wonderful family and supportive friends, all of whom have been cheerleaders for me. I hope I do the same for them.

My mother is my role model. I can only hope to have her outlook on life. Without a doubt, she is absolutely the most positive and upbeat person I know. Given her earlier life, you would expect her to see the shadows of life; instead, she sees its beauty. When I thought this degree and dissertation would never be completed, she was already celebrating my successes. In 200 blank pages, I saw an overwhelming amount of work. She saw possibility. When I grow up, I want to be like her. Thank you, Mom.

We all carry parts within us of those we love and those who love us. My best friend and husband, Kersh, is another person who sees the best in me. He has always believed in me and feels I can do more than is really justified. His philosophy of life is that our glass is always half full, never half empty. In his eyes, my glass is never half empty. It is always full and overflowing and I believe, because he does.

I have four interesting, brilliant, challenging, and beautiful children. Ben, your combination of peacefulness, perseverance, and balance inspire and remind me to take it slowly and smell the roses. One day I will achieve balance, stretch every day and learn to surf. In the meantime, I am delighted with the man you have grown to become.

Chessie, yes, yes, yes, I know. . . you want to be called Francesca. However, *Chessie,* you are brave and incredibly gentle. I love how you enjoy life and care for all of us. You are a delight to be around. I am always humbled when you say I'm your role model--the feeling is mutual. I am incredibly proud of you.

Sam, I asked if you knew that the secret to life was to fall seven times, but to get up eight times. You laughed and said that is exactly your belief! When you come out of your room singing, the light shines through, and it reminds us we can accomplish all things through Him. You are next; I can see us celebrating already.

Blair, you have taught us all so much. One thing that happened that was so inspiring was when your basketball coach was putting another player in ahead of you. I advised that you should talk to the coach. You shook your head and said "No," you were just going to work harder! What a lesson for me, and a great insight into you. Work harder, such a simple but powerful lesson.

Dr. Cintrón, thank you for your guidance and for your active understanding that adult students cannot set life aside. You also reminded me that "Sometimes it takes more than the intellect." I had forgotten.

Last, but certainly not least, I wish to offer my appreciation and express my admiration for the adult students who agreed to participate in this journey with me. There is no doubt that I learned much more from you than you may ever learn from us. Your determination and sheer joy in being able to finally reach your goals was humbling and a blessing that I will carry with me always.

Kersh, we are off to Italy!!

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INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

In addition to having a positive impact on individuals and their families,

baccalaureate degree production has been identified as critical to the overall health of

Florida's economy. This view was supported by President Barack Obama who, in his

remarks to a Joint Session of Congress and the nation on February 24, 2010, underscored

his commitment and understanding of the need for increased college degrees for the

nation. He referred to college degrees as pre-requisite to opportunity and necessary for

the United States to remain competitive in a global environment (The White House,

2010). Further the president set forth the goal ". . . that by 2020 America will once again

have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world" (The White House, 2010).

Increasing the number of citizens with a baccalaureate degree has clearly been a part of

the national agenda, and the president despite the significant obstacles, has established a

goal to increase the percentage of adults with baccalaureate degrees from 40% to 60% by

2020. A 60% degree attainment rate would return the United States to the highest level

of baccalaureate degree attainment in the world by 2020 (Russell, 2010; Walda, 2011).

Florida has long recognized the benefits of baccalaureate degree attainment for its

citizens and the state. These benefits include lower rates of unemployment, reduced

heath care costs, declines in prison populations, higher individual salaries resulting in

declines in entitlement programs, and improved tax revenues (Florida Department of

Education, 2011). The state, however, has struggled for several decades with trying to

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increase the percentage of its population with a baccalaureate degree. During the late 1990s, Florida's university system reported that the state ranked between 47th and 49th in the United States for baccalaureate degree production per 100,000 residents (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). This is in contrast to Florida's ranking as the third highest producing state in the nation for associate degrees (Evelyn, 2003).

In 2002 and again in 2005, Florida's State Board of Education reported that the state continued to have a significant challenge in raising its baccalaureate degree attainment for its citizens and was falling even further behind in the nation's rankings of baccalaureate degrees per 1000 residents. Of the nation's largest states, which included Texas and California, Florida occupied the seventh lowest position in the number of degrees awarded per capita. The report of the 2000 U. S. Census Bureau indicated that 22.3% of Florida's population over the age of 25 years had earned a bachelor's degree or higher, in comparison to 24.4% nationally. Adding to the state's pressing need for a baccalaureate-educated populace has been the critical shortages projected in certain workforce areas, such as nursing, information technology, business and teacher education (Florida State Board of Education, 2005). Legislators in Florida were concerned not only that the state would not be able to produce the highly skilled professionals needed to bolster the state's economy but would not remain competitive as it tries to recruit new industries into the state (Evelyn, 2003).

In 2007, The Florida Board of Governors (BOG), the state's higher education oversight group, established the objective of closing the gap between state and national averages for baccalaureate degree attainment as a major strategic goal. In attempting to

raise Florida's level of baccalaureate degree attainment, the BOG acknowledged the need

for additional models of degree production through collaborative efforts with community

colleges as an important approach to narrowing the disparity between the state and the

nation in degree production (Florida Board of Governors, 2007). The BOG

acknowledged that student access to the bachelor's degree could be strengthened through

two distinct strategies. First the state's 2 + 2 articulation partnership model between

universities and community colleges could be enhanced and more fully supported and

secondly, community colleges could offer baccalaureate degrees in high workforce areas

specifically geared to the Associate of Science graduate (Harrison, 2009).

Community colleges have traditionally contributed to baccalaureate attainment

through their transfer function or 2 + 2 partnership model (Floyd, 2005). Many states

have used a variety of models and 2 + 2 alternatives to increase baccalaureate degree

production for their citizens; several models have been identified in the literature (Floyd,

2005). These articulation models, whereby community colleges contribute to

baccalaureate attainment for their students, are discussed in detail in Chapter 2.

Though these articulation partnerships are a significant and effective step to

helping solve Florida's baccalaureate attainment shortfall, the Florida Department of

Education, Florida's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability

[OPPAGA] (2007). The Florida Board of Governors have maintained that additional

models are needed to help serve the adult, non-traditional student and provide for

regional needs of high demand upper division workforce programs (Florida Department

of Education, 2008b).

The position of the state in allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees is one response to the increased enrollment demands placed on the state university and college systems. There are several factors that have contributed to the increased demand for higher educational access in Florida and the nation. Between 1995 and 2007, the state added 3.7 million people to its population base (Office of Economic Development & Research, 2008), and subsequently between 2007 and 2010 high school graduation rates increased by more than 10%; both of these factors have added thousands more college aged individuals to the pool of college age individuals (Florida Department of Education, 2011). The Bright Futures Scholarship program, designed to afford more Florida high school students the opportunity for college and to keep the brightest students in the state has effectively resulted in many more students seeking entrance into Florida's higher educational systems (Harrison, 2009). The convergence of population growth, escalating high school enrollments, and the Bright Futures program led to tremendous system growth, with community colleges experiencing a 17% increase in enrollments and the state university system experiencing a 33% enrollment growth (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2006). An outcome of these circumstances was the resulting increased selectivity of the state universities leading to denial of access for students who in years prior would have gained admission to the state university (Harrison, 2009).

In 2007, the Florida Board of Governors (BOG) and in 2008(a), the Florida Department of Education (FLDOE) reaffirmed the role of the community college in providing baccalaureate degrees in specific high need workforce areas, such as nursing and education. The definition of limited high need workforce areas for the purposes of

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this study was derived from the US Department of Labor, Employment and Training

Administration, as industries with substantial growth, high demand, and which were

critical to the continuing growth of the economic base of the nation (U.S. Department of

Labor, n.d.). Major state educational entities, the BOG and the FLDOE, recognized the

potential role of the community college as a more active provider of baccalaureate degree

access for non-traditional adult students in select workforce baccalaureate program areas

(Florida Department of Education, 2008a).

In further support of the role of the community college in providing an alternative

approach to baccalaureate degree attainment, particularly in workforce areas, the

Community College Baccalaureate Association (CCBA) (n.d.) actively supported

expansion of the community college mission to include delivery of baccalaureate degrees

to a greater number of individuals, particularly those not served by state university

systems. The CCBA has convincingly put forward in their mission the premise that all

individuals should have the opportunity to pursue higher education (baccalaureate

degrees) at a location that is accessible, affordable, and convenient (Community College,

n.d.). According to Garmon (2004), the CCBA is focused on access for all students.

Garmon (2004) credited the CCBA with ushering in a new era of access to the

baccalaureate degree in states such as Florida, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico Texas,

Minnesota, Arkansas, and Canada.

Similar to the position of the CCBA, Walker (2005) and Furlong (2005)

contended that the community college baccalaureate was a natural extension of the

mission of the community college and aligns with the initial organizational intent for

Florida's community colleges designed by Dr. James Wattenbarger in 1957. Wattenbarger's plan was built on the premise of having a community college offering higher educational opportunities within commuting distance of 99% of the state's population (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). The development of Florida's community college system, its mission and role in regard to higher educational access are discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

The development of the community college baccalaureate degree remains controversial in Florida and throughout the nation (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). Educational leaders from community colleges and universities, politicians, bureaucrats, industry leaders and students have had strong positions either supporting or challenging this new degree (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). Major concerns are centered around the impact the new baccalaureate will have on the original mission of the community college and fears of closing the open door policy for students in need (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). The debate over mission and access are contained in Chapter 2.

Statement of the Problem

In 2001, Florida's Higher Education Funding Advisory Committee expressed concern over the state's low percentage of individuals with baccalaureate degrees, calling this a pressing issue for the state's overall economic health. In 2005, Florida's Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA) discussed the need for increased options for the state's citizens to obtain baccalaureate degrees. OPPAGA (2005) and others (Florida Department of Education, 2011; Pascarella & Terenzinni,

2005) documented positive gains resulting from degree attainment in terms of salary and professional movement for individuals. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) found that the achievement of a bachelor's degree resulted in an increase in lifetime earnings advantage of between 20% and 40% with a private return on investment between 9% and 11%. The Florida Department of Education (2011) also noted that the attainment of a bachelor's degree had significant benefits for the individual as well as the state and nation. The benefits to the individual and the state will be further discussed in Chapter 2.

The United States has continued to struggle with economic recovery after a staggering downturn beginning in 2009 which persisted at the time of this study. With the nation facing an estimated 9.8% unemployment rate, the jobs recovery process has been predicted to benefit educated individuals over those with less education (Saporito, 2011). In December of 2010, the United States Department of Labor documented unemployment rates for persons with a bachelor's degree or higher at 4.6%, those with some college or an associate's degree at 8.7%, and individuals with a high school degree and no college at 9.8%. Those individuals without a high school diploma had the highest unemployment rates (15.7%). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explained this phenomenon by arguing that individuals with bachelor degrees have more opportunity to enter high status managerial, technical, and professional occupations, which in turn confers greater stability during economic fluctuations, than do skilled workers without the degree. In further support of the need and importance of the baccalaureate degree for individuals, Martha Kantor, the U.S. Undersecretary for Education, noted that 30 of the fastest growing and more stable professions, e.g., those found in healthcare, the

biosciences, and information technology require a bachelor's degree as a point of entry (Floyd, 2005; Walda, 2010). Another phenomenon adding to the need for more baccalaureate options for the nation's citizens has been the changing work place requirements that have served to elevate the level of education necessary for some of the more in-demand occupational fields (Russell, 2010; Walker, 2005). Nursing is one example of this phenomenon change (W. Coldwell, personal communication, 2010) with others such as surveying and interior design (M. Staley, personal communication, 2010). The baccalaureate is quickly becoming a preferred, if not required, credential by employers as they seek to hire the most qualified employees (Russell, 2010; Walker, 2005).

Florida's Higher Education Funding Advisory Committee acknowledged that Florida would not be able to increase significantly the numbers of baccalaureate degrees awarded without major strategic change (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). In order to help meet the needs of its citizens, the 2001 Florida Legislature approved Senate Bill 1162 which authorized St. Petersburg Junior College to re-establish itself as St. Petersburg College and to offer baccalaureate degrees in high need workforce areas, such as nursing, education, and information technology (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). In addition, Senate Bill 1162 put into statute a process by which other community colleges could seek approval from the State Board of Education to also offer baccalaureate degrees. This authorization, later codified in Florida Statute 1007.33 F.S. 1007.33 (2009), had as its purpose ". . . the Legislature . . . recognizes the economic development needs . . . and educational needs of place-bound, non-traditional students . .

. and increased demand for access" (Chapter 1007, part III, (1) (a). Through this legislation, Florida officially endorsed the community college as a point of access for workforce related baccalaureate degrees. By 2012, of Florida's 28 community colleges were offering 135 workforce focused and teacher education baccalaureate degrees (Florida College System, 2012). Table 1 details the legislative acts authorizing community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees and the respective years of approval.

Walker's (2000, 2001, 2007) assumption has been that since the community college baccalaureate degree was developed in direct response to the need for greater access to bachelor's degrees, particularly for nontraditional adult populations, that these new programs would be effective in meeting the stated needs. Ruud, Bragg, and Townsend (2010) proposed that the community college baccalaureate was in direct response to adult learners' needs for baccalaureate degrees, regional workforce development requirements for advanced degrees, attempts to strengthen transfer rates, and improvement of baccalaureate attainment for the population. However, at the time of this writing, and after an extensive literature search which included Dissertation Abstract and Education Resources Information Center (ERIC), and assistance from the library staff at the researcher's institution, little empirical evidence documenting the impact of community college baccalaureate degrees on the adult students' needs for baccalaureate education or regional needs for workforce development was found.

Table 1

Years of Authorization and Approval: Baccalaureate Degrees in Florida Community Colleges

Legislative Act	Year	College
Senate Bill 1162 (authority codified in Florida Statute 1004.73)	2001	St. Petersburg College
Florida Statute 1007.33.	2002	Chipola Junior College Miami Dade College
	2003	Okaloosa-Walton College
	2004	Edison College
	2005	Daytona Beach Community College
	2006	Florida Community College at Jacksonville
Amendment of 1007.33 F.S. allowing community colleges to offer baccalaureate programs in math and science	2007	Indian River Community College
	2008	Broward Community College Palm Beach Community College
	2009	Polk State College Seminole State College Sante Fe State College State College of Florida, Sarasota Valencia Community College
	2010	St. Johns River State College Gulf Coast State College College of Central Florida
	2011	South Florida State College Florida Gateway College

Source: Moltz (2010)

The Community College Baccalaureate Association's website, the official source for information on the community college baccalaureate displayed approximately 420 articles on the topic of community college baccalaureates. The vast majority of these publications were opinion and editorial in nature. They were not of scholarly journal quality. Even fewer reported on studies exploring the impact of the CCB on adult

students. The site also maintains a listing of recently completed dissertations, and five

published on the site were reviewed; however, only two of the studies included any focus

on students. Despite the lack of evidence of the effectiveness of community college

baccalaureates, the number of community colleges offering these degrees has continued

to grow. Concern over the lack of empirical evidence has been well documented in the

literature (Burrows, 2002; Floyd, 2005; Floyd & Skolnik, 2005; Grothe, 2009; Milliron,

2005; Petrosian, 2010; Russell, 2010; Skolnik, 2005). All of these researchers have

called for in-depth exploration of the community college baccalaureate. Grothe (2009)

more specifically called for research on the CCB and non-traditional adult students,

which was precisely the focus of this researcher's study.

Significance of the Study

The community college baccalaureate (CCB), a baccalaureate level degree

conferred by a community college (Walker, 2007), has been a relatively new but growing

phenomenon which emerged in the 1990s (Russell, 2010). To date, 18 states have

approved the offering of community college baccalaureates. A total of 54 community

colleges have been authorized to offer the new CCB degree, and more than 465

baccalaureate programs have been approved (Petrosian, 2010; Russell, 2010). This is in

comparison to 11 states approved to offer community college baccalaureates and 21

institutions offering the new CCB degree in 2004. These figures show steady growth of

this new model for baccalaureate attainment and have caused many scholars to declare

that the community college baccalaureate is here to stay (Lane, 2003).

Florida has been one of the national leaders in community college baccalaureate development with 21 of its 28 community colleges offering more than 135 approved baccalaureate programs (Division of Florida Colleges, 2012; Russell, 2010). Russell noted that the remarkable growth of community college baccalaureates in Florida has been the result of clearly articulated vision by its legislature on the role of the community college in helping to alleviate the needs for more baccalaureate degrees. Petrosian, (2010), in examining the rationales leading to legislative approval of community college baccalaureates in 18 states, found that the convergence of a legislatively stated need for more baccalaureates, along with the needs of industry and students have been the overriding and compelling causes for policy enactment.

Though Florida's colleges regularly report enrollments, demographics, costs, and graduation data to the state, there has been limited if any analysis to demonstrate the effectiveness of FS 1007.33 on the attainment rates of Florida's adults. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities (Russell, 2010) and OPPAGA (2005) have called for further in-depth study of the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate, particularly in reference to the impact of implementation of the new degrees on baccalaureate completion by adult students.

This research was important because it focused on the adult students, those 24 years and older, who have been one of the legislature's primary audiences targeted in the development of the community college baccalaureate (CCB). This was one of the first dissertations to explore the implications of the community college baccalaureate degree on baccalaureate attainment and the adult learner from a student perspective. The study

focused a new lens on F.S. 1007.33 by qualitatively describing the impact this bill has had on non-traditional adult baccalaureate degree seekers and exploring students' perspectives in choosing community college baccalaureate degree programs when there were university programs available. Therefore, several interview questions reflected the intent of F.S. 1007.33 in overcoming obstacles faced by adults in pursuing the baccalaureate degree.

In order to comprehensively analyze FS 1007.33 and its intended outcomes, the voices of adult non-traditional students who have chosen to pursue a baccalaureate degree at a community college and their reasons for doing so were heard. These voices were important to discover the phenomenological meaning of the expanded role of community colleges to its intended audience.

Conceptual Framework

This research was structured using the perspective of Kingdon's Multiple Streams (MS) Theoretical framework (1995) as the lens through which the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate and its impact on adult students was viewed. In his framework, Kingdon recognized possible streams which merge to affect policy changes. The streams described by Kingdon are: (a) the problem and its recognition, (b) choosing from available alternatives, and (c) the political environment and forces in play at the time of problem recognition, (1995). Using the streams as a metaphor, Kingdon explored how problems are defined and recognized, how policies are developed to address the problems, how solutions are selected from the available alternatives, how political events

influence agendas, and how all of these factors converge at key times in the political realm.

Kingdon's framework was intended as a lens through which the process of agenda setting could be analyzed and viewed (1995). This study, however, used Kingdon's original framework as a lens through which an implemented policy, F.S. 1007.33, can be viewed from the perspective of the intended audience of the bill. This modification is a logical adaptation as one of the intents of the current study was to inform policy. In the position I hold at Seminole State College and the role I play at the state level of informing the Department of Education, Florida College System about the impact and possible outcomes of legislation on students and community colleges, it is appropriate to use a framework from the political realm. The narratives of adult students who seek the baccalaureate degree and meaning of the community college degree in their lives can be powerful testimony on the degree of effectiveness of the bill, especially as states consider the merits and drawbacks of expanding the role of the community college. The political forces or policy proponents in this framework are the state's legislature and other powerfully connected players such as community college presidents and their political allies. An integral component of the framework includes the presence of a favorable political climate reinforced by values and the current mood of the state and nation (Kingdon, 1995). The favorable mood, at present, has been created through presidential call for increased numbers of individuals with college degrees (The White House, 2010), by a declining economy, and Florida's need for a more diverse economy. In Kingdon's framework, the public, those impacted by the legislation or policy under consideration, is

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comprised of informal participants in the policy agenda process. These informal groups, however, play an important role in blocking, promoting, or proposing solutions to identified problems. The public in this study were adult students who potentially have an impact on state legislation specifically as it relates to the community college baccalaureate. These students may exert influence on state policy either through public opinion forces or active participation such as lobbying or voting.

In this research, a modification of Kingdon's Multiple Streams (MS) approach was used to view the phenomenon of the adult student and the community college baccalaureate in a new way. MS primarily focuses on policy development and agenda setting from a legislative view. Kingdon's model has three major components (a) identification and definition of a problem, (b) the selection of alternative, and (c) the political environment.

During my proposal defense, one of the committee members questioned the transferability of using Kingdon's model to adult students and their decisioning to attend the community college baccalaureate and the meaning of the degree to their lives. For the purposes of this study, Kingdon's model was modified for use with adult students and their sense making of the community college baccalaureate. The first component of the model, problem identification, was modified to determine (a) the problem or problems adults are trying to solve by returning for the baccalaureate degree, (b) the reasons for their going back to college to obtain a baccalaureate degree, and (c) the problems or obstacles they have encountered during their quest to return for the bachelor's degree.

The second component of the model, choosing from alternatives, was significant to the study in that there are many options or alternatives offering baccalaureate completion programs in the region. How and why adult students choose the community college baccalaureate is of interest to higher educational professionals such as the researcher and should also be of interest to policy makers as they consider expanding the role of the community college. In Florida, there have been several options for the baccalaureate degree, i.e., traditional state universities, state universities offering baccalaureate programs on community college campuses, private colleges, and for profit colleges and universities. The alternatives available to adults and their perspectives regarding the CCB were explored in this study.

The final component of the model, referred to as the political environment by Kingdon (1995), was modified to describe in the students' own voices their prior educational experiences, the life and familial environment of the adult, and how their environment contributed to their choosing to enroll in a CCB. The modification of Kingdon's Multiple Streams as the framework for the study is illustrated in Table 2, and the relationship and alignment between the theoretical framework, the research questions and the interview protocol is contained in Appendix B.

Table 2

Kingdon's Multiple Streams (MS): Components and Modification

Streams	Kingdon's Multiple Streams Framework	Modification of Multiple Streams
Problem identification	A problem that comes to the attention of governmental decision makers through a systematic indicator which indicates an area of concern. *In this study, the problem is low national and state baccalaureate rates.*	What problem is the adult student trying to solve by obtaining a baccalaureate degree?
Choosing from alternatives	How do governmental decision makers chose from all available alternatives for addressing a problem? How are different alternatives evaluated? *In this study, there are numerous alternatives for higher education presented.*	What alternatives for the baccalaureate are available to the adult student? How did the adult student choose from the available higher education alternatives? What does the adult student believe about the community college baccalaureate?
Political environment, politics	What focusing events are present which compel governmental action? What is the national mood related to a particular issue? What are the politics, the players, and the political climate present at the time? *In this study, there is a favorable national mood created by the president and by US ranking of baccalaureates compared to other countries.*	What are the life experiences of the adult student, their prior educational experiences? What was going on in the adult student's life at the time of the decision to return to school? Were there any events that focused the adult on returning to obtain a bachelor's degree (focusing event, crisis or symbol)?

Note. Adapted from Kingdon, J. W. (1995). *Agendas, alternatives, and public policies* (2nd ed.). New York: Harper Collins.

Research Questions

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study. They are as follows:

1. What narratives do adult students tell of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program?

2. How do adult students perceive and describe meaning to access and opportunity to enroll in a Community College Baccalaureate degree program?

3. What meaning did the Community College Baccalaureate have on the adults' decision to return to college for a four year degree?

Definition of Terms

Associate Dominant colleges. A new classification or category of colleges first described by the Carnegie Foundation in 2000, where the primary degree offered is the associate degree and at least 10% of the degrees conferred are at the baccalaureate level. The 2010 update of the classification system has eliminated the 10% limit in favor of a system that defines colleges by the dominant or majority of degrees conferred (Carnegie Foundation, 2010). Currently, the majority of the 28 colleges in the Florida College System are classified Associate Dominant (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

Community college. A ". . . regionally accredited institution of higher education that offers the Associate's degree as its highest degree." (Vaughan, 2006). Vaughan acknowledges that many community colleges had begun to offer the bachelor's degree.

Community college baccalaureate degree (CCB). A bachelor's degree awarded by a community college (Townsend, 2005). Cook (2000) further clarified the community college baccalaureate by stating , ". . . unlike the re-designation of a junior college as a four year institution, the community college baccalaureate implies that the degree granting institution maintains its community college identity" (p. 5).

Community college baccalaureate (CCB) programs. Bachelor's degrees offered by a community college, not including programs jointly offered with a traditional upper level institution, e.g., 2+2 bachelor's degree programs.

Florida College System (FCS). Public postsecondary educational institutions in Florida which award two- and four-year academic degrees. These institutions, by law, may offer associate and baccalaureate degrees at a cost which represents savings to both students and the state (Florida Department of Education, 2008b). Institutions within the FCS may not award master's degree or doctoral degrees.

High growth/high demand workforce programs. Programs, typically Associate of Science degree programs, which prepare students for careers linked to industries with considerable job expansion. These programs are often critical to the economic stability and vitality of the region and impact other growth industries (U.S. Department of Labor, n.d.).

Life circumstance. The situations in which people live including the physical environment, social and familial environment, and other factors such as income, economics, and influential impacting events (The Scottish Public Health Observatory, 2012, Life circumstances: overview).

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Non-traditional adult student. A student 24 years of age or older who is employed full or part time and has not, completed a previous baccalaureate degree. These students may also report significant priorities such as spouse, and/or children. Non-traditional students differ from more traditional students in that they are often employed, have families, and characteristically have limited resources, e.g., time and flexibility (Walker, 2001). In this study, these students will be referred to as adult students.

State University System (SUS). Typically referred to as several state supported public universities within a state that have the same governing structure under the auspices of a state governing body.

Transfer. Initial enrollment in a community college followed by successive enrollment at a four year degree granting institution within a five year period (Wellman, 2002). This term refers to the transfer of community college students to any four year institution, public or private. Transfer is also defined in Florida as the 2 + 2 articulation structure, a statewide agreement which "facilitates the seamless articulation of student credits across and among Florida's educational entities" (Florida Department of Education, 2008b, p. 8). The Florida Statute that guides this process specifically defines 2 + 2 as providing community college graduates of Associate in Arts programs admission to junior standing at any of the state university system colleges (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

Workforce programs and degrees. Programs developed by community colleges to meet specific needs of businesses and industries. Course content is less theoretical than

the traditional bachelor's degree and involves a significant work-based component (McKee, 2001).

Workforce baccalaureate degrees. Baccalaureate degrees which have been specifically designed to meet the employment needs of industries and which prepare students for high growth, high demand careers, such as nursing, healthcare, engineering technology, information technology, and programming (Walker & Floyd, 2005).

Assumptions

The assumptions upon which this study is based are as follows:

1. Kingdon's Multiple Streams (MS) (1995), as modified by the researcher, was an appropriate theoretical framework to view the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate and its impact on adult students.

2. Interview questions posed by the researcher were adequate to elicit data to answer the research questions which guided the study.

3. Study participants would be truthful and open when responding to interview questions posed by the researcher. They would be interested in sharing their educational experiences with the researcher and want to give voice to their perspectives.

Limitations

1. The researcher was an employee, with administrative responsibility for two baccalaureate degrees, of a community college that has recently transitioned

to offering four-year degrees. Precautions were employed to avoid and minimize any biases. Such strategies included recording interviews, data triangulation, member checking, and disclosure of the researcher's position.

2. Because the study was conducted at one public community college in Florida and was based on interviews of between five and 10 adult students, generalizations to a large population will be hindered.

Delimitations

1. The study was limited to one public community college in central Florida.

2. The study participants were limited to adult students who (a) have previously earned an AA or AS degree but not a previous baccalaureate degree, (b) have been admitted into a community college baccalaureate program, (c) were enrolled in 3000 or 4000 level business or business related coursework, and (d) were adults, 24 years of age and older who self-report responsibilities and priorities other than school, e.g., work and family obligations. Students who have not enrolled in a community college baccalaureate program were excluded.

Transparency of the Researcher

The hallmark of qualitative research is that the investigator is the primary tool for data collection and analysis. Researchers, because of their positionality, must be alert to any biases or perspectives that may subjectively influence their interpretations of data

(Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). A significant consideration of qualitative research study is how the experiences, perspectives, and values of the researcher influence the study (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998). Merriam (2009) called attention to this issue by recommending that researchers explore their personal and professional experiences with the topic at hand in order to avoid or minimize biases, especially in the interpretation of data. In addition to exploring their experiences, researchers must disclose personal and professional experiences which may potentially influence the constructs of the study.

At the time of this study I was employed at a community college as the Associate Vice President for Career and Professional Studies. Though I have worked in several higher educational settings; small private colleges, a large private Catholic university, two different state universities, and a community college, I have found my values and heart align with the philosophy and work of the community college. My epiphany occurred 27 years ago during the interview process for a nursing faculty position. Prior to this experience I was a nursing faculty member at the University of South Florida where I was involved in teaching senior nursing students, participating in community service as a nurse practitioner in a housing project, and conducting research on biorhythms and body temperature with a leading nurse theorist. My faculty colleagues identified me as someone who was on the "fast track" to a career as a professional nurse educator. A family move to Orlando led me to interview for faculty positions at the University of Central Florida and Seminole Community College. As a faculty member who had taught previously at two major universities, I had never considered teaching at a

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community college. I interviewed at the community college in case the university

position did not materialize.

One of the required components of the community college interview process was

an impromptu 30-minute teaching demonstration (I later learned that the community

college faculty who were interviewing me were not at all certain that a university

assistant professor could teach). At the conclusion of the teaching demonstration, I asked

the students in attendance about their stories, and what I heard moved me. All of the

stories were compelling and caused me to reflect on my own journey as a first generation

college student, recalling my personal struggle in convincing my parents that I needed to

attend college. At the time I thought this was a hardship, but my experience paled

compared to the stories I heard that morning. One particular student, Martha Brown, told

me that her entire family; children, aunts, cousins, and parents, were putting coins into a

large glass bottle to help her pay for books and tuition. She was 30 years old and

struggling to juggle a family and job. Because of a fairly disadvantaged education which

left her with poor mathematics and reading skills, it had taken her two years to advance

beyond college prep classes. It sounded as if the hope for her entire extended family

rested on her. Martha Brown knew that her education was more about her children's

future than it was about her self actualization.

That meeting with the students was all it took! I left the classroom and practically

begged the interview committee for a faculty position that involved a cut in salary and a

28-mile, one-way commute. I could not have guessed it at the time, but four years later

when I awoke from a difficult and complicated C section, the first reassuring face I saw

was Martha Brown's. She had become a very good nurse. It was the community college story, its mission in helping students whose parents had not gone to college and those who needed second chances that attracted me. What inspired me then, and still does today, is what a local community college can mean to students and their families.

My professional experience in higher education has been as an adjunct faculty, a full-time tenured faculty, and an administrator. I have a great deal of experience with all aspects of community colleges from teaching, designing programs and curriculum, evaluating programs and determining programs to be both developed and limited. My biases are that I have very positive feelings about community colleges and the role they play in students' educational lives. Although I understand that there are possible disadvantages to students' attending community colleges, I tend to believe that these disadvantages are related more to the educational and life experiences of the student than the structure of the community colleges. Additionally, my belief is that the benefits of community colleges far outweigh any disadvantages which may exist. In my current position, I have strongly recommended that Seminole State embark on the development of the community college baccalaureates. I pursued this because of my passion to see as many individuals as possible earn a baccalaureate degree, as I believe the accomplishment to be life-changing for individuals and their families. At Seminole State, our slogan has been "We change lives." I have embraced this philosophy and have expanded it to "We change families for generations."

The disclosure of my story as a community college educator is significant in order for readers to understand my perspectives and the biases I brought to the study at hand. It

is also important to know that I have developed two community college baccalaureate degrees, a BS in Information Systems Technology and another in Business and Information Management. Both of these degrees specifically address workforce needs of the region and, notably, provide options for adult students to obtain a bachelor's degree. Because I am concerned that my biases may influence the results of the study, I will use member checking and an external reviewer to minimize the potential for bias to color interpretation of the data.

Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the research. The study was conducted to explore and gain an understanding of adult students who have elected to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program. Exploration of the problems adults are trying to resolve by obtaining the baccalaureate and the reasons nontraditional adult students choose the community college baccalaureate when more established university programs are available were also examined. Addressed in this chapter was background information relevant to the topic, the community college baccalaureate (CCB) movement, and an introduction to the history of CCBs in Florida. Presented were discussion of the purpose of the research, the theoretical framework used to guide the study, research questions, and pertinent definitions. The significance of the study rests in determining if the strategy of providing more baccalaureate degree options through community colleges has a positive impact on one group of students, the nontraditional adult students who decide to pursue it.

Chapter 2 provides a comprehensive literature review which begins with a brief historical view of the community college in the United States and in Florida, the development and growth of community college baccalaureate degree programs as well as arguments both supporting and challenging its value. Literature on the adult student and baccalaureate degree attainment is also considered.

Chapter 3 is devoted to the methodology that was used in conducting the research. The methods and procedures used in identifying the population and sample for the study, the instrumentation, and the data and analysis procedures were also detailed.

Chapter 4 presents a demographic picture of the study participants as well as offering a composite description of all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science of Business and Information Management degree program. Importantly, the chapter presents the narratives of each of the participants' lived experiences with higher education and their related life experiences.

Chapter 5 presents and explored themes which emerged during participant interviews, data analysis, and triangulation of existing data. Chapter 6 contains a discussion of the thematic findings as they relate to each of the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the literature review. Chapter 7 presents implications of the study for legislative and policy informing bodies, community college administrators, and faculty who are involved or are considering engagement with community college baccalaureate programs as well as adult students.

CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction

The United States system of higher education is comprised of several different

sectors. These sectors include large state university systems, private elite colleges, small

religious affiliated colleges, technical colleges and public community colleges among

others. America's community colleges have played a significant role in the system of

higher education due to their open door admissions policies, significant role in workforce

education, and welcoming atmosphere for non-traditional adult students (Dougherty,

1994). These colleges have enrolled nearly 11 million students annually in more than

1,100 community colleges nationwide. This is almost half of all students who embark on

a college career (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Dougherty, 1994; Phillippe & González

Sullivan, 2005). At the beginning of the 21st century, community colleges existed in

every state of the union and within commuting distance by 95% of the U.S. population

(Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Dougherty, 1994).

The community college baccalaureate degree is a recent and emerging

phenomenon in the United States, and research into its impact on baccalaureate degree

attainment by nontraditional adult students has been limited (Floyd, 2005; Floyd &

Skolnik, 2005; Rice, 2007). Though supporters have postulated that this new degree is

proving critical to meeting the needs of adult learners in their pursuit of a bachelor's

degree (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005; Furlong, 2005; Walker, 2001), little research has been

conducted to validate this claim.

In the researcher's initial consideration of the phenomenon of the community college bachelor's degree, the importance of understanding the background and development of the community college in the United States and particularly Florida was recognized. Thus, a comprehensive review of the literature was undertaken and is presented in this chapter. Addressed are the development of the community college in the United States organized around institutional variables, the growth of community colleges in Florida with particular emphasis on Florida's 2 + 2 system and the barriers and obstacles to transfer for community college graduates. The remainder of the chapter is focused on the literature related to the community college baccalaureate degree and the adult students for whom the degree has been designed. Presented are the rationale for and the challenges to the degree in the United States and Florida. The limited research that has been conducted in regard to the CCB is also reviewed. The evolution of the CCB in Florida is detailed, and enrollment information for Florida's CCB programs that was available at the time of writing is presented.

<center>Community Colleges in the United States</center>

An understanding of the history and evolution of America's community colleges is important to the study of the community college baccalaureate in that it provides a historical context in which the development of the new baccalaureate can be viewed. A thorough understanding of how community colleges came to be in the U. S. and their original purposes provide a sense of the dynamic nature of the community college and the rationale for the emergence of the community college baccalaureate degree.

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The community college is a uniquely American endeavor supporting the ideals of access, affordability and opportunity at its core (Vaughan, 2006; Witt, Wattenbarger, Gollattscheck, & Suppiger, 1994). They are often referred to as "democracy's college" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5) or "the people's college" (Cohen & Brawer, 2008, p. 5) because of an enduring commitment to open access, affordability, lifelong learning and comprehensiveness in its offerings (Vaughan, 2006; Witt et al., 1994). Many historical events came together to help shape the community college as it existed in 2012.

The first of these events, the enactments of the Morrill Acts of 1862 and 1890, signaled the first attempt by the federal government to broaden access to higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). The Morrill Act of 1862 focused on agricultural and occupational workforce education, and was closely followed in 1890 by the second Morrill Act that opened the doors of higher education to women, minorities, and others who had previously been excluded (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). These acts changed the way Americans viewed higher education from a privilege reserved for the elites of society to one that accorded the opportunity of higher education to a much broader audience.

Another contributing factor influencing the development of the community college was the tremendous expansion of high school graduates at the beginning of the 21st century (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). During the 30 years surrounding the Civil War, the number of high school graduates increased by more than 600% (Witt et al., 1994). Traditional colleges of the time were unable to meet the growing demands for access due to limited capacity, high costs, and inaccessible locations. Additionally, admissions

policies had been designed as an exclusionary strategy to maintain the elite status quo rather than an inclusive strategy to meet the needs of the growing body of middle class high school graduates (Karabel, 2005; Witt et al., 1994). Although the land grant colleges were able to increase access for many, the need for local higher educational options for the typical high school graduate remained unmet.

In attempting to respond to the rising demand of the middle class for higher education, early educational leaders began to develop the idea of the first two years of college as separate from the university. In 1901, William Rainey Harper, considered by many as the founder of community colleges, established Joliet Junior College as an institution of higher learning to offer those first two years (Witt et al., 1994). Joliet Junior College has been considered by many historians as the first public junior college in the United States (Dougherty, 1994; Vaughan, 2006). In fairly quick succession, the 1907 California legislature authorized several public high schools to expand into two-year or junior colleges (Vaughan, 2006).

During the 1920s, America saw the community college movement spread throughout the West and Midwest, and in 1940 more than 10% of all college students were enrolled in a community college. Less than a century after their birth, more than 1,100 community colleges had opened their doors across the United States in response to a heightened demand for access (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994).

Cohen and Brawer (2003, 2008) and Dougherty (1994) identified numerous reasons for the rapid growth of community colleges in the United States. As important as the tremendous growth of high school graduates during the early 1900s was to the

emergence of the community college, another equally important factor was the influence

of business leaders who needed well-trained employees for their businesses. These

industry leaders understood that community colleges could supply the educated

employees necessary for their businesses (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Dougherty,

1994). These community college scholars also reported that many community leaders

saw the existence of a community college in their locale as bringing prestige to

themselves and their regions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Dougherty, 1994). Social

reproduction theorists, as reported by Cohen & Brawer (2003), believed the rapid

development of community colleges across the US was in effect a strategy for

maintaining the economic and social status quo of the times by offering an education that

essentially served to train employees for low paying occupations. Cohen & Brawer,

(2003), Vaughan (2006), and Walker (2005), however, viewed the more valid force

behind the rapid development of the American community college as being related to the

nation's inherent belief that access to higher education should be available to all. Other

reasons for the rapid proliferation of the American community college reported by

Dougherty (1994) included (a) local secondary educators seeing these new colleges as

paths to secure jobs, (b) elected officials who viewed community colleges as economic

engines to produce a needed workforce, and (c) universities who saw these new colleges

as a way to maintain their selectivity.

The establishment in 1944 of the G.I. Bill proved to be another pivotal event

contributing to the development of the community college. The G.I. Bill, which offered

the opportunity of a free college education to returning war veterans, was considered to

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have effectively removed the social and economic barriers to higher education for an entire generation of males (Brubacher & Rudy, 2007). The G.I. Bill resulted in an explosion of students, increasing college enrollment from 15% to 40% of the college age population (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). President Harry S. Truman responded to the unprecedented growth in demand through his 1947 Presidential Commission on Higher Education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994; Quigley & Bailey, 2003). The presidential charge to the commission was ". . . expanding educational opportunities to all able young people" through the establishment of a system of intermediary two-year institutions (Quigley & Bailey, 2003, p. xv).

The 1947 Commission of Higher Education played a powerful role in reimagining higher education in this country. One of the hallmark recommendations of the commission was the recognition of the need for two-year or junior colleges designed to meet the local need for higher education. The commission named these new institutions "community colleges" and established the role of these colleges in America as the educational sector that offered tuition free access for the first two years of higher education (Dougherty, 1994; Quigley & Bailey, 2003). The commission further recommended these new colleges be aligned with the educational needs of the communities in which they resided. The significance of President Truman's 1947 Commission on Higher Education cannot be underestimated for its impact on the growth and future of community colleges, the expansion of opportunity, and the influence exerted on the democratic ideals of the country (Quigley & Bailey, 2003). The significance of the community college in America has been acknowledged by several

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presidents since Truman. President Eisenhower in 1957, President Clinton in 1998, and President Obama (The White House, 2010) each supported the role of the community college in extending access to higher education (Dougherty, 1994; U.S. Presidents Committee 1950s Education, 1957).

Many community college scholars believe the convergence of access and proximity has contributed more than any other factor to the growth of community colleges. Cohen and Brawer (2003) argued that the concept of the community college as a neighborhood institution catering to the local need for higher education had done more to extend opportunity than its policies of open admissions. Further, Cohen and Brawer (2003) contended that more than all of the other systems of higher education, community colleges opened the doors of education for new groups of students, i.e., women, minorities, those less prepared, and the economically disadvantaged. Thus, advancement was made possible for those previously left out. Having college available and accessible made momentous gains in access possible. In the late 1980s, data indicated that 94% of students enrolled in community colleges resided in the same state, and an overwhelming 96% were within commuting distance (as cited in Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Data from individual community colleges has shown this trend to continue into the 21st century. In 2010, Seminole State College drew its student population from a three county area, with the majority from three local zip codes (Seminole State College, Institutional Research, 2012).

Mission and Role of the Community College

From their early beginnings, community colleges have served several distinct curricular functions aligned with the mission of meeting a community's needs. These curricular roles are: (a) preparing students for transfer to the university, (b) providing education in the occupational areas, (c) offering developmental or remedial education for students in need, and (d) continuing education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Cook, 2000; Vaughan, 2006). Academic transfer has been a central aim of community colleges since William Rainey Harper first envisioned the community college as a means of providing students with the first two years of a college education (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008). This purpose has been continued in that the majority of the country's community colleges have provided the academic transfer function. According to Vaughan (2006), transfer programs typically comprise the largest of the community college divisions, and most universities accept community college Associate of Arts graduates into junior status. Additionally community college graduates have reportedly performed academically as well as native university students upon graduation (Vaughan, 2006). For the 1999-2000 academic year, the majority of bachelor's degrees conferred in the United States were to community college transfer students (McPhee, 2006).

According to Cohen and Brawer (2003), the academic transfer function was created to accomplish three distinct but major objectives: (a) to increase awareness of higher education and what it could do for the individual and the community; (b) to increase the accessibility of higher education, and, (c) to alleviate the universities' burden of having to offer the first two years of the baccalaureate degree. For the most part, the

first two functions have been accomplished as indicated by the high percentage of individuals attending community colleges and the growth of community colleges throughout the United States. By 1970, more than 40% of first-time-in-college enrollees were attending community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Harper's original goal of transferring the first two years of the academic program from the university to the community college has not, however, been accomplished. Universities refused to abandon their freshmen and sophomore years and instead increased the selectivity of their admissions (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Harrison (2009) suggested that many universities, particularly those in Florida, have become even more selective over the years as demand has increased.

The occupational and workforce roles first emphasized in the Morrill Act of 1862 have continued to be vibrant components of the community college and have been reflected in the missions of most community colleges across the nation since the early 1920s (Dougherty, 1994; Vaughan, 2006). Community college graduates make up a major proportion of employees in essential fields as diverse as healthcare, information technology and public safety (Dougherty, 1994).

The federal government has continued to recognize and support the significant role played by community colleges in workforce development through a series of federal programs, namely, the Vocational Acts of 1963, 1968, and 1972 and the Carl Perkins Act of 1984, both of which remained authorized (Vaughan, 2006). Vaughan expressed the belief that these federal enactments were a tangible recognition of the essential role

community colleges play in supporting U.S. competitiveness in an increasingly global economy.

In the early days of community colleges, vocational programs were limited to teacher training, secretarial training and agricultural sciences (Vaughan, 2006). Over time, programs were expanded to include such fields as early childhood education, business, nursing, information technology, health sciences, public safety, management and many other technical fields (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). Over the years, some of the original workforce programs were eliminated from the community college curricula when the requirements for entry into the professions were elevated to baccalaureate degrees. A prime example of this is teacher education that had its beginnings in community colleges. Because degree requirements for the profession increased, teacher education programs were moved to universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Vaughan, 2006). The evolution of professions such as nursing, surveying, information technology and others to the baccalaureate continued, at the present time, and many community college educators have called for a solution other than moving all of these programs to a university system already overwhelmed by students (Walker, 2005). One of the roles of workforce divisions in the community college has been to educate new groups of students for middle and upper middle class occupations (Dougherty, 1994). Dougherty cautioned that if programs that prepare students for high salaried jobs continue to move out of the community colleges, these new students would be denied the opportunity to elevate their economic status and be left with occupational choices which tend to keep the lower class in a lower economic position.

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Partnership between universities and community colleges is one response to the continued escalation of degree requirements for select professions. The precedent for these partnerships rests in the original intent of the community college to provide the first two years of a four-year degree. Such arrangements provide important pathways to a four-year degree which can serve many students.

Community College Students

Community colleges have been viewed by the majority of students as the doorway to higher education and the opportunity for a brighter future, often defined by the students as creating a financial benefit for themselves (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Phillippe & González Sullivan, 2005). Phillippe and González Sullivan reported that the reasons students choose community colleges are as diverse as the student body itself: access, proximity, low cost, academic excellence, a welcoming atmosphere, and needed support services. The low costs of community colleges, combined with financial aid packages and the proximity to their homes, have created opportunities for many students who may not otherwise have been able to advance educationally beyond high school.

Community college students are best characterized by immense diversity in terms of demographic indicators, goals, expectations, and experiences (Cohen & Brawer, 2008; Vaughan, 2006). Phillippe and González Sullivan (2005) and Cohen and Brawer (2008) reported that the average age of community college students was 29. 2012 data from the American Association of Community Colleges shows the average age of the community college student has fallen to 28 years of age (AACC, 2012). Since 1985, the female

population of community college students has increased considerably with more than half of enrolled students being female in the first two decades of the 21st century (AACC, 2012; Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Phillippe & González Sullivan, 2005). The growing number of first generation students has also added to the diversity on community college campuses. According to the 2012 ACC Community College Fast Facts report, first generation college students made up 42% of total community college enrollments.

The percentage of part-time community college students rose from 47% to nearly 64% in the years between 1970 and 1997 (Cohen & Brawer, 2003), and in 2004, the percentage of part time students held steady at 62% in comparison to just 21% at public state universities (Cohen & Brawer, 2008). Data presented by the AACC (2012) showed the percentage of part time students had decreased to 58% of the whole. The latest declines in community college student's average age and the percentage of part time students may be indicative of more students entering community colleges after high school rather than going to the university as a result of an ailing economy. The dramatic size of the part-time student body at community colleges has many origins including the increased number of older adults seeking college and the needs of students to combine schooling and employment (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008).

Racial diversity has been another defining characteristic of the community college student population. Importantly, Cohen and Brawer (2008) found that the majority of black and Hispanic students was reported to have begun their college educations at a community college. In 2004, students of color represented approximately 33% of community college enrollments (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), but the percentage was slightly

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lower (26.7%) for the same time period for universities (Phillippe & González Sullivan, 2005). Data from the American Association of Community Colleges indicated that diversity of the community college student body had risen to 37%, with blacks and Hispanics comprising 30% of all community college students (2012).

The diversity of community college students in general has been matched by their equally disparate objectives, ambitions, skill levels, and life situations (McPhee, 2006; Vaughan, 2006). Many students seek transfer to a university as their primary goal. Others look for the preparation needed to begin a career, and still others return to the community college to enhance technical skills or to learn the language of their new country (Phillippe & González Sullivan, 2005). Vaughan (2006) has advocated that the differences in nontraditional community college students and their more traditional counterparts (students aged 18-21) need to be recognized. The perspectives of nontraditional students are often influenced by their concerns regarding current employment, paying bills, and raising families as opposed to fulfilling the traditional role of student. In support of this position, McPhee reported that even after transferring to universities, community college transfer students considered themselves employees first and students later (2006). A later study by Collins (2009) supported this finding in describing adult community college transfer students as essentially disengaged from the universities they attended.

The Non-traditional Adult Learner in Higher Education

The stereotype of the 21st century typical college student is one of an 18-year-old, who lives in a residence hall and is supported by his or her parents (MacKinnon & Floyd, 2011). The realities, however, are much different. On campuses, the presence of adult learners has been on the rise since 1970 (Howell, 2004; Kasworm, 2003) when 28% of the total college enrolled population was 25 years of age or higher. By 1999, this percentage increased to 39% (Choy, 2002; Kasworm, 2003). As of 2009, 43% of students enrolled in United States higher educational institutions were 25 years of age and older (National Center for Educational, 2009; Summey, 2009), and there were more than six million adult students on U.S. college campuses (Collins, 2009). Adult students' higher education participation rates were expected to continue to climb, and researchers predicted that adult students would outpace the growth of traditional age students by 2016 (National Center for Public Policy, 2008; National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009).

Defining nontraditional adult students is difficult, and researchers and higher educational scholars have described the adult learner in many ways. Researchers for the Lumina Foundation for Education (Pusser et al., 2007) and others (Cross, 1982; Richardson & King, 1998) concluded that there is not one typical picture of an adult learner; each individual is unique and comes to higher education with very different goals and aspirations. Kasworm presented a holistic view of the adult learner as one who is 25 years and older, who possesses maturity obtained from life experiences, responsibilities and financial independence, and who has competing sets of priorities and roles (2003). In

her study of adult women returning to college, Howell (2004) used a broader definition to include all students 25 years or older. Cross (1982) had earlier defined the adult learner as one who is 24 years or older and has adult life responsibilities other than school, e.g., family and work. Cross (1982) further enhanced her description of this group to include "upwardly mobile" (p. 67) and posited that as a group adults students were "determined to rise above the socio-economic level of their parents, largely through. . . advanced education" (p. 67). For the purposes of this study, Cross' definition of the adult learner, as one who is 24 years or older and has adult responsibilities, will be employed.

Irrespective of the definition or description used, researchers and educators alike have determined that beyond the age difference there are other significant differences between traditional and nontraditional adult students (Cross, 1982; Kasworm, 2003; Walker, 2001). Pusser et al. (2007), in their Lumina Foundation research, found that adult learners in higher education comprised a diverse group, defying generalization, and that they had varied goals, desires, academic foundations and life circumstances. Walker added more depth to the picture of adult students when he posited that because non-traditional students were frequently employed and had families, they also had more limits on their educational pursuits, e.g., time to devote to travel to school, scheduling restraints, and concerns for finances.

Lumina Foundation statistics revealed that the average age of adult students increased as the size of the institution decreased. Adult students in the smallest sized institutions were on average 40.7 years of age, and those in the largest institutions were younger, averaging 37.9 years (Pusser et al., 2007). More significant than age, Pusser et

al. claimed that adult students enrolled in higher educational programs were in the early phases of their careers. Given the trend to postpone retirement by many in the work force, it makes sense that adult students may be wise to proactively reposition themselves career-wise.

There has been general agreement that a significant percentage of adult students, more than 45 %, identify themselves as first generation in college students (Cross, 1982; Pusser et al., 2007). First generation students have been defined as those whose parents did not participate in post secondary education (Snyder, 2010). These students often have added risks and challenges that can impede their success in degree completion (Snyder, 2010). Cross (1982) argued earlier that first time in college adult students often came from a lower socio-economic class, typically those working in lower tiered occupations. The combination of factors, i.e., adult, first-time-in-college, and lower SES, places the adult student in a high-risk category for degree attainment. The special risks associated with being a first generation student have been well documented in the literature (Cross, 1982; Pusser et.al., 2007; Snyder, 2010).

At the beginning of the 21st century, women comprised the largest group of adult students in postsecondary education (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2009). Between 1970 and 1995, the female adult student population numbers grew by more than 59%. In contrast, male participation increased by only 40% (Kasworm, 2003; Richardson & King, 1998), making the needs of female adult students a priority for higher education. Adding to the already complex picture of adult students on college campuses are two more significant findings: (a) 29% of all adult students are single

parents and (b) 60% of adult learners live in single income families (Kasworm, 2003).

These demographic findings all lend support to the changing landscape on the college

campus and the growing need to strengthen the understanding of adult students and their

needs.

Motivation of Adult Learners

Since the phenomenon of the adult learner on campus emerged in the early 1970s,

researchers have sought to understand the motivations of adults in their decision making

to return to school (Cross, 1982; Kasworm, 2003; Pusser et al., 2007; Summey, 2009).

Not surprisingly, the motivations of adult learners have been determined to differ from

those of traditional students. Each adult comes to their educational experience with a

unique set of goals, beliefs, expectations, and demands. Cross (1982) found that the

rationales most often presented as motivating factors were typically associated with the

life situations of the participants. Frequently, there is a constellation of motivating

factors that propel the adult toward a college degree (Cross, 1982; Kasworm, 2003;

Pusser et al., 2007). Cross explained in 1982 that adults from the working class were

looking for better careers and those in better jobs were seeking advancement in their

fields. This position has not changed over time.

Primary in adults' decision making is whether or not the degree contributes to a

positive difference in their lives. The college degree has been viewed as an important

credential for advancement (Cross, 1982; Pusser et al., 2007; Summey, 2009).

Researchers (Pusser et al., 2007; Summey, 2009) found that primary in adult students'

decision to enroll was whether the degree contributed to a positive difference in their lives.

Kasworm (2003) characterized motivations of adults returning to college into three thematic groupings: (a) those undergoing personal transitions and life changes, (b) others who purposely design positive steps in planning their lives, and (c) others who are faced with a combination of the first two constructs. Both Cross (1982), and Kasworm (2003) suggested that many adults chose to enroll in college after major life changes such as divorce, job loss, or children either starting or leaving for school. Still, numerous adults purposefully plan their futures around accomplishing the goal of a college degree; these adults seek an alternative that provides for better life situations for themselves and their families (Cross, 1982; Kasworm, 2003). The final group found motivation in their response to life changes in addition to establishing plans for their futures (Cross, 1982; Kasworm, 2003). Cross further explained that adult students have a "problem to solve" (p. 96), and they use additional post secondary education as a strategy to resolve such problems. This problem solving position aligned with the theoretical framework of this study.

Cross (1982) argued that it was also important to understand the reasons adults chose not to return to college, as there are several schools of thoughts about this. Cross and Choy (2002) have described factors perceived as barriers by the adult returning population and classified them into three categories: situational, institutional, and dispositional. Situational barriers are those arising from the life of the student and include such factors as; limited financial resources, lack of time, children, and job

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responsibilities. Institutional barriers refer to those "practices and policies" that impede adults' movement into college and may include registration processes, financial aid policies, and other perceived barriers set up by institutions (Choy, 2002; Cross, 1982). The third category refers to the characteristics of persons and their attitudes toward learning and higher education (Choy, 2002; Cross, 1982). Those adults with a more positive view of higher education and what it can offer them were more prone to return and persist toward the degree. Howell's 2004 study of adult women who returned to college supports that dispositional barriers played a significant role in adult students' persistence patterns.

Using an interpretive methodology, Grothe (2009) substantiated obstacles to returning to college when he described a constellation of linked barriers to adults achieving a bachelor's degree. Foremost in Grothe's study was the identification of situational barriers described by the adult students studied and noted by Cross (1982). Such barriers were the need to continue employment and the inability to set aside work, family and other responsibilities for school. Significantly, Grothe defended the CCB as helpful in overcoming the barriers that had previously prevented these students from moving forward with their degrees. Grothe (2009) echoed Vaughan's (2006) and McPhee's, (2006) earlier contention that for the majority of community college students adult responsibilities, not student concerns, are primary in their lives.

Community College Faculty

Of critical importance in the discussion of the community college baccalaureate are the faculty whose primary focus has been concentrated on the teaching and learning process. It is important to consider the implications for faculty in terms of demographics, roles, and concerns that may arise from increased emphasis on the baccalaureate degree within community college settings. Current faculty demographics are presented here to offer a framework from which faculty may be viewed. There are approximately 400,000 full time and adjunct community college faculty (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), with an estimated one-third employed full time and the remaining faculty teaching in an adjunct capacity (Vaughan, 2006). Cohen and Brawer (2003, 2008) have indicated that numbers of part-time faculty are on the rise due to tremendous increases in enrollment coupled with simultaneously occurring reductions in educational funding allocations.

Faculty demographics have changed over the years. Particularly notable has been the increase in the percentage of women and minority faculty which rose from 38% to 48% during the 1990s (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). The "graying" of community college faculty, during which the median age rose from 40 in 1975 to 45 in 2003 (Cohen & Brawer) and to just under 50 years in 2008 (Cohen & Brawer, 2008), has been a more concerning statistic. The continual rise in faculty age has led to widespread concerns on community college campuses as to the availability of the next generation of faculty and the potential impact of mass faculty retirements within a short span of time.

The vast majority of full-time community college faculty holds a master's degree. Between 17% and 19% indicated the doctoral degree was their highest degree earned

(Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Vaughan, 2006). Historically, community colleges have

espoused, as a distinct advantage, master's degree-prepared faculty who are experts in

their field and are fully committed to teaching. Community college faculty, unlike

university faculty, have not been required to conduct research and publish (Cohen &

Brawer, 2003, 2008). Though the majority of community colleges have a system of

ranks typically delineated as senior professor, associate professor and instructor, the

ranks are not related to research and publication activity but rather to years of experience

and expertise in teaching.

Community colleges, because of their increased focus on articulation, transfer,

and now for many the community college baccalaureate degree; have begun to increase

faculty requirements from the master's degree to a doctoral degree in their respective

areas of specialization. It has been speculated that this change may ultimately alter the

culture of the community college (Ross, 2007; Skolnik, 2005). Laden (2005) predicted

that 50% of community college faculty will need to have earned doctorates to teach in the

new baccalaureate degree programs. In a study of changes since the inception of the

baccalaureate degree at Great Basin College in Nevada, Hofland (2011) discovered that

recruitment practices had been modified to attract faculty who either already possessed a

terminal degree or were near completion. The percentage of faculty at Great Basin

College possessing an earned doctorate rose from 6% to 24% in the three-year period

following implementation of the community college baccalaureate degree (Hofland,

2011).

Such developments have given rise to several concerns, specifically expressed by Campbell & Leverty (1999) and others (Campbell, 2005; Eaton, 2005,) who fear that the community college's ability to recruit and retain faculty with doctoral degrees may be hampered by the emphasis on teaching rather than research. Of even more concern is that community colleges may alter their focus on teaching to include and encourage research in order to recruit doctorally prepared faculty. Campbell (2005) has contended that either stance would have deleterious effects on the community college mission.

George Boggs, a former president of the American Association of Community Colleges, cautioned community college presidents that offering the community college baccalaureate was an endeavor that could result in fractioning community college faculty. He argued that the new CCB degree, along with higher level requirements for faculty teaching baccalaureate courses, could make it difficult to maintain the cohesiveness of faculty.

The advent of the community college baccalaureate has led to other significant changes for faculty. Researchers (Kielty, 2010; Laden, 2005; Ross, 2007) have attempted to study these changes from the perspectives of community college faculty. Ross (2007) utilized a mixed methods design in an attempt to describe the resources needed by faculty at Kwantlen University College in Canada during the institution's transition to a baccalaureate degree granting institution. These resources included additional technology support, curriculum development resources, and greater professional development. Ross's major discovery was that faculty reported needing professional development in order to successfully transition to teaching and creating upper level

coursework. He also found that additional time was required by faculty for curriculum development, grading requirements, and professional activities. Ross contended that these activities may necessitate reduced workloads and the need for enhanced support resources in areas such as library and technology. Because it was not known whether these additional supports were required long term or just through the transition period, Ross called for additional study on the long term impacts of the community college baccalaureate on resource requirements for faculty and staff. Ross's findings had implications for the traditional five courses per semester workload required by most community colleges and have caused administrators to rethink the current practice.

The concern of the faculty regarding workload was echoed by Laden (2005) in his qualitative analysis of the paradigm shifts which occurred in Ontario's community colleges once they began to offer applied baccalaureate degrees. Laden found that concerns pertaining to faculty such as workload, time for class preparation, and increased salary demands emerged as recurrent themes and have caused concerns in Canada. Faculty in Laden's study requested reduced class workload and higher salaries than the traditional faculty. Complicating the matter in Ontario is the faculty bargaining unit that represents all faculty and has thus far been reluctant to have special considerations for faculty teaching upper level courses (Laden, 2005). The experience of the researcher in her administrative capacity also validates this concern as one that will likely need attention. Baccalaureate faculty, in the institution which is the site of the present research, have also raised the issues of reduced workloads and higher pay for their work with the new degree.

Kielty (2010) conducted a quantitative study and surveyed 318 faculty whose institutions were undergoing or had recently undergone transition to the CCB. Her findings supported inclusion of the faculty in the overall planning and decisions of institutions to be important. Faculty involvement was viewed as necessary to the degree's acceptance and success. Through her study, Kielty demonstrated that faculty beliefs related to the CCB and its role in providing student access to the baccalaureate was an important driving force in shaping faculty and institutional attitudes and intentions regarding support for the degree. Petrosian (2010) supported Kielty's findings with his research on faculty and administrator perceptions of the CCB. He found that where faculty and administrators viewed the CCB as necessary to meeting the students' demand for access to critical workforce education, there was also a strong positive correlation between those beliefs and faculty and administrator support for the new degrees.

Kielty's (2010) findings lent support that faculty who perceive they are participants in the decision making process tend to support the transition of their institutions to baccalaureate granting status. This finding was supported by Levin (2002) who previously argued that community college administrators must build consensus and share governance decisions related to the CCB with their faculty. Both Kielty (2010) and Levin's (2002) work on faculty perceptions have significance for the CCB. Both researchers observed that at the heart of faculty concerns was fear of the loss of long held core institutional values, particularly as they relate to student access and the primacy of teaching. Another important consideration exerting influence on faculty support for the

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CCB was the extent of institutional support available for current faculty to obtain advanced degrees.

Some community college presidents, skeptical of the new degree, have raised the concern that upper division faculty will require different teaching loads and this may lead to rifts in the faculty (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Lane, 2003). Full-time faculty at community colleges have traditionally taught five courses each semester and conducted little, if any, research (Cohen & Brawer, 2003). In Hofland's study of the transformation of Great Basin College (2011), she found that one of the changes that occurred with the implementation of the baccalaureate degree was the reduction of the teaching loads of baccalaureate faculty members from six to five courses per semester. It should be noted that teaching loads at Great Basin College were higher at six courses per semester than most community colleges in the United States (Cohen & Brawer, 2003, 2008; Vaughan, 2006). Nevertheless, Hofland's study is important because it empirically documents the institutional changes impacting faculty which took place during the years of post baccalaureate degree implementation.

Although concerns over the community college baccalaureate and the changes to faculty role and workloads are legitimate, there are also many positives identified by faculty which should not be overlooked. Community college faculty who were included in the decision making process and who perceived the new degree as beneficial to students viewed the implementation of baccalaureates as a positive forward development for community colleges (Kielty, 2010; Levin, 2002; Ross, 2007). Faculty participants in Hofland's examination of the transformations which took place at Great Basin College

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when baccalaureates were implemented described excitement and renewal over the prospects of teaching upper division courses.

Community Colleges in Florida

Florida's community college system had its origins in the private college sector. In 1927, St. Petersburg Junior College, a private two-year college, was founded as the first junior college in the state. The development of St. Petersburg Junior College (SPC) was quickly followed by the establishment of additional private junior colleges located in Jacksonville, Orlando, and Edison County. With the exception of St. Petersburg Junior College, these private colleges eventually failed.

Florida's first public junior college was organized in 1933 as Palm Beach Junior College (PBJC). The establishment of PBJC by the local community board was in response to a local need for higher education and is illustrative of the influence local boards exerted on the proliferation of community colleges. In 1939, Florida's legislature enacted policy which allowed the formation of public junior colleges in any county, or consortium of counties, which had a population greater than 50,000 (Florida Department of Education, 2008b). The results of this legislation led to Florida's emergent junior college system. In 1948, the new system was comprised of four public community colleges: Palm Beach, St. Petersburg, Chipola, and Pensacola Junior Colleges (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). The state's Community College Council was initiated in 1955, and Dr. James Wattenbarger, considered by many as the father of Florida's community college system, served as the Council's chair (Campbell & Leverty,

1999; Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). Led by Wattenbarger as chief architect, the

Council produced a futuristic report which proposed a statewide higher educational

system consisting of 28 junior/community colleges located within driving distance of

99% of the state's population (Florida Department of Education, 2008b; Wattenbarger &

Albertson, 2007). The proposal was well received, and Florida's 1957 legislature

authorized a governance system for community colleges separate from the public school

system, creating Florida's Division of Community Colleges (Florida Department of

Education, 2008b). Between 1957 and 1972, 18 additional community colleges were

approved, and resulted in 28 community colleges in the state which fulfilled the master

plan designed by Wattenbarger and the Community College Council (Florida Department

of Education, 2008a; Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007).

Since its introduction in 1933, the Florida Community College System has

advanced as one of the state's most valuable assets in providing access to higher

education for its population (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). In 2011, Florida's

community colleges were reported to have served over 900,000 students annually in a

variety of degree programs (Florida Department of Education, 2011). Central to

Florida's community college mission has been the transfer function, with more than

333,272 students enrolled in Associate of Arts degree programs and another 134,741 in

workforce related Associate of Science degree and certificate programs (Florida

Department of Education, 2011). Florida has become one of the nation's leaders in two-

year degree production (Florida Department of Education, 2011; Wattenbarger &

Albertson, 2007), awarding more associate degrees than any of the other 15 Southern

Regional Educational Board's (SREB) member states (Florida College System, 2011c). The SREB member states include: Alabama, Arkansas, Delaware, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia (Florida College System, 2011c). Further proof of its importance in providing higher education access, the state's community college system, now named the Florida College System, awarded 48,763 Associate of Arts degrees and 13,000 Associate of Science degrees during 2009-2010 (Florida Department of Education, 2011a, 2011b). Florida has compared very favorably with the rest of the nation in terms of associate degree production. *Community College Week's* annual Top 100 report of 2009 identified Florida as having awarded more associate degrees than any other state in the nation and also leading in production of associate degrees awarded to minorities (Associate Degree & Certificate Producers, 2009).

Florida's Two Plus Two (2 +2) System as a National Articulation Model

The Florida system has achieved national model status through its legislatively mandated 2 + 2 articulation policies and its common course numbering classification between the state university and community college systems (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). The state's 2 + 2 approach has guaranteed a "seamless" system allowing students to transfer from one system to the other without credit penalty (Florida System Task Force, 2008b). Each of the following strategies was designed to facilitate admittance of associate of arts degree graduates to Florida state universities as juniors (Florida Department of Education, 2011a; Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). These policies have

been effective as evidenced by the fact as late as 2007 community college transfers comprised almost half of Florida's baccalaureate recipients (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

Articulation Agreement Model

One of the more common models is the articulation agreement approach between community colleges and partner state universities whereby the community college provides the first two years of the baccalaureate degree and, through legislative mandate the university accepts these students into the junior year (Floyd, 2005). Florida's very successful 2 + 2 system of higher education has been characterized by a nationally recognized practice of providing articulation between each of the state's 28 community colleges and the state's university system (Florida Department of Education, 2008b). During each of the years 2003 through 2009, more than 17,660 community college AA graduates transferred to the state's university system with more than 23,000 students transferring in 2009 (Division of Florida Colleges, 2011, March). Through this model, community college students who complete an associate of arts degree are eligible to matriculate to one of the state universities to earn a baccalaureate degree. This model is focused on providing admission for the community college associate of arts (AA) graduate to a university, not necessarily to a specific college such as business, engineering, or nursing (Harrison, 2009). For example, a community college graduate wishing to complete a degree in engineering may be accepted to the university but not into the university's college of engineering.

University Centers Model

A second alternative is the university centers model where multiple universities, both private and public, and a community college, partner to offer different baccalaureate degrees on the community college campus (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). In the university centers approach, the universities housed on the community college campus accept community college AA graduates and provide the last two years of agreed upon baccalaureate degrees (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). Such models typically involve shared facilities, joint programs, and other collaborative arrangements. In all of these arrangements the community college works collaboratively with the university to deliver programs; however, the university confers the degree (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005; Russell, 2010). In the state of Florida, Tallahassee Community College (n.d.) and St. Petersburg College (Lorenzo, 2005) both have extensive university centers.

The Direct Connect Model

In Florida's traditional 2 + 2 model, students are not guaranteed admission into the program or college of their choice but rather into the university. The model developed by the University of Central Florida and four regional community colleges was referred to as "Direct Connect" (n. d.) symbolizing the alignment of operational strategies which are the hallmarks of this partnership. Several practices distinguish Direct Connect from the traditional 2 + 2 articulation model

Harrison (2009), in describing Direct Connect, indicated that the community college sends students' transcripts to the university at 30 credits, 45 credits, and again at

60 credits. This practice helps ensure that students are on track for university admission.

In support of the goal of keeping students seamlessly progressing toward the

baccalaureate, the university brings full service advising, admissions and other services

directly to the community college campus. These student services along with university

faculty and classrooms are typically housed in facilities shared by both the university and

the community college. Another hallmark of the Direct Connect partnership model is the

collaborative curriculum alignment work of community college and university faculty

(Harrison, 2009).

University Extension Centers Model

The University Extension Centers model is an approach that has been used

beginning in the 1960s and growing in popularity in the 1980s (Floyd, 2005, Lorenzo,

2005). The University extension model consists of off-campus centers, organizationally

part of the university, which typically provide the last two years of the degree and

primarily serve the needs of working adults (Cejda, 1999). These centers are typically

located in high density work areas such as industrial parks and downtown areas.

The models that have been described herein have all proven to be effective

methods for community college AA graduates to enroll in universities and complete

baccalaureate degrees. These programs, based on partnerships and collaboration between

institutions have emerged out of legislative mandates from state government. They have

resulted in a steady rise of annual baccalaureate degree enrollments by community

college AA graduates with increases of 102% since their inception in 1971 (Florida

College System, 2011c; Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

Though there have been many positive outcomes stemming from these

collaborative relationships, there have also been drawbacks. One disadvantage in current

transfer practices is that community college transfer students, though accepted to a state

university, may not be accepted into the college or major of their choice (Harrison, 2009).

Another significant shortcoming is that though articulation agreements have been

customarily developed for associate of arts (AA) graduates, associate of science (AS)

graduates have been excluded from articulation arrangements. Reasons for this exclusion

are that (a) AS graduates typically do not complete the required general education

component for university entry, (b) many of these students do not have the grade point

average (GPA) to enter the university, and (c) there are few university degrees

corresponding to the workforce career fields to which these students could transfer

(Collins, 2009).

Bachelor of Science in Applied Science (BSAS) Model

One of the more recent models to facilitate transfer of AS students is the pathway

developed by the University of South Florida (USF) through the creation of a Bachelor of

Science in Applied Science (BSAS). The centerpiece of this model, first offered in 2003,

is that the BSAS was specifically designed as a baccalaureate completion for any AS

degree (Collins, 2009). This general business related degree sits on top of any AS and

provides a baccalaureate completion opportunity for the workforce student. Though there

has been limited research on the BAS (Collins), the degree has been replicated by other

state universities, notably the University of Central Florida (n.d.), due to its enrollment

success. In 2009, Collins sought to explore and describe the transfer students who

enrolled in and completed these new degree programs. He reported that the Bachelor in

Applied Science degree fulfilled an unmet need and had been readily accepted by AS

students. Proof of its fit with adult students needs, Collins argued, has been demonstrated

by the continuing growth of the program.

Collins' (2009) findings in his qualitative case study research confirmed the

findings of other community college scholars in regard to demographic indicators:

community college transfer students were older (37 years on average), and though they

were performing well academically, they were generally disengaged from the rest of the

university community. Collins concluded his study by arguing that (a) these students

were an entirely new student group at the university, (b) universities had little experience

in dealing with these adult students, and (c) there was a need to develop programs,

services, and teaching approaches that appeal to these groups of adult students.

Concurrent Enrollment Model

The final model discussed here, the concurrent enrollment model described by

Cejda (1999), addresses two important issues: the challenges faced by Associate of

Science degree graduates in transferring to the university and the dilemma of AA

students not accepted into the program of their choice. In the concurrent model, students

are accepted into a community college program and a specific university program at the

same time (Cejda, 1999). Students enroll in courses each semester from the community college and the university simultaneously. An example of a concurrent enrollment model is the collaborative effort between the Associate of Science in Nursing program at Seminole State College and the Bachelor of Science in Nursing program at the University of Central Florida (UCF). During the course of the associate degree program, students enroll in baccalaureate degree level nursing courses (University of Central Florida, *2011-2012 College Catalog*). Once students graduate from the AS degree program, they typically have one additional semester to complete the Bachelor of Science degree in Nursing (BSN) at UCF. This model, developed by Seminole State and the University of Central Florida, is significant in that it builds the baccalaureate using the AS degree as a foundation. This is unlike the 2 + 2 partnerships which require completion of the AA degree prior to admission. In this concurrent model, course repetition is eliminated by the university's acceptance of community college courses in place of its own courses. Finally, in the concurrent model of articulation, faculty work across college lines to ensure curriculum alignment and student success (C. Cicotti, personal communication, September, 2011).

The concurrent model between UCF and Seminole State has proven to be very effective with graduation rates of the concurrently enrolled students at or above 90% (C. Cicotti, personal communication, September, 2011). There are, however, several obstacles for students and institutions that must be overcome in order to make this a more viable and replicable model. The first obstacle is that the student is enrolled at two different colleges at the same time and must navigate and contend with differing

admissions criteria, schedules, and procedures. There are also significant financial aid

challenges that are often encountered by the students. The obstacles faced by

concurrently enrolled students are not unlike the documented hindrances faced by many

community college transfers. These are explored in the following section.

Barriers and Obstacles to Transfer for Community College Graduates

Significant concerns remain nationally, as well as in Florida, about transfer

obstacles for the community college graduate. Dougherty (1992) has described several

challenges to baccalaureate transfer and degree completion by community college

graduates that may help to explain why 2 + 2 and other articulation arrangements are not

more successful. Many of these can be characterized as institutional barriers. In the

early 1980s, Cross (1982) identified the following six barriers:

1. The impact of having to transfer to a different institution to continue the

    degree;

2. The reluctance of many four year institutions to admit transfers from

    community colleges because of biases towards these students, and poor

    perceptions of instructional quality;

3. The instability of the university's capacity to accept transfer students,

    depending on first and second year enrollments;

4. The limited availability of financial aid particularly for part time and working

    adult students;

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5. The difficulties in assimilating to a new environment faced particularly non-traditional adult students; and,

6. The possibility of having to repeat courses not accepted by the university.

Certainly there are other factors which account for some of the difficulties inherent in the transfer process. Dougherty (1992) noted that community colleges share equal responsibilities for the difficulties faced by their students. Community colleges could take several actions to strengthen their efforts in preparing students for transfer. Such actions include (a) purposely designing programs to facilitate the transfer process, (b) offering structured opportunities for assimilation into the university culture, and (c) strengthening curriculum alignment with their university counterparts so that community college transfers are optimally prepared (Dougherty, 1992,1994).

<div align="center">The Community College Baccalaureate Degree</div>

The community college baccalaureate remains a controversial issue among community college and higher education scholars alike (Cook, 2000; Eaton, 2005; Floyd & Skolnik, 2005). There has been agreement that additional strategies for expanding and increasing opportunities for both adult and traditional students to attain the baccalaureate degree are needed (Cook, 2000; Dougherty, 1992). Walker (2002, 2007), supported by Fanelli (2007) president of Nassau Community College, contended that the primary rationale for the community college baccalaureate is the necessity to address local shortages in critical need areas and to offer the opportunity for baccalaureates to new groups of students who might not have the opportunity to participate in the degree.

However, in the foreword of *The Community College Baccalaureate* (Floyd, 2005),

community college leaders were cautioned by Mark Milliron, formerly with the Bill and

Melinda Gates Foundation and currently serving as the Chancellor of Western Governors

University, to be transparent regarding their reasons for initiating baccalaureate degrees.

Milliron also encouraged leaders to assess whether the new baccalaureates were

developed for appropriate reasons such as improving access and student need. Cook

(2000) and Burrows (2002) concurred, arguing that prior to further development of more

CCBs, educational leaders and policy makers must examine the impact of these new

degrees on meeting student and regional needs, costs of new programs, and impact on

institutional missions. Burrows (2002) was more explicit in her argument and

recommended that community colleges thoroughly assess whether they have the

necessary resources, financial and human, prior to implementing new degrees. She

viewed the implementation of new baccalaureates, absent adequate resources, as

diminishing community colleges' ability to fulfill their historic open door mission.

Community college scholars have stated many reasons for their entry into the

baccalaureate area. Walker (2005) discussed three key rationales for the development of

the CCB: employer and student demand, growing expenditures for universities and

inadequate access to select programs and colleges (2005). Rudd, Bragg, and Townsend

(2010) argued that the CCB was advanced to address specific statewide concerns over the

needs of adult learners to attain the degree. Earlier, Cook (2002) presented changing

demographics (the increase of adult students, economic concerns leading individuals to

seek the baccalaureate degree, and heightened business and community expectations for

the community college to provide more baccalaureates) as having provided the impetus for community colleges to offer the four-year degree. Similar to the arguments of Walker (2005) and Cook (2000), Russell (2010) identified the following convincing reasons to support community college baccalaureates: (a) enhanced access to the bachelor's degree, particularly for working adults and first time in college students; (b) more affordable option for the bachelor's degree than state university or private colleges; (c) decreased cost to the state due to lower faculty pay at community colleges and projected reduced need for additional facilities; (d) increased selectivity of state universities due to heightened demand; and (e) availability of workforce expertise at community colleges and a history of positive responses to employer demands.

It has generally been agreed that the student should be at the forefront of any discussion surrounding the need for the community college baccalaureate. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) explored the positive impacts of the baccalaureate degree for the individual on salary, life satisfaction, prestige, and social status. In focusing on economic gains, they observed that:

1. There is a net occupational status advantage of 33% over a high school diploma, and a 9-17% advantage over the associate degree.

2. There is increased participation in gainful employment with subsequent decreases in unemployment.

3. There is a 15% increase in net earnings with baccalaureate degree attainment.

4. Baccalaureate attainment results in a private rate of return on investment of between 9 and 16%.

5. The earning advantage of having a bachelor's degree does not lessen over

    time and actually increases.

The Florida College System (2011b) documented positive gains for the state and

nation in addition to the benefits the individual derives from the baccalaureate degree,

making the case that Florida as a state would benefit from having more of its population

prepared at the baccalaureate level. These benefits come in the forms of higher salaries for

its citizens, ability to attract clean industries to the state, lower medical costs to the state,

declines in incarceration rates, and a significantly higher tax base (Florida College System,

2011b).

The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as an Adult Student Choice

Relevant to the proposed research is the exploration of why adult students choose

to enroll in a community college baccalaureate program when a more traditional

baccalaureate program is accessible. In numerous studies and monographs, Walker

(2000, 2001, 2005) postulated that these reasons centered on location, cost, flexibility,

small class size, and the community colleges' commitment to nontraditional students.

Correspondingly, Manias (2007), in a study of adults who chose to enroll in a community

college baccalaureate teacher education program, found similar results. The majority of

those surveyed identified location and costs as the two primary reasons for their decisions

to enroll in a CCB, followed by prior positive experiences at community colleges, course

flexibility, and institutional and/or program reputation.

The Manias (2007) and Walker (2000, 2001, 2005) studies supported prior

research by Chapman (1981) who grouped reasons for students selecting one college over

another into two categories: internal and external influences. Internal influences included the students' current life situation, and external influences considered such factors as cost, location, and availability. The findings of Walker (2000, 2001, 2005) and Manias (2007) seemed to validate Chapman's (1981) earlier conclusions. However, what was missing from the literature tangential to the community college baccalaureate was a specific focus on adult students, why they chose the community college baccalaureate, and the extent to which having an accessible degree option influenced their decisions.

Adult students typically select colleges that are convenient, offer flexible options for enrollments and schedules, and provide supportive culture for adult students' needs and priorities (Kasworm, 2003). Richardson and King (1998) discussed the multiple burdens and priorities, unlike those of traditional age students, which must be negotiated by adult students. Provision for flexible scheduling, therefore, remains a high priority with adults since according to Kasworm a majority of them (69%) are part-time students who are employed full time (46%). An additional 29% work more than 20 hours per week. Also, many others are frequently the primary caregiver for their families (Pusser et al., 2007). There are several outcomes of these competing priorities, one of which is that enrollment patterns may not be continuous as the adult student drops in and out of college for work, family, and financial reasons (Pusser et al., 2007).

Another outcome for this multi-role adult student that has implications for colleges and the adult student is that adult students must frequently prioritize family with resulting constraints on time for college engagement. This position was demonstrated by Collins (2009) who, through focus groups and embedded case studies, found that the

adult student had a strong sense of disengagement with the university atmosphere. More than half of the adult students in Collins' study reported limited, if any, engagement with the university, and the majority explained that they did not engage in any extracurricular activities. Howell (2004) expressed the fear that such disengagement may lead to feelings of isolation resulting in diminished willingness to ask for assistance and greater difficulty in degree completion.

The present dilemma, however, is that college campuses, particularly four-year institutions and state universities, have been designed and focused on the traditional 18 to 24-year-old college age student. Adult students continue to struggle to find appropriate solutions to their higher education needs (Ruud et al., 2010). According to Collins (2009) and Howell (2004), more often than not, adult students feel marginalized and undervalued on youth oriented campuses (Collins, 2009; Howell, 2004).

Pusser et al. (2007) discussed the national and state need to expand postsecondary and baccalaureate education options to educate the 54 million U. S. citizens in the labor force without a baccalaureate degree. Pusser et al. along with other researchers (Bragg & Ruud, 2011; Collins, 2009), have emphasized the importance of making adult learners feel welcome on college campuses. However, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, in a 2008 report, revealed that adult student enrollment in postsecondary education has actually declined since the early 1990s. This development is of concern as part of the national and state agenda is the increase of baccalaureate attainment by adults. Policymakers and educators alike must seek ways to help make higher education as accessible and attainable as possible for these students. In order to

more effectively find solutions to meet the needs of the adult student, the richness and diversity of their voices, aspirations, and their challenges must be heard. Many in the community college baccalaureate movement have articulated that the community college baccalaureate is just one of the strategies that are needed to help fill this need. Both of these premises were central to the significance of this research.

Rationale for the Community College Baccalaureate Degree in Florida

The various partnerships between universities and community colleges have provided significant and effective assistance in helping to solve Florida's baccalaureate attainment shortfall. Still, the Florida Department of Education, the Office of Program Policy Analysis and Government Accountability (OPPAGA), and the Florida Board of Governors have maintained that additional models are needed to help serve the adult non-traditional student and provide for the regional needs of high demand upper division workforce programs (Florida Department of Education, 2008b).

Despite Florida's success in awarding AA degrees and in modeling exemplary transfer policies, Florida has remained well behind other states in baccalaureate degree production (Florida Department of Education, 2008b). In the late 1990s, Florida ranked 47th and 49th in baccalaureate degree production per 100,000 (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). During the early 2000s, Florida ranked 45th in the United States and seventh of the 10 largest states in baccalaureate degree attainment (Florida State Board of Education, 2005; Petry, 2006). In 2005, the state fell further in the national ranking to the 46th position in baccalaureate degrees per 1000 residents. The Florida College System

Task Force (Florida Department of Education, 2008b) projected that Florida needed 2.15 million baccalaureate degree graduates in order to move the state from 45th position to one of the top 10 baccalaureate producing states.

From a regional and state perspective, Walker (2005), Dougherty (1994), Cook, (2000) and Boulard (2010) suggested that the CCB fulfills an unmet need in the regions where many community colleges are located. Boulard (2010),Cook (2000), and Walker (2005) all described pressure along with support from local employers for baccalaureate workforce options for their employees and the community. Additionally, these authors claim that community colleges often have special expertise in the associate of science workforce fields leading to baccalaureate degrees (Boulard, 2010; Walker, 2005). Examples of these might be information technology, public safety, and nursing. Such expertise in the content areas of these workforce degrees leads to curriculum alignment that is seamless and which builds on the strengths of the associate of science degree. Though Florida has several paths, such as the 2 + 2 articulation (Florida Department of Education, 2008b), and the university centers approach (Floyd & Skolnik, 2005) by which community college students may access the bachelor's degree, the CCB provides one additional, possibly more attractive, option to the adult student that can help alleviate obstacles to attainment (Cook, 2000).

Dougherty (1994) identified several areas which he argued hindered or diminished the chances of the community college student in attaining a baccalaureate degree. These factors include (a) completing the often thorny transfer process, (b) beginning anew in an unfamiliar environment, (c) the toll on grades from transfer shock,

(d) difficulty in acclimating socially to a new environment, and (e) misalignment of financial aid. Dougherty (1994) called the convergence of these many factors and the "institutional gulf" (p. 261) between the community college and the university as creating "psychological difficulty" (p. 261) in bachelor degree completion. Dougherty (1994) used these issues as a basis for recommending a structural change in community colleges that included the emergence of the CCB. He expressed the belief that, as baccalaureate degree granting institutions, community colleges could make it much less daunting for students to move from the lower levels to upper division coursework. His reasoning was that (a) students would not have to transfer between institutions, (b) financial aid and credits would move effortlessly and seamlessly from the sophomore to the junior year, (c) curricular alignment would improve, and most importantly (d) workforce related coursework could be creditable to these new degrees without the continual frustration inherent in articulation agreements.

Walker (2005) used Dougherty's (1994) findings as a foundation for one of the major rationales for the CCB. Walker contended that the opportunity for community college students to remain at the community college would likely increase their prospects for completing the baccalaureate by making access to upper division coursework more readily available. This premise was supported by Cabrera, Burkum, and LaNasa (2005) who found that beginning one's education at a four-year college and having continuous enrollment were significant for degree completion. Community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees can provide the same opportunity to their students, eliminating the

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need for transfer and increasing the chances of continuous enrollment resulting in degree completion.

The advancement of certain professions by requiring the baccalaureate as the entry point is another rationale for the community college baccalaureate degree (Cook, 2000; Lewin, 2009; Walker, 2005.). If community colleges are to continue being relevant by providing gateways to some of the high skill and higher salaried occupations, it follows that the community college must advance vertically by offering these degrees (Burrows, 2002).

Community colleges, with their long history of serving underrepresented students such as minorities, first-time-in-college, adult and nontraditional students, have a unique understanding of the needs of these students (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Dougherty, 1994; Vaughan, 2006). Collins (2009) validated this understanding in his case study involving AS transfer students to one of Florida's universities. He found that transfer students were a different and unfamiliar group of students to the university, e.g., adult students older than traditional students (average age of 37), who were often fully employed and had family responsibilities. In focus groups and surveys, the students in Collin's study reported a decided lack of engagement with the university community and their faculty that led to very low satisfaction with the student faculty relationship and subsequent interactions (Collins, 2009). In conclusion, Collins recommended that universities must begin to understand how to work with adult students, and that university faculty needed to learn how to work collaboratively with these adults. Collins, in his research, inadvertently supported the positions of Walker (2001, 2007) and Cook (2000) that (a)

community colleges have historically served this population, (b) have a keen understanding of how best to serve this group, and (c) are in a more advantageous position to offer the baccalaureate than universities who must learn to work with and serve this population. Walker (2001, 2007) and Cook (2000) have contended that CCB programs, by their very nature, are able to provide the flexibility and resources needed by adult students.

Another compelling reason cited for fostering the growth of the CCB is convenient geographic access. Building on the strength of the original Florida plan of having a community college within commuting distance of virtually all students (Albertson & Wattenbarger, 2007), community colleges can use the same framework to offer opportunities for access to the baccalaureate. According to Walker (2001, 2007), community college baccalaureate programs increase geographical access to upper division education and increase responsiveness to community needs for specialized programs. In a survey of Edison Community College students, 80% of respondents said they would enroll in and complete a baccalaureate degree at their home community college if one were offered. The most frequent reasons students cited in support of the CCB were accessibility, location, and lower cost (Walker, 2001). In 2004, the American Association of State Colleges and Universities argued that the CCB had emerged in direct response to increased demands by nontraditional students. Petry, in his 2006 study of the CCB in five community colleges, made similar observations.

In 2001, Florida's Higher Education Funding Advisory Committee validated the concern for more baccalaureates as a pressing issue for the state's economic health and

further stated that Florida would not be able to increase significantly the numbers of degrees awarded without major strategic change. At the same time, Florida's State University System, recognizing the need to grow dramatically baccalaureate access, lobbied the state legislature for significant funding increases to allow them to fulfill the mandate for additional baccalaureate production. A 2002 Florida Department of Education report, along with the Pappas Report (2007), acknowledged the longstanding mission of its community college system in providing points of access for many nontraditional students. In the report, it was recognized that the community college system could serve as one possible alternative for meeting the need for increased access points for baccalaureate attainment.

Challenges to the Community College Baccalaureate Degree

The community college baccalaureate has become a pivotal point of challenge among higher education scholars, policy makers, and students (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Cook, 2000; Eaton, 2005; Grothe, 2009; Levin, 2002; Russell, 2010; Skolnik, 2001) with each position, both pro and against, passionately engaged in the discourse. Bailey and Morest (2004) called this phenomenon one of the most heated and contentious movements to come out of community colleges. According to the Russell (2010), the controversy may, in part, be caused by the shifting dynamics in the positioning of community colleges within the higher education system. In a policy brief for the AASCU, Russell identified the salient arguments contesting the community college baccalaureates as including the following: mission creep, programmatic duplication,

unnecessary costs incurred for higher level accreditations, difficulty in recruiting appropriately credentialed faculty, inferiority of the degree, and the availability of alternative and more efficient models such as university centers, and online learning (2010). Other critics have stated similar concerns in slightly different ways, e.g., that the degree is just not needed (Eaton, 2005) and that the costs of the CCB will eventually require sacrifices in other areas of need that are critical to the mission (Lane, 2003).

The most frequently voiced argument has been the concern for damaging the community college open door mission by reducing enrollments in transfer, remedial and adult education programs (Bailey & Morest, 2004; Campbell & Leverty, 1999; Cook, 2000; Eaton, 2005; Levin, 2002; Townsend, 2005; Russell, 2010). Skolnik (2001) proposed that the possibility and fear of a changed mission was one of the major issues causing consternation regarding community college baccalaureates. A number of community college presidents have expressed fears regarding the heightened requirements for Level II institutions (Campbell, 2005). One of the concerns voiced by critics was that resources for faculty and other services required by regional accreditation boards like the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) will eventually limit funds for mission centric programs such as the transfer, occupational, and remedial programs (Campbell, 2005; Lane, 2003; Townsend, 2005). Cook (2000), Bailey and Morest (2004) and Lane (2003) also posited that the additional costs for the baccalaureate may threaten access by raising costs for all students.

Rice (2007) was one of the first to conduct empirical research on the impact of the CCB on the community college mission. She concluded that the criticisms of the CCB's

negative impact on mission, as defined by enrollments in transfer, workforce and adult and remedial education programs, were unfounded. However, she also encouraged future study to assess the situation once the challenges of providing start-up funding for these programs and the financial challenges caused by a downward spiraling of the economy converge.

Bailey and Morest (2004) cautioned community colleges that offering baccalaureate degrees may weaken the commitment to students who do not wish to pursue the bachelor's degree: those seeking developmental education, others pursuing vocational certificates, and still others who seek skill advancement. Bailey and Morest voiced concerns stated by others that community colleges cannot do all things well, and that embracing multiple missions eventually detracts from other roles (2004). Dougherty (1994), however, was of the belief that with careful planning, community colleges that offer baccalaureate degrees are likely to keep a focus on components vital to students such as developmental education, thereby fulfilling their mission. Skolnik (2001) also defended the CCB, positing that evolution and the ability to change have always been unique distinctions of the community college. He saw the community college as an evolutionary entity with its history rooted in change. Levin (2002) found, however, that new baccalaureate granting institutions took on a different identity and that the old distinctiveness in terms of mission and role were replaced or modified. Conversely, Petry (2006), in her research, found that administrators at five community colleges offering the new degrees viewed the new baccalaureates as an extension of their historical mission. Given the recency of the paradigm shift to baccalaureate degrees,

scholars have been justified in their calls for more research into the impact of the community college baccalaureate on the traditional mission of the community college long range (Campbell, 2005, Cook, 2000; Evelyn, 2002; Skolnik, 2001; Townsend, 2005). Dougherty (1994) cautioned community colleges about the risks of being hybrid colleges if they adopted too many missions.

There have been concerns expressed over the quality of the community college baccalaureate from two perspectives. Townsend (2005) posited that because community colleges have not developed or offered bachelor's degrees previously, they would encounter difficulty in making the pedagogical and structural leap. Challengers to the CCB have stressed that four-year colleges are better prepared to expand their enrollments and offerings than the community college is to evolve (Eaton, 2005; Townsend, 2005).

The second perspective addresses the relative value of the CCB. Challengers such as Campbell (2005), Eaton (2005), and Glennon (2005) have claimed that these new degrees engender less prestige for the student and have inferred that the new CCBs are inferior to the traditional baccalaureate degree offered by a university. At least one of these authors argued that these degrees may potentially suffer from the anti-intellectual culture of the community college (Campbell, 2005). Campbell and Eaton have suggested that the CCB will not be an acceptable path to graduate school. Walker and Floyd (2005) have also expressed fear that the CCB would prove to be unacceptable to graduate school faculty. However, recent studies (Grothe, 2009; Florida Department of Education, 2008b) have supported neither Walker and Floyd's nor Campbell's or Eaton's concerns

but have indicated that between 29% and 30% of CCB graduates have matriculated into post-baccalaureate education.

Critics have also argued that, in offering the CCB, community colleges are reaching beyond their resources, i.e., finances, structure, curriculum, and faculty (Campbell, 2005; Eaton, 2005), and that the decision to offer the degree is often guided by presidential and faculty egos. Both Campbell and Eaton have indicated that there are several other viable pathways for community college students to obtain baccalaureate degrees, e.g., university partnership models, 2 + 2 articulation agreements, branch campus programs, and university centers.

From a theoretical perspective, another limitation of the community college baccalaureate may be its position relative to the schooling function as espoused by deMarrais & LeCompte (1998). These researchers claimed that community college degrees serve as a mechanism perpetuating social reproduction. This concern was echoed by Eaton (2005) and Campbell (2005) who cautioned that minorities and those disadvantaged will be further jeopardized by attaining a CCB, and that it may not help to close the income gap. In contrast, employers and CCB graduates disagreed in response to Grothe's 2009 survey of graduates, who reported positive gains resulting from the CCB degree.

Given the competitive and restrictive financial environment faced by community colleges in the 21st century, challenges to adding new degrees and expanding mission via the CCB will continue. Further study is needed to respond to challenges and further refine the rationale for the CCB. The proposed qualitative study will add to the body of

literature particularly as it relates to the constructs adult students perceive as benefits of the degree.

Research on the Community College Baccalaureate Degree

Literature on the community college baccalaureate has been limited in scope and depth with little consideration for a comprehensive and qualitative exploration of the new degree. The majority of published information has been comprised of editorial or opinion pieces and journal articles which anecdotally either argue for or against this new delivery model. Townsend (2005) agreed with this assessment, stating that much of the available literature has focused either on (a) reasons to support the community college baccalaureate degree or (b) concerns of those challenging the new degrees. Neither position, according to Townsend, has been based on empirical research. Townsend and others (Milliron, 2005; Floyd, 2005) have called for careful and analytical study to objectively assess the phenomenon. Joining the call for additional research was Petry (2006) who referred to community college baccalaureate programs as being ". . . in a state of infancy, with numerous questions and problems yet to be resolved" (p. 10). Skolnik (2005), in his discussion of the community college baccalaureate movement in Canada, wrote that due to the absence of empirical research, his information was drawn primarily from discussions with faculty and administrators involved with the process. The modest amount of research that has been conducted has primarily been concerned with (a) analysis of legislative policies (Burrows, 2002), (b) the states' role in the development of these new degrees, (c) examinations of the changes at community

colleges that implemented the degree (Hofland, 2009), and (d) constituent perceptions (Floyd, 2005; Pershin, 2006; Petrosian, 2010). Pershin (2006) and Petrosian (2010) reviewed administrator and faculty views of the new degrees and found that perceptions were generally positive. Kielty (2010), after a qualitative study of faculty and administrators, offered lessons learned regarding program development. The evolution of college practices, policies, and services has also been explored by a number of researchers (Burrows, 2002; Kielty, 2010; Manias, 2007; Pershin, 2006).

Townsend (2005), along with others such as the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (Russell, 2010), called for further research investigating (a) the effectiveness of the community college baccalaureate in raising attainment rates; (b) the number of students obtaining the baccalaureate degree; (c) the cost of these new programs; (d) the impact of the degree on the national figures for baccalaureate degree attainment; and (e) differences in future income or educational aspirations between community college and traditional baccalaureate degree recipients. Central to the significance of this research was the position of Bragg and Ruud (2011) that discussion of the impact of the community college baccalaureate on the adult students who are pursuing it is missing in the literature. Because so few qualitative studies have been conducted to explore the perspectives of adult students who are pursuing the degree, there remains an incomplete picture of the new degree in that the voice of the student is almost absent from the discourse.

Though there has been a void in research assessing the community college baccalaureate, there have been a small number of recent dissertations in which the new

degree was examined and students' perspectives were of interest. These studies (Grothe, 2009; Manias, 2007; McKee, 2001; Shah, 2010, Williams, 2010) were the first to focus the discussion on the student. Manias looked at CCB graduates, Grothe focused on CCB graduates and employers, Williams surveyed enrolled students, and Shah compared outcomes and perceptions of community college graduates with those of their counterparts at one university.

One of the first dissertations to include students' perspectives about the new degrees was a 2001 study by McKee. McKee explored factors impacting the decision to develop a manufacturing bachelor's degree at Westark Community College in Arkansas. In this qualitative study, the CCB was explored from the perspective of six stakeholders: a student, a faculty member, an administrator, an employer, an official with a regional accrediting body, and a state legislator. Grounded theory was used to guide the interview questions and protocol. All six of the stakeholders were interviewed using similar questions, and their responses were documented for comparison. McKee identified the three prominent themes that she argued could be used to evaluate decisions related to the development of community college baccalaureates. These themes were: (a) the strength of community support for the CCB, (b) alternatives available for delivery of the baccalaureate, and (c) the type of baccalaureate degree to be developed (2001). Through this study, McKee developed a decisioning model for community colleges to use when evaluating the need to develop CCBs. Though the study provided views of the CCB from all stakeholders involved, generalization of the results in regard to student perceptions was limited because only one student was interviewed. Additionally, the focus of the

interviews was on elements related to building a decisioning model. Because findings

centered on students' employment, their perceptions of courses taken during their degree

programs could not be generalized. McKee did, however, provide a building block on

which other researchers could begin to construct a comprehensive picture of community

college baccalaureate students and graduates.

Focusing on students and access, Manias (2007) delved into whether or not the

new community college baccalaureate increased access to baccalaureate teacher

education programs in Florida. Specifically, Manias examined (a) reasons students

reported for attending a community college baccalaureate program; (b) alternate plans if

the community college was not in existence; and (c) whether or not the limited

baccalaureate offerings by most community colleges influenced their choices of major.

In his quantitative study using mixed sources of data, Manias surveyed 140 juniors and

seniors at three community colleges. Data were collected from institutional records, a

researcher-designed survey instrument, and college specific data from the National

Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE). Manias, in comparing fall enrollment figures of

2002 against those of fall 2005, determined that the new CCBs in teacher education had

resulted in net enrollment gains for the state. Manias found, as did other researchers, that

students enrolled in a community college baccalaureate program, because of location and

cost. Location, defined as proximity to the student, was the category receiving the

highest percentage (54.7%) followed by costs (37.2 %).

The purpose of Grothe's (2009) qualitative study was to extend the picture of the

community college baccalaureate student by examining graduates' and local employers'

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perceptions regarding the regional economic impact of the new degree. He collected data from three colleges offering community college baccalaureate degrees. Kwantlen Polytechnic University in Vancouver, British Columbia, St. Petersburg College in Florida, and Great Basin College in Nevada. Similar to McKee (2001), Grothe identified seven themes, employing a grounded theory methodology, to analyze data obtained in structured interviews with students and employers.

Grothe's (2009) first theme was the revelation of barriers which prevented students from seeking the baccalaureate. The identified barriers, in order of importance, were (a) being place bound; (b) being unable to travel distances to pursue college; (c) having daytime classes; (d) being unable to relocate families; (e) dealing with scheduling conflicts; and (f) having family responsibilities (Grothe, 2009). The second theme related to programmatic issues and included, in order of importance, (a) the real world industry experience of faculty; (b) small class size; (c) lower costs; (d) personal attention by faculty; and (e) the institution's familiarity with and specific accommodations provided to their students.

The third theme was that the adult students interviewed believed that the CCB adequately prepared them for graduate school. This theme supported the notion that the ability to continue to advanced study was an important consideration for adult students in making the decision to enroll in a CCB (Grothe, 2009). Illustratively, six of the 18 graduates were already enrolled in graduate school at the time of the interviews. The fourth theme related to the use of alternative instructional delivery methodologies and was an important consideration for institutions as they attempted to respond to the adult

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learners' needs, and each of the colleges studied incorporated alternative models to deliver instruction.

The fifth theme was that the primary driving force of CCB adult students, in their decision to enroll, was to strengthen their career opportunities (Grothe, 2009). This has been central in the arguments put forth by CCB proponents (Floyd, 2005; Townsend, 2005; Walker, 2001, 2005, 2007). This theme was also identified in the pilot study for the proposed research. Of the six students who participated in either a focus group or interview in 2010, all with the exception of one described advancing their careers or obtaining better jobs as their primary reasons for enrolling in a community college baccalaureate program. The one individual who reported obtaining the degree for personal reasons was in her late 50s, and this may have had an impact on her lack of career aspirations.

Themes six and seven related to employer perceptions of the new degrees. In theme six, it was discovered that employers perceived that the CCB had enhanced the graduates' workplace skills and competencies (Grothe, 2009). This was an important finding as it corresponded to the graduates' desire for career enhancement and supports the contention by Walker (2005) and Furlong (2005) that the CCB is designed to meet the local industry needs for qualified employees. Theme seven provided an interesting but unexpected finding. Employers related that having the CCB in their communities provided an economic advantage as a "community builder" (Grothe, 2009, p. 145) in the following ways: (a) companies have the opportunity to access local talent, (b) the CCB

degree supports economic development, (c) the CCB degree prevents talent drain from areas and can be an incentive for other companies to relocate to the region.

The Grothe (2009) study was important in that a positive correlation was found between the desires of adult students and the employers who hire them. Grothe's findings also added to the body of work on adult students and the impact of the opportunity the CCB provides. It should be noted that the community college graduate, not the adult learner, was the focus of the study and the researcher recommended additional study to explore barriers which hinder adult student with a two-year degree from pursuing the bachelor's degree (Grothe, 2009). According to Grothe, more study of the barriers faced by adult students would help delineate the challenges that are considered as these students make decisions to continue their education through transfer. It is also important for community college faculty and administrators to understand these obstacles so that programs may be designed appropriately to mitigate barriers to baccalaureate attainment.

One of the most recent dissertations to focus on students was written by Shah (2010) who used quantitative and qualitative methodologies to research the comparative outcomes and experiences of community college baccalaureate teacher education graduates at St. Petersburg College and University of South Florida. Shah compared demographics, competencies, and experiences of the two groups. Community college and university graduates were asked to describe their academic experiences, rate the perceived quality of their programs, and assess their own teaching competencies. Shah's findings on the student demographics data supported the existing literature. Students in

the CCB program were on average five years older than their university counterparts, and the great majority was female with less than 15% of those surveyed identified as males. There was no statistical difference in the ethnicity of the two groups of graduates. An important finding supporting the development of the CCB was that the community college graduates surveyed were found to be statistically more satisfied with their decision to enroll in a teacher education program at a community college than their university peers (Shah, 2010).

Another important finding from Shah's 2010 study, which also supported a foundational argument for the CCB, was that community college graduates were described as being more place bound than those from the University of South Florida. This finding supports the contention of Walker (2001, 2007) who argued that one of the obstacles to adults achieving the baccalaureate was the necessity to remain in their own locale. Shah's study gives credence to the community college being a more welcoming and accessible environment for the adult student.

To assess graduates' perceptions of program quality, Shah (2010) examined several areas: liberal arts courses, teacher preparation courses, field experience, internship experiences, faculty mentoring, feedback from program coordinators, and academic advising. Of the seven areas studied, statistically significant differences between the responses of the two groups were found in three areas: mentoring, field experience, advice and counseling from academic advisors, and satisfaction with teacher preparatory courses with the community college graduates being more satisfied than their university peers (Shah, 2010). Differences in these important teacher education program

component areas began to refute the charges of Campbell (2005), Eaton (2005) and Wattenbarger (2000) who questioned the ability of the community college to offer a quality baccalaureate degree. However, it was recommended that much more research was needed in this area before any final conclusions could be drawn.

Tangential to this discussion was another surprising finding in Shah's study related to advanced study. Community college graduates reported slightly higher aspirations towards obtaining a doctoral degree than did their university counterparts. Such a finding may have implications for the future of the profession, the modeling role of the community college faculty, and the focus on teaching by community college faculty. Shah, in her recommendations for future study, called for studies to be conducted with larger groups of graduates and current students. One of the major limitations of Shah's study was that the voices of the graduates were only heard through a survey research instrument, limiting the understanding of students' perspectives.

The final dissertation reviewed was that of Williams (2010) who examined whether or not students, faculty, and administrators believed that the CCB was necessary to provide options for the baccalaureate degree. More explicitly, she sought to determine if the studied groups believed that CCBs would eliminate barriers to the baccalaureate in Mississippi. One of the strengths of the research was that the researcher surveyed 1,100 students on Mississippi's community college campuses. The majority of students surveyed reported that the CCB would (a) benefit them in their pursuit of the bachelor's degree; and (b) once completed, the new degree would provide a financial advantage. There was a statistically significant positive relationship between nontraditional students

and those with familial priorities and a reported need for the CCB (Williams, 2010). Moreover, 16% of the students studied offered that without the CCB they would not be able to obtain a four-year degree. Though the percentage was not large, it was significant in representing almost 200 of the 1,100 surveyed graduates. The percentage of students indicating the CCB was essential to their attaining a baccalaureate degree was close to the 20% of CCB graduates who made the same claim in Manias' 2007 study.

Though the body of knowledge specifically focused on the adult student and the CCB has been limited, researchers have begun to give voice to graduates of these programs. Importantly, these studies begin to show that the community college baccalaureate is a critical option to meeting adults' needs for continued education. What are lacking, however, are the comprehensive perspectives of students enrolled in CCB programs, i.e., the constructs they draw from the opportunity provided by the community college baccalaureate, the obstacles they faced in making the decision to enroll, and the sense they make about the new degree. The qualitative study that has been completed by the researcher not only fills, in part, a gap in the literature, but provides for understanding decisions made by adult students and enables the richness of the student voice to be heard. The researcher has taken a forward-looking approach to the study of the CCB. Her results have been based on the experiences of currently enrolled adult students rather than on the reflection of graduates about their past experiences.

The Evolution of the Community College Baccalaureate Degree in Florida

As early as 1997, Florida's Community College Council of Presidents endorsed the concept of community colleges by offering select workforce related baccalaureate

degrees in response to unmet demand (Walker, 2001). In 1998, several influential

educational groups in Florida, i.e., the State Board of Community Colleges, the

Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC) and the Senate Education

Appropriations Committee, acknowledged access to bachelor degree level education as a

major concern for the state of Florida and its residents (Florida Department of Education,

2008a).

In 2001, the president of Edison State College in Ft. Myers, Florida, proposed the

community college baccalaureate degree as an important approach to meeting Florida's

challenge of increased access for more baccalaureates (Walker, 2001). President Walker

focused on the availability, affordability, and accessibility of community colleges to large

segments of the state's population. He argued that community colleges were

exceptionally well positioned to meet the higher education demands related to 21st

century careers, namely the baccalaureate degree. Expanding the mission of the

community college, Walker (2001) contended, was a logical step since these institutions

could assist the state by providing bachelor's degrees to more learners at reduced costs, in

convenient locations, and at learner-centered colleges.

In a striking and significant departure from the slow legislative process that

typically occurs with major policy change, the Florida Legislature in 2001, through

Senate Bill 1162, authorized St. Petersburg Junior College to begin offering

baccalaureate degrees in specific workforce high need areas such as education and

nursing. Dr. Carl Cutler, President of St. Petersburg College, and Dr. Ken Walker,

President of Edison College and the founding director of The Comprehensive College

Baccalaureate Association (CCBA), each played prominent roles in policy development and passage of the legislation. State Senator Sullivan, an influential proponent of higher education and chair of the powerful Senate Education Appropriations Committee, spearheaded the push for systemic and dramatic change.

Eight months after S.B. 1162 was first enacted St. Petersburg College began offering the baccalaureate degree. Other community colleges, such as Edison, Indian River, Okaloosa-Walton, and Daytona State College were actively lobbying for an expansion of S.B.1162, and the expansion was subsequently granted. Between 2002 and early 2003, Edison and Indian River Community Colleges followed with their own baccalaureate degrees. In late 2003, Okaloosa-Walton Community College was approved to offer a bachelor's degree in Project and Acquisition Management and became one of the four community colleges authorized to offer baccalaureate degrees (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). The 2004 legislature authorized Okaloosa-Walton, Edison, and Chipola Community Colleges to drop the term community from their names. Furthering support for the broadening of the authority of other community colleges to offer baccalaureate degrees was a 2005 OPPAGA report which concluded that the state university system's ability to significantly increase the number of baccalaureate degrees in workforce areas without expansion would be severely constrained in future years.

Between 2006 and 2007, the Pappas Consulting Group was commissioned by the state legislature to analyze the State University System (SUS) and to recommend a strategic plan to inform the legislature on ways to strengthen the system and provide increased access to baccalaureate degrees. In its conclusion, the Pappas Group proposed

that greater prominence be placed on baccalaureate degree production. The advantageous

position held by Florida's community colleges to help meet the need by serving the adult,

the disadvantaged, and the underrepresented student was also recognized by the group

(Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Florida Statute 1007.33 reflected these views

in its statement of purpose: ". . . it is therefore the intent. . . to further expand access. . .

through the use of Florida colleges" (Chapter 1007, part III, (1)(a)). F.S.1007.33 sought

to remedy and offer viable alternatives for increasing baccalaureate degree access

through the state college system, previously known as the community college system.

The statute attempted to address the need for additional baccalaureate degrees, and to

elaborate on one possible causal factor, limited access to baccalaureate degrees

particularly for non-traditional students. The 2008 Florida legislature created the Florida

College System that empowered all community colleges to transition to Level II

baccalaureate degree granting institutions and reaffirmed the system's autonomy from the

state's university system (Harrison, 2009).

Given the history of Florida community colleges' dedication to a mission of

providing the first two years of a baccalaureate degree, a few short years to bring about

significant change should not be considered an inordinate amount of time. Kingdon's

(1995) Multiple Streams theory helps explain how such a major policy change was

enacted so expeditiously. As Kingdon would theorize, the economic environment in

Florida, the recognition by many of the existence of a problem, the agreement of a goal,

and the identification of several plausible alternatives as solutions, coupled with strong

legislative leaders, contributed to a favorable political climate leading to such a dramatic policy change.

Enrollment in Florida's Community College Baccalaureate Degree Programs

At the time of the present study, limited data were available regarding the success of the newly formed Florida College System. In 2001, St. Petersburg Junior College, since renamed St. Petersburg College, offered the first community college baccalaureate degree in the state of Florida. Within the year, St. Petersburg added an additional seven Bachelor of Applied Science (BAS) degrees, and by 2007-08 another eight were added to their offerings. Other of Florida's community colleges began offering the baccalaureate degree bringing the total number of degrees offered to 37 (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Through March of 2010, many more community colleges added the baccalaureate degree. Full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment data reports indicated that 19 of the 28 community colleges were offering a total of 88 degree programs for the 2011-12 academic year (Florida College System, 2011a).

Although the number of community colleges offering the baccalaureate has continued to increase, the number of enrollments and graduates remain a significantly small percentage of the state's enrollments and total graduates (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Data displayed in Table 3 supports the assumption that students attending community college baccalaureate programs are additive rather than duplicative of the number of the state's residents seeking degrees and that enrollment in the SUS has continued to climb even with the continued growth of the community college

baccalaureate offerings. Even though the new State College System served more than

5,000 students in upper division (CCB) coursework, SUS enrollments grew by

approximately 12% during the same time period (Florida College System, 2009). An

update reported by the Florida College System in February of 2012 documented that

enrollments in CCB's grew to 17, 906 during the 2010-11 academic year (Florida College

System, 2012).

Table 3

Comparison of Upper Division State University System (SUS) and Community College
Baccalaureate (CCB) Enrollments

Enrollments	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
SUS	110,255	116,944	122,281	127,749	133,112	139,228
CCB	627	1,252	1,894	2,332	3,166	5,333

Note. Adapted from The Florida Department of Education (March 2008) *Baccalaureate Programs in*
Community Colleges; A Program Review (FL DOE K20) Retrieved from
www.fldoe.org/cc/Vision/.../PR2008_02_Baccalaureate_Program_Review.pdf

In a program review conducted by the Florida Department of Education of

Education (2008a), community colleges by virtue of their mission and proximity to where

students live and work, have a strong tendency to target and enroll non-traditional adult

students, those who are place bound with significant time constraints. The majority of

community college baccalaureate enrollees were clustered in the age groups 25-34

(35.9%) and 35-44 (28.1%). Only 15% were between the ages of 45 and 54, and the

smallest percentage (3%) were older than 45 years of age (Florida Department of

Education, 2008a). The program analysis supports the assumptions made about individuals who would take advantage of the community college baccalaureate. This view is important in that it was fundamental to the legislative intent of 1007.33 and prior bills.

St. Petersburg College awarded the first community college baccalaureate degrees in 2003-04. Since the implementation of legislative action allowing community colleges to award upper degrees, the number of graduates has climbed steadily from 123 individuals in the first graduating class in 2003-04 to 569 graduates in 2006-07, and 697 graduates in 2007-08 (Florida College System, 2009; Florida Department of Education, 2008a,). Data from 2006-07 demonstrate that of the total 1,318 community college baccalaureate degrees awarded since 2003-04, 41% were in the area of education, 41% in general business such as management and supervision, and 18% in nursing (Florida Department of Education, 2008a). Notably, the degrees were in high workforce need areas as delineated by statute with a business related completion degree for those with associate degrees in workforce related fields.

For 2008, Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP) data, which follows up on employment and continuing education of graduates, found community college baccalaureate graduates to be employed or pursuing additional education at positive and high rates. These findings coincided with those of Walker (2001, 2005, 2007) and Grothe (2007) who found that the primary reason graduates pursued these degrees was for career advancement.

Table 4 illustrates employment trends and data on continuing education of community college baccalaureate graduates. These data are important because one of the concerns raised about the community college baccalaureate degree was that the degree would not be upwardly transferable to the master's degree (Campbell, 2005). Given that between 10% and 25% of community college baccalaureate graduates elected to continue their education following receipt of the baccalaureate degree, this concern would appear to be without merit or would, at the least, warrant further study.

Table 4

Community College Graduates: Follow-up Data

Graduates	Percentage Employed	Percentage Continuing Education
2003-04 Graduates	86.2%	25.2%
2004-05 Graduates	94.7%	22.9%
2005-06 Graduates	86.7%	9.8%

Note. Adapted from The Florida Department of Education (March, 2008) *Baccalaureate Programs in Community Colleges: A Program Review* (FL DOE K20) Retrieved from www.fldoe.org/cc/Vision/.../PR2008_02_Baccalaureate_Program_Review.pdf

Minority student participation has been another major concern for the state, and an essential rationale behind community college baccalaureates has been to increase the number of enrolled and completed minority students. Data from the initial eight community colleges that had operational baccalaureate degrees at the time of the study offer some positive trends in terms of enrollments of minority students. Data showing

the positive impact of the community college baccalaureate on minority enrollments and

degree completions are displayed in Table 5.

Baccalaureate enrollments have continued to climb in Florida. Full time

equivalents (FTE) for 2011-12 grew 39% over the prior year, bringing the total

baccalaureate FTEs to 10,541. Additionally, the number of graduates continued to climb

as well. Data from the Division of Florida Colleges (October, 2010) indicated that the

number of baccalaureates awarded by community colleges had reached 2,729.

Table 5

Community College Baccalaureate Enrollment and Degrees Granted: Blacks, Hispanics, and Males

Enrollment and Completion	2005-06	2006-07	2007-08
Black, Non-Hispanic			
Program Enrollment	11.6%	13.6%	15.6%
Degrees Awarded	6.8%	8.2%	12.1%
Hispanic			
Program Enrollment	9.2%	12.1%	15.3%
Degrees Awarded	6.5%	10.2%	9.5%
Males			
Program Enrollment	28.6%	29.1%	27.6%
Degrees Awarded	18.1%	25.2%	27.1%

Note. Adapted from The Florida College System (2009) *Baccalaureate Accountability, 2007-08.*
Retrieved from http://www.fldoe.org/cc/osas/fastfacts/pdf/2009-01.pdf

Summary

The published research on the community college baccalaureate degree has been focused particularly on policy analysis, documenting the need for the new degree, and administrator and faculty perceptions regarding programs and lessons learned. These studies have been important and have contributed significantly to the acceptance and statewide diffusion of this innovation. Researchers who have explored the impact of these new degrees on students have not looked specifically at adult students nor have they examined the degree from the perspectives of enrolled adult students. Moreover, most of the studies that did include students were quantitative, and those that included a qualitative dimension focused their attention on graduates.

All of the recent studies were important, and they were valuable to the researcher in forming a foundation for this research. This study was conducted to intentionally investigate adult students enrolled in a community college baccalaureate program for the purpose of making sense of the new degree through the perspectives of the adult. Research is almost absent with regard to the impact the community college baccalaureate has on adult students' decisions to enroll in a community college baccalaureate program.

The examination of the available literature on the issue of the community college baccalaureate and the adult student substantiated the value of the research as a next step in creating a comprehensive understanding of the community college baccalaureate degree. This research provides for the logical extension in the research process for the exploration of the community college baccalaureate degree through the sense making and narratives of the adult students interviewed who were participating in higher education.

The significance of the study lies in two important areas: first, its contribution to policy development as Florida wrestles with expanding, curtailing, or supporting the community college's role in offering baccalaureate degrees as an additional and necessary alternative for adults; and second, the practical implications for community colleges that offer the baccalaureate degree

The methods and procedures used to conduct the study are thoroughly described in Chapter 3. Chapter 4 introduces the participants; Chapter 5 presents the themes which emerged in the analysis. Chapter 6 contains a summary and discussion of the findings, and Chapter 7 presents conclusions and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 3
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The study employed an interpretive qualitative phenomenological approach to explore the meaning adult students give to the opportunity to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program. This chapter contains a description of the research plan and the rational for use in the current study. The setting for the investigation is described, and the criteria used for participant selection are outlined. A detailed description of the processes I followed for data analysis and thematic generation is provided. Accompanying the description are examples of findings, nodes, and the invariant horizons. Included are statements regarding design parameters such as reliability, validity, generalizability, and triangulation of data. Because this research involves the study of humans, procedures for their protection and consideration are explained.

The progressive six-step methodology used in this analysis, and presented in this chapter, was a modification of the processes used by Moustakas (1994) and van Kaam (1990) with influence of Hycner and Groenewald (2004). I found the process effective for understanding, synthesizing, and seeing the interconnectedness of data and participant experiences. Furthermore, the process was efficient in providing a structure for analyzing the voluminous transcribed data.

Research Design

The community college baccalaureate is a fairly new phenomenon in higher education. As such, the vast majority of research on the topic has been either quantitative in nature or related to policy analysis. Creswell (2009), Merriam (2009), and Patton (1987) have supported the use of qualitative research in the exploration of any new phenomenon. Their view lends support to the need for qualitative studies in order to fully comprehend this new degree and its meaning to adult learners. Qualitative research has the ability, unlike quantitative research to add depth, richness and detail to the understanding of a phenomenon and its meaning for a specific group. Qualitative research will enable the researcher to link adult students' voices and the richness of their experience to the quantitative data already being reported by colleges. The integration of state reported data along with qualitative data gained in this study will aid in constructing a more holistic and comprehensive view of the values and perceptions of the adult students' behavior in enrolling in the community college baccalaureate. Van Manen (1990), Groenewald (2004), and Hycner (1999) concurred with Merriam (2009) and Patton (2002) in their assertion that unlike quantitative research that predicts or counts experiences, qualitative research clarifies meaning.

In qualitative research, the focus is on the individual or the group being studied and the capturing of the complexity of the experience for the group (Creswell, 2009). Qualitative researchers often ask open-ended questions in semi-structured interviews. This permits participants to share their views, feelings, meanings and perspectives from their personal positioning about the experience (Creswell, 2009). Flexibility in the

interview questions asked of each participant gives the researcher the freedom to explore how participants make sense of the world and their experiences in it and enables the researcher to more fully capture the voices and experiences of the adult student (Creswell, 2007, 2009).

This study was designed under the broad category of interpretive qualitative research in that the researcher is seeking an understanding of the meaning of the community college baccalaureate to the decision to return to college by adult students. The interpretive approach, according to Merriam (2002), is used when one wishes to learn how individuals experience, interpret, and interact with their world or a certain phenomenon. There are important distinctions postulated by Merriam that define interpretive qualitative research. First interpretive qualitative research must seek to understand the "meaning people have constructed about their world and their experiences" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). The second characteristic is that interpretive research acknowledges the researcher as a critical element in the research process; hence, the researcher is the "primary instrument for data collection and analysis" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). Though there are cautions that must be taken to avoid researcher bias, one advantage is that the researcher is able to observe and make note of verbal and non-verbal cues, analyze multiple sources of data, and seek immediate clarification from the participant. Another essential component of interpretive qualitative research is its inductive nature, where the investigator ". . . gathers data to build constructs, hypotheses, or theories, rather than deductively deriving postulates to be tested" (Merriam, 2002, p. 5). According to Merriam, these inductively uncovered constructs form the themes,

categories, or concepts relating to the phenomenon being studied. The final attribute of interpretive qualitative study is that it is "richly descriptive" in that it employs words, nonverbal communications, and other symbols to describe the experience of the phenomena (Merriam, 2002, p. 5).

Phenomenological Research

The purpose of phenomenological research is to seek and describe the lived experience of a phenomenon through the perception and meaning it has to the group being studied (Creswell, 2007, Lester, 1999, Van Manen, 1990), in this case, adult students. Phenomenology was chosen as the research approach for this study, as it provides a powerful means of understanding and describing the human subjective experience and the discovery of the "essence of the experience" [through] "systematic and disciplined methodology for derivation of knowledge" (Moustakas, p. 45). Creswell (2007) also reasoned that the central focus of phenomenology research is to discover the "universal essence of the experience" (p. 58) of the participants. Through this study of adults, the researcher attempted to describe the meanings and perceptions adult students have in common in their decision making to pursue a community college baccalaureate degree.

Phenomenology offers an opportunity to gain insight and understanding of motivations, meanings, and interpretation of events and phenomenon free from hypotheses or preconceived notions (Lester, 1999). Van Manen (1990) defended the use of phenomenological study in education since its use "ward(s) off any tendency toward

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constructing a predetermined set of fixed procedures, techniques and concepts" (p. 29) and leaves the participants free from biases to construct the experience from their own world view. This methodology is extremely valuable in uncovering the perspectives of individual participants and "making voices heard" with regard to the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate, making it possible "to inform, support, or challenge policy and action" (Lester, 1999, p. 1).

The Process of Phenomenological Research

Moustakas (1994) contended that in order for phenomenological researchers to maintain the integrity of the data and rigor of the study, a "... series of methods and procedures that satisfy the requirements of an organized, disciplined and systematic study" (p. 103) are essential. Toward that end, the process advised by Moustakas was employed in the development of this study. Moustakas recommended the discovery of a topic (Step 1) that has meaning to the investigator as well as having social value followed by a complete review of the related and existing literature (Step 2). An extensive review of the literature and related research, in which important gaps in knowledge about adult students and community college baccalaureate degrees were identified, was conducted by the researcher and reported in Chapter 2. The third step prescribed by Moustakas is the development of conditions for the selection of appropriate "co-researchers" (p. 103) or study participants. Moustakas' (1994) fourth step concerns actions taken by the investigator to assure the ethical integrity of the study. Prior to the participants' agreement to join in the research, the investigator described for them the purposes of the

study and the steps involved. The nature of phenomenological research is that the

investigator and the participants are partners in the discovery of knowledge and meaning.

Therefore, all involved parties have responsibilities in the process, and it is for this reason

that participants are referred to as co-researchers (Moustakas). Responsibilities were

discussed with the potential participants so that all co-researchers enter into the study

relationship fully aware of time requirements and other essential responsibilities such as

reviewing transcripts for accurate reflections of participant meanings and perspectives

and being available for clarification or additional questions. Methods of protecting

confidentiality were discussed with the participants; informed consent was explained, and

participant signatures were obtained.

The fifth step in the methodology is the construction of questions for the semi-

structured interview and conducting the interview. Interview questions are developed

from the integration of the study's theoretical framework, the literature reviewed and the

essence of phenomenology to uncover lived experiences. Central to phenomenological

qualitative research is the "person-to-person" semi structured interview focused on the

research questions guiding the study (Moustakas, 1994, p. 104). The final step in

qualitative research according to the plan outlined by Moustakas is the organization and

analysis of the transcribed interviews and other sources of data (p. 118). Moustakas

wrote:

> Organization of the data begins when the primary researcher places the
> transcribed interviews before him or her and studies the material through the
> methods and procedures of phenomenal analysis. The procedure involves
> horizonalizing the data and regarding every horizon or statement relevant to the
> topic and question as having equal value. From the horizonalized statements, the
> meaning or meaning units are listed. These are clustered into common categories

or themes, removing overlapping and repetitive statements. The clustered themes and meanings are used to develop the textural descriptions of the experience. From the textural descriptions, structural descriptions and an integration of textures and structures into the meanings and essences of the phenomenon are constructed" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 118).

Research Questions

Research questions that guide phenomenological study often search for the meaning of an experience or a phenomenon to a specific group (Creswell, 2007). In keeping with this premise, the research questions in this study focused on adults who had elected to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program and the meaning of the degree in their lives. After an extensive literature review, it was concluded that a gap existed in the literature regarding the meaning, perspectives, and impact this new delivery methodology has on adult students. The purpose of the research questions was to elicit a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate on the lives of adult students and their decision to return to college.

Using a qualitative, phenomenological approach, this research was conducted to investigate adult community college baccalaureate students to determine their experiences and perspectives relating to the following research questions:

1. What narratives do adult students tell of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program?

2. How do adult students perceive and describe meaning to having access to a community college baccalaureate degree program?

3. What meaning did the community college baccalaureate have on the adults' decision to return to college for a four-year degree?

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Study Location

The research study was conducted at Seminole State College in central Florida.

Seminole State College was founded in 1966 as Seminole Junior College (Seminole State

College Catalog, 2011). Seminole State College is located in Seminole County just north

of Orlando. An astute observation about Seminole county was made during the proposal

defense by one of my committee members with regard to the uniqueness of Seminole

county. The county with a population of 425,071 (United States Census Bureau, 2011)

has one of the highest income levels in the state and the nation, with a median household

income of $62,171. This household income is higher than the state's average of $47,661

(United States Census Bureau, 2012). Differentiating Seminole county from the rest of

the state is that Florida's household incomes falls well below the national average

household income of $ 51,914 (United States Census Bureau, 2012) making Seminole

County one of the areas in the country with higher than average household incomes. This

demographic situation may hinder broad generalizability of the study and must be noted

as one considers the study's implications as well as recommendations for future study. In

2011, Seminole State was identified as one of the fastest growing community colleges in

the nation with four campuses and more than 30,000 students.

Seminole State College was chosen because it is a comprehensive community

college, the designation given to community colleges that offer the transfer associate of

arts degree, the career focused associate of science degree, adult education programs, and

developmental studies (Vaughan, 2006). Seminole State College, with more than 49% of

its students 24 years or older and the recent addition of baccalaureate degrees, was

considered an ideal setting for this study on adult students and the community college

baccalaureate (Seminole State College, 2011).

In 2009, Seminole State College received State Board of Education approval to

offer its first baccalaureate in Interior Design. In early 2011, the college was approved to

offer four additional baccalaureate degrees: Business and Information Management,

Information Systems Technology, Construction Management and Architectural and

Engineering Design Technology (Seminole State College Catalog, 2011). The study was

conducted at the Sanford/Lake Mary campus, the largest of the college's campuses and

the site of the Business and Information Management baccalaureate program which was

the focus of this study. The B.S. in Business and Information Management degree was

chosen as the degree from which study participants were drawn. The decision to use this

particular degree was based on one of the component streams of Kingdon's theoretical

framework; choosing from alternatives (Kingdon, 1995) in that there was a similar

business related degree offered by the University C on the same campus.

In addition to available alternatives, there is support in the literature for

conducting research at one site. Creswell (2009) asserted that in a phenomenological

study it was more important to the qualitative process for study participants to have

experienced the same phenomenon than to have multiple sites. In this study design,

participants selected for the study met all established criteria and were enrolled in a

community college baccalaureate degree program.

Participant Recruitment and Selection

Phenomenological studies are conducted on small groups to allow for more detailed and in depth study of the experience and meaning to the subjects (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002). The central criterion used in the identification of study participants is that they have experienced or are experiencing the phenomenon being studied (Merriam, 2009). Since the sample size is typically small, it is important that the selection criteria for the sample be established early (Merriam, 2009).

The accessible population in this study was comprised of adult students enrolled in the Business and Information Management baccalaureate degree program during the spring and summer terms of 2011-2012 at Seminole State College (previously known as Seminole Community College) in Florida. Study participants were enrolled in 3000 level (junior year) required business courses taught in either the traditional face-to-face format or the non-traditional online learning modality.

In order to select co-researcher participants for this study, a brief demographic questionnaire (Appendix B) was administered to all Business and Information Management students enrolled in junior level required classes during the spring semester at Seminole State College. The demographic questionnaire offered the researcher the opportunity to identify adult students who fit the study criteria and were willing to participate in the study interviews. The selection criteria employed in this study were that students must be (a) 24 years or older; (b) enrolled in the community college baccalaureate program as a degree seeking student; (c) enrolled in and registered for at

least six credit hours; and (d) fit the definition of the adult student as defined in Chapter 1 of this study.

To begin the recruitment process, the program manager of the Business and Information Management baccalaureate degree program was contacted to obtain permission to make classroom and online presentations explaining the purpose of the study, the criteria for participant selection, and the methodology involved. Prospective co-researchers were informed of time commitments, the method of data collection, and the precautions that would be taken to maintain confidentiality. I presented this information on the study in the classrooms, handed out the short 13-item questionnaire and collected these when they are completed. The students took less than four minutes to complete the questionnaire. For online courses, the questionnaire was uploaded to the college's learning management system for distribution and return. Contact information for the researcher was left with each instructor in the event that questions arose. The goal was to recruit a pool of at least 20 interested students from which a minimum of six students could be drawn to participate in the study. As co-researchers in a phenomenological study (Moustakas, 1994), participants are deeply involved in the study. Because the responsibilities and time commitment of co-researchers are extended beyond the initial interview, it was important that this was presented to prospective participants prior to their agreeing to be involved in the study (Moustakas). Participant involvement included reviewing data to confirm, clarify, and validate that the interview captured the essence of their feelings, and also to modify summaries when necessary.

Each of the prospective study participants who expressed interest was contacted by the researcher via phone to validate fit with the participant selection criteria.

A purposive sampling strategy was applied in the selection of the co-researchers. According to Patton (2002), purposive sampling is appropriate in qualitative research so that the researcher can select "information rich cases" for in depth study (p. 46). Patton (2002) further explained that the power of purposive sampling lies in the opportunity to discover important themes central to the purpose of the study and the research questions being explored.

The type of purposive sampling employed in this study was homogeneous sampling. In homogeneous sampling, participants with similar backgrounds and experiences such as age, employment and family status, and length of time since high school graduation are selected in order to describe a subgroup in depth. In this study, the subgroup consisted of adult students enrolled in a community college business related baccalaureate program (Glesne, 2006).

Pre-interview meetings of 10 to 20 minutes in length were conducted by the researcher with each prospective participant. Study purposes were reviewed, the need to record interviews was explained, and precautions for maintaining confidentiality were discussed. Prospective participants were informed that their names would not be released or made available. Rather, pseudonyms were used. I had planned on asking the participants for a pseudonym they would like me to use in reporting the research; however, this proved very time consuming. During my first interview Linda took more than 15 minutes to consider which name she would like used. This simple question led to

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several tangential topics, making it difficult to refocus the interview. From then on, I

chose a pseudonym after the interview was conducted that was either similar to the

participant's real name or began with the same letter.

Once prospective students confirmed their willingness to participate in the study,

they were asked to sign informed consent documents (C).

Interviews

Interviews are one of the major strategies of phenomenological investigation

(Creswell, 2007; Merriam, 2002). Interviews range from highly structured with

specifically ordered questions to completely unstructured in which the participant and the

researcher are free to deeply explore a topic (Merriam, 2002). The semi structured

interview used in this investigation employed a combination of structured and

unstructured questions to guide in-depth exploration of themes and topics. The semi

structured interview uses neither strict wording of questions nor a pre-arranged order

(Merriam, 2002). Rather, the researcher retains the ability to follow up areas of interest

as they emerge with guiding probes. The interview protocol was used as a guide to

facilitate discussion, and notes were taken using a field notes form (Appendix D).

Interviews were conducted with eight students using a researcher developed semi-

structured interview protocol (Appendix A) at locations which had space for quiet,

private conversations and which were convenient for students. The conference and study

rooms used for the interviews were quiet, private and comfortable with glass walls for

visibility. As Glesne (2006) advised, the locations were "convenient, available and appropriate for the students (p. 86).

Each of the study participants was personally greeted by me at the entrance to the study room or alternative site. Based on the recommendations of Creswell (2007), each interview began with: (a) a review of the purposes of the study, (b) confirmation of the signing and reading of informed consent by the participant, (c) an explanation of the plans for using the study data, (d) a discussion of the expected length of the interview, and (e) a review of the data obtained from the demographic questionnaire (Creswell, 2007).

Pilot Study

As suggested by Fraenkel & Wallen (2009), a pilot study was conducted on the demographic questionnaire and interview questions to reveal deficiencies in the instrumentation and research design. The researcher enlisted the help of a "gatekeeper" in the form of an administrator, as advised by Fraenkel and Wallen, to gain accessibility to students to participate in the pilot test.

The questionnaire was administered to groups of students enrolled in 3000 or 4000 level business required course at a local community college other than the research site during the fall term of the 2010-2011 academic year. Faculty teaching online courses administered the questionnaire via their learning management systems, and faculty teaching traditional courses administered the questionnaire during their regular class meeting times. The demographic questionnaire was pilot-tested over a one-week period

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with 59 students returning the completed instrument. From the students who completed

the questionnaire, a purposive sample of students age 24 years or older who agreed to

participate in a focus group or interview was selected. Initially, 10 students agreed to

participate in the pilot study. Because of scheduling difficulties, however, only six

students were actually interviewed. Of the six, three students participated in a focus

group, one was interviewed face to face, and the remaining two agreed to individual

phone interviews.

Once the pilot study was completed, changes were incorporated in the design of

the study and the interview questions. These modifications included the following:

1. The decision to conduct in-person, individual semi-structured interviews over

   focus groups or phone interviews was made due to the increased richness and

   depth of responses and the ability to immediately follow up for clarification

   with the co-researcher. The information shared by the students in the face to

   face discussion was much richer, more descriptive, and personal than the

   information gleaned from the telephone interviews. Additionally, the

   researcher was not able to discern any non-verbal cues during the phone

   interviews. Therefore, the use of phone interviews as a strategy for data

   collection was abandoned.

2. There were several drawbacks found in the use of focus groups. First, one

   challenge was in finding a time when all of these very busy adult students

   were available to share their stories. Second, it was difficult to coax

   narratives from each individual in instances when one of the participants was

very dominant. Creswell (2007) noted this possibility by observing that not all participants are "equally articulate" (p. 133). Finally participants appeared to be guarded in their responses within the focus group. These observations resulted in abandoning the use of focus groups as a strategy for data collection.

3. Changes to the interview protocol were made to more clearly relate the conceptual framework to the study and to explore more deeply the students' thought processes about enrolling in a community college baccalaureate degree program. Questions added included "What problems or life challenges were you trying to address by enrolling in the community college baccalaureate?" and "What have been the past challenges preventing you from enrolling and completing a baccalaureate program?" To more fully align the instrument and study purposes, the following request for information was added to the prior interview questions: "Given the proximity of more established four-year baccalaureate programs, would you share your thought processes about selecting the community college baccalaureate programs."

4. Based on the concerns cited by challengers to the community college baccalaureate movement, the following line of questioning was incorporated into the previously established list of interview questions "Some of those who argue against the community college baccalaureate state that the CCB is viewed as inferior to a university baccalaureate degree. What are your feelings on this?" followed by "Did this concern you at all?" and finally,

"How do you think an employer will value your degree from a community college?"

5. Questions such as "Were there any individuals who influenced you to attend (site of the study)?" were eliminated. None of the students interviewed during the pilot could identify an individual and most did not answer this question.

The changes made to the interview questions enabled the researcher and participants to delve deeper into the meaning of the community college baccalaureate.

The Interview Protocol

As discussed earlier, the in-depth, semi-structured informal interview is one of the primary methods of collection in phenomenological investigations (Merriam, 2009), and it is the methodology that was employed in the study. Each session began with a greeting followed by a 10-15 minute conversation designed to establish some level of rapport between participants and researcher. Each interview ranged between one and two hours in length, depending on the student, and all interviews were digitally recorded.

The interview tool was comprised of several open ended questions designed to bring forth the meaning of the degree to the life of the adult student. My role was one of guide and facilitator in encouraging the participants to richly describe feelings, perspectives, and meaning centered on the purpose and topic of the study (Patton, 1987). Probes and follow-up questions suggested by Patton were used when necessary to "solicit depth and detail" (p. 142) from the participants. The interview protocol (Appendix A) contained a complete list of interview questions with appropriate suggested follow-up

questions to be used if necessary to elicit more power and detail in participants' responses. During the defense for my proposal, one of the committee members suggested adding questions relating to marital status, family income, and parents' highest level of education achieved. The question of marital status was included in the demographic questionnaire, and the remaining questions relating to family income levels and parents education were added to the interview protocol. Table 6 displays the linkage between the theoretical framework, the research questions used to guide the study and interview protocol questions. This crosswalk provided confidence that the interview protocol was in fact driven by the theoretical framework.

After all of the interviews were conducted and the data were analyzed, I realized on a much deeper level the overriding uniqueness of individuals and the desire they had to tell their stories. It would be difficult to anticipate every situation which may arise during human research and their interviews. However, on reflection, I believe having had a more focused set of interview questions may have been more efficient and helpful in facilitating participants' getting to the core of some of the areas explored more directly. Having interview transcripts that were at times ambiguous and elusive made coding arduous.

Table 6

Relationship Between Research Questions, Theoretical Framework and Interview Protocol Questions

Research Question	Theoretical Framework	Interview Questions
What narratives do adult students tell of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program?	Streams: Problem Identification Choosing from Alternatives Life experiences/situations	1,2,3,5
How do adult students perceive and describe meaning to having access to a community college baccalaureate degree program?	Streams: Choosing from Alternatives Life experiences/situations	4,5,6,7
What meaning did the community college baccalaureate have on the adults' decision to return to college for a four-year degree?	Streams: Problem identification Life experiences Choosing from Alternatives	8, 9,10,11,12,13,14,15

Field Notes

In addition to the demographic questionnaire and the interview protocol form, I also had on hand a field notes form described by Glesne (2006) and Snyder (2010) for each participant. During each of the interview sessions, I recorded observations, descriptions, and impressions of the participants and their verbal and non-verbal cues. At the conclusion of each interview, once I had an opportunity to process the experience, I added any further observations and impressions to the field notes observation form for each of the participants. These field notes served as another source for data triangulation.

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The field notes observation form developed for this study (Appendix D) was a modification of one used by Snyder (2010) and had five broad components: (a) participant identification, (b) researcher observations, (c) verbal and non-verbal cues, (d) reflections, and (e) notes for follow up. The form was used to capture my interview notes, observations about the participant during the interview, and analytical thoughts regarding the interview experience. The last section was included to facilitate follow up with participants (Glesne, 2006). Glesne supported capturing these thoughts regardless of how preliminary as they serve to document the beginning of the analysis process.

During each interview, I actively and carefully listened to participants, observing their behavior, appearance, and non-verbal cues. These observations and other notes were captured on the field note observation form designated for this purpose. At the conclusion of each interview, I also reflected on the interview and recorded any additional thoughts or observations using the field note form. An example of a field note form completed for one of the participants is included in Appendix D.

As suggested by Merriam (2002, 2009) and Glesne (2006), interviews were transcribed immediately. Once transcribed, I reviewed the interview transcript, the demographic questionnaire, the audio recording, and the field notes, to continue capturing reflections and "tentative themes, hunches, ideas and things to pursue derived from this first set of data" (Merriam, 2009, p. 170). I planned to use written memos to myself to serve as reminders of things to "ask, observe, or look for in the next interview" (p. 170); however, the field notes served this purpose. The review process was repeated until all interviews were completed.

Using a participant tracking form (Appendix E), I attempted to maintain an accurate record of activities conducted related to each of the research participants. However the continual scheduling challenges encountered with several of the participants rendered the form less effective than I had anticipated. Because I received texted messages and calls from the participants at varied hours and times, I resorted to recording changes in scheduling in a small purse size notebook which I carried everywhere.

Data gathered from each participant included audio recording of the interview, digital transcription, field notes, and demographic questionnaire information. The audio interviews and the transcribed documents were stored electronically for data analysis. All other data weres stored and locked at the researcher's home office.

<center>Data Analysis</center>

In qualitative phenomenology, "data analysis occurs simultaneously with data collection" (Merriam, 2002, p. 14). Merriam (2002, 2009) and Glesne (2006) argued that the researcher embarking on qualitative research begins analysis during the first interview or the first observation. This simultaneous analysis characteristic of qualitative research enables the researcher to constantly focus and test emerging concepts and themes during successive interviews. Merriam (2002) also expressed the belief that waiting until all interviews are completed increases the risk of losing opportunities to collect "more reliable and valid data" from the co-researchers (p. 14). This simultaneous analytical approach, according to Merriam, supports the inductive nature of phenomenological study in that:

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one begins with a unit of data (any meaningful word, phrase or narrative, etc.) and compares it to another unit of data, and so on, all the while looking for common patterns across the data. These patterns are given names (codes) and are refined and adjusted as analysis proceeds. (p. 14).

In my study, I used a combination of Merriam's process of simultaneous analysis (2002, 2009) along with computer assisted content analysis using the software NVivo9. NVivo9, developed by QSR International, is qualitative analysis software which allows the researcher to easily manage the administrative tasks of data analysis (Welsh, 2002). The software helps facilitate activities such as data access, file management, search functions and sense making of unstructured data such as transcribed interviews, leading to a more sophisticated identification of emergent themes (QSR International, n.d.). Welsh (2002) a supporter of the use of qualitative analysis software, has contended that the software enables a more accurate and transparent process for analyzing unstructured data which in turn, provides a more "reliable picture" of the data and how the researcher arrived at themes and other findings. NVivo was described by Glesne (2006) as a "Code Based Theory Builder" (p. 163) software package. Glesne and Welsh (2002) noted that though the software can facilitate data management, only the researcher has the capability and responsibility to assess and interpret the data. The researcher using qualitative software must be as intimate with the data as the researcher conducting the analysis by hand (Glesne, 2006).

Once all interviews were completed, transcribed and coded, the information was uploaded into the content analysis software, NVivo. Moustakas' (1994) modification of van Kaam's method for data analysis was employed. Using van Kaam's original process of analysis, Moustakas (1994) described a stepped progression for data analysis which,

through Hycner (1999) and Groenewald's (2004) influence, has been streamlined and simplified for this study. The steps are detailed in the following paragraphs.

Step 1: Listing and Preliminary Grouping

Once the interviews were coded, a comprehensive listing of each horizon was constructed. However, it was only after I had listened to the voices of the participants several times and thoroughly reviewed the supporting documentation that I believed I had reached a sense of knowing the participants' lived experiences. As Moustakas (1994) advocated none of the horizons were omitted, and each horizon was considered as equally relevant (p.120). An example of output developed by this level of data analysis is provided in Appendix F. From the example offered, one sees the horizons, also referred to as nodes, the number of sources where the node is mentioned, and the number of times the horizon is referenced.

Step 2: Reduction and Elimination

There are two goals of this step. The first is to capture the holistic experiences of the participants through repeated review and listening to the interviews. Second is to distill the voluminous data collected to its essence (Hycner, 1999; Moustakas, 1994). Moustakas prescribed the testing of each expression to determine if it is repeated in other interviews followed by a subsequent determination of whether or not the expression is "necessary and sufficient" (p. 121).

Following Moustakas' (1994) process, the researcher determined if the

expressions identified were able to be labeled and therefore qualify as a true "horizon of

the experience" (p. 121). Horizons that continue are referred to by Moustakas as "the

invariant constituents of the experience" (p. 121), the unchanging constants of the

experience. From this point, both Moustakas and Hycner (1999) suggested that a list of

all constants or units of relevant meaning be made and that redundant units be cautiously

eliminated. Prudence was exercised during this process so that horizons which represent

divergent points of view were not eliminated. Hycner cautioned researchers to carefully

consider each horizon or expression before proceeding with reduction and elimination of

data (1999). In fact, Hycner regarded the term, reduction, as disadvantageous to the

phenomenological process and cautioned that reduction and elimination may result in the

removal of "lived experiences" of the phenomenon.

Following the guidelines established by both Moustakas (1994) and Hycner

(1999), and after frequent scanning of the data collected and coded in Step 1, I was able

to comfortably reduce the numerous codes and horizons into their distilled essence but

still preserve the holistic experiences of the participants. This was accomplished by

identifying those codes that had at least seven references in the source documents. I

initially identified only the codes with a minimum of 10 references. However, once I

reviewed the transcripts and triangulated data from field notes and my reflections, I

determined that using a minimum of 10 references resulted in the elimination of

important lived experiences. Moustakas (1994) and van Kaam (1990) cautioned against

eliminating too many of the horizons at this step, thus preventing a homogenization of the

experience and loss of the richness of the individuals' experiences. The culmination of this step resulted in the identification of the invariant constituents of the experience. An example of the data obtained in Step 2 is provided in Appendix G.

Step 3: Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents to Form Themes

This step involves clustering the invariant constituents or units of meaning into related categories (Creswell, 2007; Hycner, 1999). Moustakas (1999) posited that these constituents, under a "thematic label" (p. 121), were the "core themes of the experience" (p. 121). In this stage, the researcher rigorously examined the units of meaning to begin to find the essence of meaning to the participants through common pattern discovery. The patterns and horizons of the experience were clustered into units of meaning and related categories. The following 12 core units of meaning were identified: (a) prior baccalaureate attempts, (b) children and family as motivational, (c) interrupting life situations, (d) adult students and the stressors of multiple priorities, (e) high personal value on achieving the baccalaureate degree, (f) the baccalaureate degree seen as the key to career and economic stability, (g) comfortable at community college, (h) financial stressors related to attending college, (i) adult students find they are more alike each other, (j) perception of the community college baccalaureate, (k) limited perception of other possible alternatives to the baccalaureate, and (l) finding self through motivations and career goals. Further delineation of the units of meaning with their related horizons is provided in Appendix H.

Step 4: Final Identification of Invariant Constituents and Themes: Validation

This stage, advocated by both Moustakas (1999) and Hycner (1999), is aligned closely to the third step in that it provides for a validation of the themes previously identified. Moustakas recommended rechecking the invariant themes against the transcribed interviews and all other forms of data collected. This was my opportunity to conduct a validity check to determine if the themes identified have been clearly and overtly expressed by the participants. Themes or units of meaning that are not explicit in the data were removed by the researcher.

This testing of data collected accomplishes several purposes. First, it verified that the expression was able to be labeled and communicated and secondly, that it was repeated to such a level as to be necessary and sufficient for inclusion as a study finding. Using a content matrix developed by Snyder (2010), I examined the data and emergent horizons through the lens of each participant. From the content matrix constructed, it was easily determined that each of the horizons were present in the experiences of a majority of the participants. The content matrix contained in Appendix I provided confidence that the major horizons were reflective of the adult student participants' experiences in seeking the community college baccalaureate.

These steps resulted in the identification of the following six major themes associated with this research:

1. Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life

2. Finding Self through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors

3. The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as Key to Economic Stability

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4. Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

5. The Importance of Communality to Adult Student Participants Feelings of Belonging

6. Neither Difference nor Disadvantage to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree

Step 5: Summary of Interviews, Validation, and Modification

After validating the themes in Step 4, I worked to create a picture of each participant and developed a summary of each of the associated interviews. This step also involved member checking with the research participants and my research adviser. My research advisor and I consulted on the identification of major themes and discovered that our thoughts based on the data analysis and reflections were in alignment. Participants were sent copies of their transcribed interviews and the identified themes. I requested that participants review their interviews and themes to ensure that I had adequately captured their experiences Participants were also reminded that this step was an important aspect of the co-researcher's role in the study. I reinforced the purposes of the participant review to: (a) insure accuracy, (b) validate that the interview transcript and my field notes captured the essence of participant narratives, and (c) further establish the co-researcher relationship in the project. In the event that there would be questions regarding statements or perceptions which needed clarification, I offered to meet with participants to further review the data and seek more clarification. I received four participant replies Sherry, Linda, Mike, and Cole. Sherry responded, "Everything looks

fantastic, and I do agree with all your statements." Mike offered, "I absolutely agree with

the common themes that emerged from your research; they all sound familiar and they

are very interesting at the same time. About the interview document, everything looks

right." Linda and Cole responded that it was interesting to read their own comments, and

Cole also stated that he was going to keep the transcripts to refer back to once he

graduated. Hycner (1999) supported this activity to ensure that the essence of the

interview and defined themes truly captured the lived experience of the research

participants. This step was important in that it confirmed the relevancy and power of the

experience to the participants.

Step 6: Developing a Composite Description and Summary for all Interviews

This step is a blending of the data analysis processes proposed by Hycner (1999)

and Moustakas (1994) and is one of the final steps in the explication of the data. Once

the above steps are completed, the researcher "looks for themes common to most or all of

the interviews as well as individual variations" (Hycner, 1999, p. 154). Moustakas

(1994) described this step as developing a "composite description of the meanings and

essence of the experience, representing the group as a whole" (p. 121) which echoed the

horizons from which the themes emerged.

In this final step, Hycner (1999) again counseled researchers that capturing

individual data variations offer an important dimension to the experience of the

phenomenon. In support of this position, Groenewald (2004) also cautioned that care

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must be taken to avoid eliminating the richness and texture of the experience to the adult students by reducing the data too quickly.

I integrated and synthesized all data sources to determine the essence of the overall experiences for the participants and to create a sense of the experiences which represented the whole. In this step, I was careful to capture the individual variations of themes, thereby providing a rich tapestry of the experience from multiple perspectives. An example of a variation of a theme was found in Linda's motivation around family. Though she had no children at the point of being interviewed, the future plan of having children and a family motivated her to achieve the degree just as providing for her child motivated Sherry.

Consideration of Human Subjects

All human science research must be guided by the ethical principles established by the U.S. Federal government and mandated in the study of human participants (Glesne, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, in this study, I followed all ethical standards of human science research and complied with the standards set by the Institutional Review Board of the University of Central Florida and the selected site for data collection. There are five tenets which must be adhered to in all research involving human participation (Glesne, 2006). Because this research is not experimental in any way and poses no or limited risk to humans, only two of the tenets were applicable and are discussed here.

First, all participants in the study were volunteers who were provided with a complete disclosure of the nature, intent, and purposes of the study. Participants were also told and signified understanding that they were free to withdraw from the study at any time without any fear of penalty (Glesne, 2006). Because this study was conducted at a college where I was employed as an administrator, voluntary participation in this study was critical to the integrity and ethical standards of research. Participants were also informed that interviews would be digitally recorded and professionally transcribed. The names of all research participants were redacted to protect privacy and confidentiality. Interviews were semi-structured and conversational in tone. This freed the researcher to validate and clarify the participants' statements and perspectives. As suggested by Moustakas (2009), research participants were offered the opportunity to "review, and confirm or alter the research data to correspond to her or his perception of the experience" (p. 110). This is in keeping with Moustakas' Step 5 which calls for the summary of interviews, validation, and modification.

<p style="text-align:center">Validity and Reliability</p>

According to Creswell (2009), validity is one of the significant advantages of qualitative research over quantitative studies and is interpreted to mean that "findings are accurate from the standpoint of the researcher, the participant or the readers. . ." (p. 191). Creswell recommended that researchers employ several different techniques in their proposals to establish and ensure validity. The strategies used to establish and maintain validity in this study of adult students were: (a) triangulation of data, (b) member

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checking, (c) the use of rich, thick descriptions", and (d) peer review (Creswell, 2007, 2009, p. 209).

Data from different sources were triangulated with information from the literature review, the researcher's extensive experience with adult learners, the participants' non-verbal cues captured in field notes, the demographic questionnaire, and the data from the semi-structured interviews. Themes were uncovered based on the "converging of several sources of data or perspectives from the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191). Member checking was used to "determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings" (Creswell, 2009, p. 191) and was accomplished by confirming the findings of the research with the participants. As recommended by Moustakas (1994), I sent each of the participants their transcribed interviews, field note forms and emergent themes and requested that participants carefully examine the data so that corrections, additions, or clarifications could be made. This strategy was another way to reinforce the collaborative nature of qualitative research which exists between the researcher and the participants in the interpretation of the findings.

Creswell (2009) advocated the use of "rich, thick descriptions" (p. 191) to convey the findings of the study. It was my intent, therefore, to employ detailed descriptions of the interviews and other data collected to transport the reader into the experience. This strategy enhanced validity of the study by providing an opportunity for the reader to share in the experience through the words, voices, and actions of the participants.

In human science investigations, the researcher will likely hear many different or divergent perspectives from the participants. Credibility is added to the study through

presenting participant perspectives that may be unexpected and which differ from other participants and from the literature (Creswell, 2009). As the primary tool for data collection and interpretation, it was my ethical responsibility to discuss and present "negative or discrepant information" (p. 191) even though it may diverge from the themes of others. It is precisely these different views which subsequently add to the richness and depth of the discussion.

I have previously disclosed my positionality with regard to past experiences, professional activities, and employment. This disclosure served to bracket any biases that I may have brought to the experience. To further enhance the validity of this study, I used what Creswell (2009) calls "peer debriefing" (p. 192). Creswell and Glesne (2006) characterized this strategy as a review by others external to the project to offer outside reflection and contribution to a study. In this stage of the research analysis, I welcomed an external review by my research advisor to question my interpretation of the findings so that the presentation was accurate, free from biases, and understandable.

In qualitative research, reliability refers specifically to the consistency of approach employed by the researcher during interviews of the different participants (Creswell, 2009). Merriam (2009) expanded on the description of reliability in qualitative studies by explaining that "the important question for qualitative research is whether the results are consistent with the data collected" (p. 221). According to Merriam (2009), the reliability of a qualitative study is judged by how much agreement there is that the findings are aligned with the data collected. To that end, several of the measures used in establishing validity are also useful for assessing reliability. These

strategies include triangulation, review by a peer, and disclosure of the researcher's position. Additionally, the reliability of this project was enhanced through documentation and the consistent adherence of the steps and procedures used during data collection and analysis.

Originality Score

The University of Central Florida, College of Graduate Studies requires all students completing a dissertation to submit their work through Turnitin.com to assure originality of the work (University of Central Florida, 2008-2009). The dissertation chair is responsible for establishing a benchmark originality score; my chair, Dr. Rosa Cintrón, has determined that an originality score not to exceed 10 % is acceptable. At initial submission, I received a score of 9%. With the removal of a previously submitted paper, the score was reduced to 4%. All other matches in the originality report were assessed at less than 1%.

Summary

The methods and procedures that were used to conduct this qualitative investigation into the meaning of the community college baccalaureate degree to adult students have been presented in this chapter. The research design and the role of phenomenology in this research have been explained. The setting, criteria for recruitment, and selection of participants has previously been discussed. A detailed discussion of the interview process and protocol was included which explained the

researcher's intent to conduct semi-structured informal interviews with eight adults

enrolled in a community college baccalaureate program at Seminole State College in

Florida. Research questions, sources of data, and methods of analysis were described.

Ethical considerations employed in human research studies were also presented along

with practices used to strengthen validity and reliability.

CHAPTER 4
THE PARTICIPANTS: VOICES AND EXPERIENCES

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological investigation was to describe the lived
experiences of adult students enrolled in a business related community college
baccalaureate degree program through deep questioning of the participants regarding the
experience (van Manen, 1990). The personal experiences of adult students in relation to
their journey in obtaining a baccalaureate degree were explored.

The Adult Students

In order to understand the context of the community college baccalaureate
program, the demographic characteristics of all enrolled students in the Bachelor of
Science in Business and Information Management (BIM) at Seminole State College are
presented in Table 7. During the spring semester of 2011-12, there were 146
unduplicated students enrolled in the baccalaureate program (Seminole State IR, 2012)
and a total of 360 course enrollments. Nearly all of the students were enrolled part time
in an average of 2.5 courses each.

Table 7

Demographic Characteristics of Baccalaureate (BIM) Students

Characteristic	Frequency	Percentage
Gender		
Female	80	54.8
Male	64	43.8
Unknown	2	1.4
Total	146	100.0
Ethnicity		
Asian	10	6.8
Black	25	17.1
Hispanic	23	15.8
White	87	59.6
Unknown	1	.7
Total	146	100.0
Age		
18-24	33	22.6
25-34	65	44.5
35-44	27	18.5
45-54	14	9.6
55-64	7	4.8
Total	146	100.0
County of Residence		
Brevard	1	.7
Lake	2	1.4
Orange	51	34.9
Osceola	1	.7
Seminole	81	55.5
Volusia	10	6.8
Total	146	100.0

Of the 146 enrolled baccalaureate students, there were 80 (54.8%) females, and

64 (43.8%) males. There was a wide variety of age groups represented; the age range of

25 to 34 was the most frequently represented group with 44.5% of the enrollments. The

next highest age range was significantly less with 23.6% falling in the 18 to 24 year

range. The ethnicity mixture was representative of Seminole county with 89 (55.5%),

more than half of the students, identified as White, followed by 25 Blacks at 17.1%. County of residence for the enrolled students is reflective of the philosophy of the community college, first established by Wattenbarger, that a community college be available within a 50-mile radius of the population (Wattenbarger & Albertson, 2007). As might be expected, the highest number of students (81 or 55.5%) listed their county of residence as Seminole. The next highest number of students (51 or 34.9%) came from Orange County. These numbers are congruent with previous research into community college baccalaureate students in which location and proximity were identified as important factors in attendance (Walker, 2005).

All 146 students enrolled in the degree program were provided with the short demographic questionnaire either in a face-to-face class or through an online class format. Of the 69 (47.3%) students who returned questionnaires, 14 were not at least 24 years of age and therefore did not meet the age criteria for the study. Of the remaining qualified students, 27 indicated that they would be willing to participate in the study. One student was a prior acquaintance of the researcher and was, therefore, excluded from participation.

Of the initially qualified respondents, only 20 met the study criteria for the purposeful sample: (a) have previously earned an AA or AS degree but not a previous baccalaureate degree; (b) have been admitted into a community college baccalaureate program; (c) are enrolled in 3000 or 4000 level business or business related coursework; and (d) are adults, 24 years of age and older who self-report responsibilities and priorities other than school, e.g., work and family obligations. Of the 20 students who had

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expressed interest and met the criteria, eight were able to meet for an interview at a time and place convenient for their schedules. It is interesting to note that a minimum of two scheduled appointments was required for all but one of the students. On several occasions, there was a need to schedule/reschedule due to students' either forgetting the appointment, or a family or work obligation which became the priority. These occurrences brought home the challenges adult students face in trying to find the time to fit school into their busy and full lives.

The picture I see in my mind when I reflect on the adult student is one of stream water flowing down through crevices toward the river. There is no set or clear path, and rocks and stumps continually block the water's passage. Adult students find a way to move forward toward their goals, persevering just as the water persists and flows toward the river.

Eight students agree to be co-researchers in this study. Demographic data for these participants are displayed in Table 8 using the pseudonyms assigned to each to protect their anonymity. An equal number of females (4) and males (4) agreed to participate. There was significant diversity in the group with one White, one Hawaiian, two Hispanic, one Middle Eastern, and two Black participants. One Black participant claimed an ethnic mixture of African American and Caucasian; however, she identified as Black. One participant declined to provide ethnicity information.

The average age of the participants was 33 with an age range of 25 through 54 years. Five of the participants were under the age of 30, and the remaining three were over 37 years of age. A majority of the group (five) was single, two were married and

one was divorced. Five of the participants had children; four with young children under the age of 12. Three of the participants had no children. Seven of the participants were employed fulltime and self-identified as the primary financial provider for either themselves or their families. All of the research participants had prior positive experience with community colleges, and six of the eight participants graduated with either an AA or AS degree. Two of the participants, Sherry and Mike, had earned Associate of Arts and Associate of Science degrees.

Table 8

Co-researcher Demographic Characteristics

Participant	Gender	Ethnicity	Age	Marital Status	Children	Primary Provider	Employed
Linda	F	Caucasian	28	Single	0	Yes	FT
Sherry	F	Hawaiian	25	Single	1	Yes	FT
Kenesha	F	Black	25	Single	2	Yes	FT
Tom	M	Not Provided	37	Married	2	Yes	FT
Gav	M	Hispanic	25	Single	0	Yes	FT
Nadira	F	Middle Eastern	54	Divorced	1	Yes	FT
Mike	M	Hispanic	42	Married	1	Yes	FT
Cole	M	Black	26	Single	0	Yes	PT

The Co-researcher Interviews

As directed by the employed methodology, semi structured interviews were conducted with each of the co-researcher participants using the interview protocol as a guide. Semi structured interviews were utilized in order to maximize the voice of the students and to allow the student to guide the interview while following the topics to be

explored. The semi structured interview protocol was effective in eliciting the voices of the students as they described the experience and meaning the community college baccalaureate had on them and their lives.

The semi structured interviews resulted in the collection of rich contextual descriptive data which helped reveal the essence of the meaning of the experience and helped place me in the experience with the participants. In several instances, I was able to live the experience with the participant and know the experience from my own perspective. Moustakas (1994) believed that this is possible in that "each can experience and know the other, not exactly as one experiences and knows oneself but in the sense of empathy and co presence" (p.57). The experience of co-presence was evident to me during my interviews with the females, particularly Linda, Sherry, and Kenesha. Each time, I was able to relate to their experiences and feel their struggles and strength.

Each of the interviews was audio recorded; I listened to the recordings several times to assure that I understood the experience from the co-researchers' view and not from my own perspective. Being an adult student myself I was careful not to use my own experiences, struggles and positionality to interpret their world. Following are summaries of the interviews conducted with the eight co- researchers.

Sherry

Sherry was a 25-year-old Asian-Pacific Rim female who was enrolled in the Bachelor of Business and Information Management at Seminole State College. She had never been married and had one son three years old. It had been approximately eight

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years since she attended high school in Hawaii. She was the sole provider for herself and her son. Sherry was employed full-time as a paralegal at a law firm in downtown Orlando doing collections work. She received her Associate of Science in Legal Assisting from Valencia College (a nearby community college), and she also earned an Associate of Arts degree from the same community college. Sherry was enrolled at University C for four semester in a legal studies bachelor program prior to her transferring to Seminole State's baccalaureate program. She is currently enrolled in four courses, taking two in the traditional face-to-face format and two others as online courses.

Sherry, a very attractive young woman, arrived at the downtown Panera, the location of her choice, dressed very nicely in jeans, heels, a dressy top, long dangling earrings and full make-up. Her long dark hair was stylishly pulled together. She referred to her dress as a typical Saturday outfit. When I arrived 15 minutes early for our meeting, I found that Sherry was already there waiting for me.

During the interview, Sherry was open but very serious about what she was doing. She seemed well educated and was articulate in her communication. She answered all of my questions without hesitation but was also very deliberate and succinct. If a question could possibly be answered in one or two words, that is how she answered it, and she typically paused to reflect on the question prior to answering. She was extremely soft spoken and with the background noise of a Saturday morning at Panera I often had to restate her responses. At one point during the conversation, Sherry pulled out a small notebook from her Gucci purse and proceeded to write my phone number in it. She

stated that the notebook "is my life, I have everything in here". Sherry employed direct and full eye contact during the entire session which lasted approximately 50 minutes. As I reflect on the interview, Sherry exhibited a sense of trying to keep control over her world; she was very much understated. Her words in describing the time she was pregnant reflect this understated approach ". . . so when I got pregnant, everything was a little harder, and I was working full time." I got the sense that between her full-time job and her son that life could quickly get out of hand or at the least not organized enough for her to meet her responsibilities to school, her son, and her job.

Sherry came to the U.S. mainland from Hawaii in 2005 with several friends. Though her friends returned to Hawaii after a few years, Sherry remained in Florida. When I asked at some point why she did not return to Hawaii, she responded that there were many more opportunities here for her and revealed that her goal was to attend law school.

In 2009, Sherry was attending Valencia Community College, pursuing her AA degree, and working full time. She became pregnant with her only child, a son, leading her to take six months off from classes to work and care for her newborn. Though she lived with her boyfriend, her son was her sole responsibility financially and parenting-wise. ". . . I have a boyfriend, we do live together, but . . . I still take care of my son alone. Everything is separate." Sherry completed her AA degree and decided to put off a bachelor's degree because of her son, instead choosing to stay at Valencia to earn an AS degree in Legal Assisting. She reasoned that with a legal assisting degree she could work during law school. She has been working as a paralegal since 2011.

From Valencia, Sherry matriculated to University C into a Legal Studies bachelor degree program. She remained there was four semesters, but believed she was not getting the education she needed to be successful.

> I wanted to learn more and UC I just felt wasn't giving it to me in that program. Because Valencia, was very challenging. It was really--I mean there were times that as soon as my son went to sleep that's when I could study. I had to focus all night, but at UC I just felt like all you got (were) lectures and tests. There wasn't anything in depth for me and it's hard, it's hard with having my son.

Further exploration of her experience at the university revealed that the challenge for Sherry was related to needing more flexibility to manage her web of interrelated responsibilities. She stated, "It was when I went to UC, it was a little harder and there was so much in my personal life, so that's one reason why I didn't want to feel like wasting the time."

She continued, with some encouragement from me,

> No, my personal life made it harder. My son was getting older. I didn't have any help, so finding babysitters to get to school to take tests (was a challenge). I did take online classes so it was different. It wasn't--I don't know. Valencia was a lot more flexible, and the professors were a lot more helpful.

She further explained:

> I don't know, I just, it was more of just here's the assignment, read this, some lectures and then a test. I did well in some classes and the other classes that I did poorly in; it was, I just couldn't make it to class. So I would miss an exam or something.

Sherry added, in our follow up conversation, that she often missed classes because of a lack of babysitters or babysitters not showing up at the last minute.

In following up with this topic, Sherry clarified that UC wasn't hands-on enough for her. She shared that she needed more contact with faculty and for them to "explain

things more." Knowing that she needed a bachelor's degree in order to continue to law

school, Sherry began to look at other completion options.

> I knew since I couldn't go straight to law school with an Associates of Science
> degree, then I'd have to have a bachelor's degree in something and the business
> degree was the only other thing that I felt would enhance my (paralegal) degree.

> Like many of the other research participants, Sherry had little free time. She was

working full time, was a single parent and was enrolled in four classes.

> I don't have any extra time. No, because between work, I work from 8:30 to 5,
> and then I have school on Monday and Tuesday, and every semester I try to do
> two days at school and two online classes. It's easier for me to take online
> classes.

In exploring her time commitments and the role of online classes, Sherry continued:

> That way, I don't have to physically go to school, and I can do homework at
> home, cook dinner for my son. Then he, he's got activities. He goes to private
> school and then, I am active in my law firm. We have softball games and
> everything else that I have to go to, so weekends are pretty much just studying.

> In addition to working 8:30 am to 5 pm, Sherry indicated she was expected by her

employer to participate and coordinate the firm's extracurricular activities such as the

softball games she mentioned. Like the other adult students in the study, there were often

hidden commitments such as coordinating activities outside of work which significantly

impacted the available time and lives of adult students.

However, unlike the other study participants interviewed, Sherry had little to no

support other than her boyfriend. When I asked about her support group and who helped

her with all of her commitments; work, child, full-time classes, she replied; "Yeah, I

don't have any family here, so it's challenging, but I've gotten used to it. It has been

three years, so I've kind of figured out how to balance everything."

An issue that was weighing on Sherry's mind was finances. Because Sherry had

been in school more than four years, she was running out of financial aid. She explained:

> I believe this semester, is my last semester for any grant money, financial aid, so I know it's going to be a bit harder. It's going to be money out of my pocket or loans for me, if I have to take out loans to finish school, that's my goal so I can finish. And that way I can be stable for my son and the future.

Sherry was an impressive young woman who has struggled to find a college

experience to meet her needs. She indicated she was focused on a clear goal of

completing law school. Like other adult students Sherry has taken the long road to

finding her place in higher education. She spent at least four years at Valencia earning

two associate degrees. She made the decision to go from her general AA degree to a

legal assisting AS degree so she could support herself and her son. This decision,

however, caused her to lose two years, and to use valuable semesters of financial aid.

She did not, however, regret this decision since she has been able to be fully employed

and to meet her financial obligations.

Kenesha

Kenesha was a 25-year-old mixed race (white/black) female student also enrolled

in the Business and Information Management program at Seminole State College. I met

Kenesha at 4:30 pm one afternoon after work and prior to classes on the campus of

Seminole State College. She arrived for our interview dressed very casually in jeans,

sandals, and tee shirt. She was well groomed, articulate, and friendly, but also very quiet,

describing herself as an introvert. Reflecting on the interview, the overriding qualities I

sensed about Kenesha were a calmness and steadiness of life. Her emotions never

seemed to fluctuate, even when she said she really liked something. She kept a very steady, emotional level during the entire interview, remaining calm and in control. This is not to say that her affect was flat. It was just that her range of emotional presentation was narrow. Like Sherry, Kenesha was a single mother who had never been married. She had two children. Her children were ages two and six years old. When I asked Kenesha how she managed all of the demands on her time, she replied, "My kids motivate me. They get me up. They need stuff. I got to get it. I got to go to work. I have to pay bills. So they're my main motivation, my kids."

Also, like Sherry, Kenesha was the sole provider for her family and was employed full time as a customer service representative for Chase Bank in Seminole County. She received an Associates of Arts degree from Seminole State College in 2007, and this was followed by three years in the military. In 2011, she ended her military career to return home. In 2012, she entered Seminole State's bachelor's degree program.

Kenesha, like Sherry, employed the use of a planner. She was very organized and I saw from her planner that each day was organized with what she had to accomplish that day. This was important because her work schedule changed to accommodate school. Kenesha, like the other adult students in the study, had multiple priorities in her life. As a testament to Kenesha's acceptance of life as it is, it was not until after much in-depth prodding, that she revealed an additional commitment and responsibility. In addition to a full-time job, two children, sole provider for her family and enrollment in four courses, she was also the caretaker of her blind grandmother.

> . . . and she is kind of ill and she needs me around, I can't really go too far from her. She's. . . she's blind and she can't see, so if she needs to

go to the doctors, or wherever she needs to go, I need to take her, so I need to be here. . . .

When I asked Kenesha how she juggles this added responsibility, she shared:

It's pretty much my responsibility, whenever she needs to go anywhere, my days off are Fridays. I make sure that she makes all of her appointments on Fridays, or if there is an emergency, I just do what I got to do, call off work or I just go in late or whatever to take care of her.

To my question as to how it felt to have this additional responsibility, Kenesha replied simply, "She raised me." At the end of the sentence, Kenesha paused, dropped her voice and her eyes, and revealed "But it's a lot." In reflecting, it appeared to me that the enormity of what Kenesha had to manage was overwhelming to her. This may have been the first time this young woman let her guard down and admitted the sense of burden she felt. It was Kenesha who did the grocery shopping, most food preparation as well being the person who took her grandmother to her doctor visits. After a pause, Kenesha reestablished her demeanor and dismissed the responsibility with ". . . she raised me. . . and she needs me around. . .I just do what I got to do."

Thus, the overriding quality emanating from Kenesha was a forced calmness and steadiness in managing her life. She never, other than one subtle expression, portrayed that what she was doing by juggling work, children, classes, and her grandmother's care was anything out of the ordinary.

Linda

Linda was a 28-year-old white female. I met her at a time and location of her choosing which happened to be Easter Sunday morning at a Panera in Lake Mary, Florida. This time suited her schedule as it was just prior to meeting her family for Easter dinner. She had made three dozen deviled eggs as her contribution to the family dinner, and she was very proud of this contribution.

Reflecting on the interview, my sense was that this young lady was a force of nature--very strong, focused, and determined. She had the focus and passion of someone who has recently discovered "me" and was working hard to reclaim herself and her life. I left each of the interviews with a sense of awe regarding the responsibilities of the adults interviewed, but this woman was so open and so generous in sharing her "lived experiences" that I developed a sense of being in her life. Our conversation was very powerful for me, as I experienced her determination to finish her degree and "grow up," a phrase she used frequently during the interview.

Linda arrived for the interview precisely on time. She was dressed modestly in a flowing spring skirt, sweater top, and sandals. She was well groomed, with several large tattoos on her chest, upper arms and legs. Her nose was pierced; her medium brown hair, cut at shoulder length, was fairly non-descript. Mention of her hair as non-descript is significant, because the next time I interviewed Linda her hair was bright auburn, with full bangs, and a chin length bob, absolutely the opposite of non-descript! My guess was that her hair had finally caught up to her growing perception of self.

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During our interview, Linda was at ease, though determined that I understand her experiences. She was mostly upbeat during the time we shared, verbal and open. She answered my questions readily and completely. Linda volunteered background information that she believed would put her life into context for me and, I suspect, for her as well. Linda, like the previous participants, was employed full time at a specialty travel service. She worked long hours, often more than 40 hours per week, and described her job as very stressful as did Kenesha and Sherry, "It's 40 hours per week. The job is extremely stressful. I have a lot on my plate at work. Hey, they told me my problem at work is that I am too efficient." She frequently referred to how much she had to do at work in juggling multiple trips and solving numerous client problems. She referred to her job as a "stressful balancing act," and showed great pride in being able to manage several projects simultaneously while solving the problems travelers encountered. "If there are payment issues, the accountant comes to me to figure out the rates and everything, so all day long I am stressed." When I asked about the other people at work and if they were as customer oriented as she, her response was an emphatic

> Yes [I am]!!! Where no one else at my job is [customer oriented] so I end up picking up their slack. So I am stressed out all day and then I leave work and I head straight over to school.

There were times during the conversation when Linda discussed very personal and painful experiences in her life. During these times her upbeat persona became very serious and emotional. She wept silently twice as she told her story. Linda graduated from high school more than 10 years ago. It took her the following 10 years to complete her Associate of Arts degree at Seminole. Linda became pregnant as a 17-year-old high

school student. After serious soul searching Linda gave the child, an infant girl, up into

an open adoption. In her words, Linda reported that she spent the next 10 years "drunk

and drugged, often blacking out each night. . . I had a lot of drug and alcohol problems."

When I probed this topic, she replied:

> I had a baby when I was 18 and that is why I put her up for adoption. That is when I decided, you know, I need--I need to have a job and a career before I could raise a child, so that is what really said (to me) you need to do this. Then the depression and that sense of loss that I experienced--I did a lot of--you know, I just drank. I drank every day (for ten years). And so I would not go to school because I was too drunk or I didn't care. I didn't do the homework. I am in a recovery program now. I do the 12 steps and, you know, it is kind of like I am looking at it now saying this is what I kind of--like I was going, but I didn't really try to push myself.

> To my questions about how she managed going to school, working, and also

working her recovery, she stated:

> That and I was going to school, but I was still drinking; and so, now my hardest thing is doing work, school and going to enough meetings and trying to work that program (AA), you know. Because once I get through--I'm never through--but once I continue to work on that, then I am done.

Clean for eight months, Linda was working to balance a full-time job, part time

coursework, active participation in her recovery which included daily meditation,

journaling, meetings, and also working to recover from significant financial debt.

> You know my goals that I have always thought of myself are now coming more to light, but it's still making the time to get my school done, you know. So trying to make time to go to a meeting and then rush home and do five hours of math homework or do I skip that and then I skip the meeting the next day so I can focus on school. So, it has been a balancing act, but I don't complain about it anymore.

> She related that her parents have been very supportive of her and offered to have

her move back home so that she could attend college and begin to pay off her debts. In

her words: "You know, my parents have been extremely supportive of me." However

she added: "I don't want to be 28 living at my, you know, with my parents, and I want a decent job to where I can sustain myself."

It was during the times when we were discussing the adoption and her past drinking and drugging that she became tearful, and tightened her lips. In telling this part of her story, she spoke very slowly with eyes downcast. At all other times, she spoke rapidly and gave quick responses. My overwhelming sense was that she was ready to tell her story. She also related excitedly that she is looking forward to a visit this summer with the family who adopted "her daughter."

Mike

With several years of full-time computer and information technology experience to his credit, Mike, a 42-year-old Hispanic student, was finally seeking his baccalaureate degree in a field that was of great interest to him. Mike entered Seminole State College's baccalaureate program in the spring of 2012. Our first interview was conducted after his work day was concluded and prior to the beginning of his evening classes. He arrived early for the interview, dressed in typical IT business casual clothing, khaki pants and a button-down long sleeve plaid dress shirt. We met in a large, quiet conference room in the same building in which his classes were held. He was well groomed and physically fit, very soft spoken, and deliberate with his wording. He exuded confidence that he would finally be able to successfully complete a baccalaureate program. Mike indicated that this was his second baccalaureate program. He had been enrolled at University C for two years in Information Systems Technology, but the program was cancelled. He would

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have completed that program had they not cancelled the degree. When faced with the decision to change majors or look for another college, Mike explained: "I started with UC, and then they cancelled the program and I was like, okay. I need to find something else and that's why I took the business (degree)."

Mike was very comfortable during the interview, sitting back in his chair and carefully considering his answer to each question prior to providing his typically abbreviated one line responses. He laughed often and easily during the interview. It should be noted that Mike was an employee of Seminole State College and I had known him in that capacity for several years. Because of the work relationship, I was reluctant to include him in this study, but as one of the students in the program he was given the demographic survey. Once he had completed the questionnaire, he came to my office twice to see if I would be interviewing him. Frankly, I was surprised by his visits, as I had been under the impression for quite some time that Mike already had a bachelor's degree.

He had always appeared to be very self-assured and mature. During the limited professional contact I have had with him, he was always professional and competent. With assurances of confidentiality and the ability to withdraw his participation at any time, we proceeded to have a very enjoyable conversation where I gained insight into why Mike has chosen this path. Like the other participants interviewed thus far, Mike shared that he worked full time and was the financial provider for his family. Mike related that he was now in a management position in the computing area of the college

and that he was very busy, "I would say I put in about 50 hours per week". When I asked

him how he manages all of the demands on his time or his life, he stated:

> It's all about time management. That's how I see it. It's not really that hard to
> accomplish the degree. It's how much you really plan ahead and just – just how
> you stick with the program. If you set up your goals, just make sure you follow
> and manage your time. I have a full-time position, but also I'm a parent and I
> have to schedule things just to make it work. Sometimes it's really hard, but you
> have to do what you have to do to accomplish what you want.

Mike, like the other participants, was very concerned with scheduling and time

management. Though he did not indicate that he used a planner as did Kenesha, Linda

and Sherry, I recalled seeing him sitting outside on the campus studying every day at

lunchtime and again after work. Prior to knowing that Mike was enrolled in Seminole

State's baccalaureate degree, I would occasionally stop and ask him what he was doing.

He always replied that he was working on his classes. I assumed at those times that he

was engaged in a master's program.

As with many of the other participants, Mike faced life obstacles and hindering

situations in trying to complete his degrees. When I explored with him why he had not

completed his degree earlier in his life, he relayed part of the story of a young man who

came to this country alone:

> When I was younger, I was single, living in this country in New York, and I felt
> like I had no one else around me. What am I doing here? I asked myself. I'm
> going back to my country. So, when I finished my (AS) degree in New York, I
> decided to go back to Columbia, but I didn't continue with the bachelor's
> program. I completed an AS degree in computers, but I could have gone all the
> way, but I didn't. I felt alone, and I said, I'm going back to my country. That was
> number 1. Then, I had [severe] health issues, so I had to stop for about two years.

During a follow up interview, Mike clarified what was going on in his life during this period in his life: "I worked in Columbia. And then for a couple of years, I was out of work. I was sick."

Mike, like the other research participants, did not follow a straight path to the bachelor's degree. He completed an AS degree in computer technology in 1995, returned to Columbia to be closer to family and then experienced debilitating health concerns. In following up regarding obstacles that hindered Mike on the path to a baccalaureate degree, he offered:

> I came back from Columbia and started (school) again here in Florida in the year 2000... and finished my AA in 2005. But from 2005 through 2009, I started my own business. And that was another roadblock. That – that didn't work well because the economy started to go down, down. So, once I was done with my business, I went back to school.

With further prodding he added,

> I started an internet cafe… we had a lot of technology. I had computers for games, computers for internet access to emails, Xboxes, Wii, TVs in the other section, and it was doing really well until the economy started going down, down and people just said, well, do I eat or play games, so I decided just to close it. It was--it was the best decision I made to stop right there before it was too late.

Mike, like many other adult students, was goal directed and cited specific reasons for returning to school to complete his baccalaureate degree. When asked about factors that had motivated him to pursue the degree, he replied:

> There are many. I'm going to mention only four. Number 1 is nowadays kids when they finish high school; they already have some degree or an AA. They finish with AA degrees, so competition is really hard. Number 2, I would say has to do with every so often I have to retool myself to be able to compete. So, I go back to school. Number 3 is for my personal goals. I want to achieve a higher degree in my education and the last one is I want to set the bar really, really high for my daughter. I want her to – to look at me and say, I can do better, than my father. So if I get (a) masters, she can (go) for the doctorate degree.

I also probed Mike about his timing and inquired as to whether there was anything in particular going on in his life at the moment that told him it was the right time to pursue a degree. He laughingly responded: "Yes. As I grow older, I figure the harder it's going to be, so I better start doing it right now." In our second interview, Mike confided that his attending school and taking three classes was very difficult on the family. His wife asked that he take only one class during the summer, and he agreed. What he was doing was enrolling in one class during the summer A term and another during the summer B term. Though it appeared to his wife as if he was only taking one class, he was actually taking two. He added determinedly, "I have to finish."

Tom

Tom was a 37-year-old light skinned male who politely refused to disclose his ethnicity. When I asked him about this, he replied, "It's just not important." Tom was married and had two young children. His wife, who did not work, was the primary caregiver to the children, and Tom was, like the other participants, the sole financial provider and leader of the family. Tom arrived on time to the interview after putting in a full day's work as a software developer for Sears. He was tall, dressed casually in jeans and a polo shirt, with short dark hair, deep penetrating eyes, and a perpetual look of seriousness on his face. On reflection, I cannot recall one incident of laughter or merriment coming from him. When I first met him, he seemed nervous and aloof. I attempted light conversation to put him at ease until I understood that this was the way he maintained control over his world. He was, however, very polite during the entire

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interview and extremely deliberate about the information he was sharing. He said several

times that he was glad to help another student, making it clear that this interview was

really not about him and his path to the baccalaureate but rather about helping a fellow

adult student. Reflecting on my interactions with Tom, I believe that he was an

individual who was not extremely comfortable with people, particularly when he was not

in control. An example of this was provided for me when he spoke of an assignment in

his management course requiring each student to develop a survey and then solicit

responses from at least 40 people. He related that he found this extremely difficult to

accomplish and was not "even sure of the purpose." I had spoken with other students

regarding the same assignment, and they thought it was an easy and fun project. The

faculty member who taught the class had told me that the students had suggested the

project in place of an examination, and that all but one student seemed to enjoy the

assignment. I guessed that this reluctant student was Tom, though I kept this information

to myself.

Tom displayed some of the same characteristics I found to be typical of the other

co-researcher participants who juggle many different priorities and responsibilities. He

had little flexibility in his daily schedule particularly when things didn't go as planned. It

was necessary for us to reschedule when his car broke down on the way to classes the

evening of our interview. When I asked Tom about the priorities he had to manage, he

responded:

> Oh, boy. There are a lot of them!! Um, work, kids, wife. Church. You know,
> there--there are social and different things like that. And that's just one of those
> things where, you know, your kids want to--you want to have your kids read (to

you). You want to know what is happening, so you're in tune with their education.
They have to go to the doctor or whatever, so, you want to be involved in that; sporting events if they have any. You know, like if they do soccer, dance, whatever. I want to be there.

He continued:

Work is work, you know. You are there from, you know, 8:30 to 5:30, sometimes longer, and that's just one of those things. Then your wife and family, you know, my wife needs to know that she's wanted and needed.

Having learned in prior participant interviews that adult students often have many more priorities than they initially share, I probed for other activities, obligations or responsibilities that might be impacting Tom's time. What I learned was consistent with data gathered from the other adult students interviewed. Like Kenesha and Linda, after deep probing additional life priorities were revealed. In addition to Tom's full-time job that typically requires in excess of 40 hours per week, a wife, two children and a full course load, Tom also reported devoting several hours per week in church related activities. He indicated that he attended church services one night a week plus most of the day on Sunday. Additionally Tom told of spending four to six hours a week canvassing neighborhoods spreading the gospel. About this additional commitment, Tom explained:

Religion. I mean, I'm one of Jehovah's Witnesses, so, you know, it's--there's different things--I mean, you know, going out in service or whether you're--you know, going to--going to church on Sunday or going to church mid-week or whatever. You, I mean, there's all kinds of obligations. All right, so I might go out in service on a Saturday morning from 9 till 1 or 2 pm, so going out in service would be knocking on your door.

Continuing, he offered:

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You know. Go to church at 9:30 on Sunday morning. I'm there until 11:30. Okay. And then we go on Wednesday evenings from 7:30 till 9:15. It's volunteer. So, you could basically consider it this way. Three hours on Saturday, three hours basically on Sunday, and basically three hours on a Wednesday.

When I asked Tom to describe how this additional activity impacted school and classes,

he stated:

It affects it a lot because your classes, especially at a community college, are in the evenings. You lose one evening. So, you can't do a Monday-Wednesday class, or a Wednesday night class, yeah . . . basically two days, nights is actually what'll lose.

Tom, like Mike, had been in another university's baccalaureate program that was

cancelled. Illustrative of the interconnectedness of the adult students' life and the

sacrifices they must make in terms of family time in order to pursue a degree, Tom

offered that he:

. . .went to UC to the College of Business because MIS kind of fits into what I do. You know, I do software development, databases, analysis, report development, different things like that, and when they discontinued the program, you know, I could have stepped backwards a year and a half and lose all my credits that I had, you know, I'd taken--Yeah, I have taken marketing. I have taken all these business courses that were--basically would have been flushed down the drain and--had to start over again, you know, that to me was stupid. You know asinine, whatever--however you want to characterize it.

Tom spoke rather heatedly about UC cancelling the Management of Information

Sciences degree in which he was enrolled, he spoke of the lost time and effort and the

wasted sacrifices for he and his family. He explained that if he had changed to another

major at the university he would have lost even more time. As I probed further into the

situation that brought Tom to a community college baccalaureate program, he continued:

It was kind of a waste, you know. I had really wasted a good part of my--you know a year. You work full time. You go to school part time. You have to sit there and really, you know, segment your time, you know, to--to get things done

at an appropriate time and level– you know, advantageously. And, you know, I felt kind of--betrayed would have been a nice word--because, you know, I had deferred on doing things with my kids or I had deferred on doing things with friends or whatever so I could pursue my education.

As Tom continued to discuss this situation, his voice deepened, and he became more agitated:

And then for them to come through and say, hey, we're going to cancel the degree path, you know. You can go over here to the College of Engineering and get a degree if you want, but that would have reset me almost a year and a half and that was not what I wanted to do.

Nadira

Nadira was a 54 year old divorced, Middle Eastern, female. Nadira arrived on time for her interview on the campus of Seminole State College. She had a friendly, open face and wore nice dress pants, a casual top, and flat shoes. She was well groomed but wore no makeup. Her long, dark wavy hair was pulled up casually. Nadira was articulate and well spoken. She did have a very heavy accent, making it necessary to clarify what I thought I heard several times during the interview. She found this amusing.

She related that she had just come from a long day at work and was tired. In addition, she reminded me that immediately following the interview she had class and was presenting a project.

Nadira had been divorced for several years and was the sole provider for her small family. She had one son who was attending a local university; he was a junior at the time of the interview. During the initial part of the interview, she identified herself as single. Only much later in the interview did she indicate that she had been divorced. The divorce was a source of great embarrassment for this adult woman. Thus, it was not until

she was comfortable with the interviewer that the divorce was disclosed. She offered that

she came to the United States with her American husband in 1997 and was divorced a

year and one half later. She related that this was a very difficult time in her life "It was

short, a year and a half after I came here (the U.S.) in that, so I feel lost, I don't know

what I am, what to do, but you know, I got through it and I did it." In addition to the

stress and disappointment of the divorce, Nadira also related that divorce is unacceptable

to other Middle Eastern Christians, particularly in her church. She spoke of enduring

great embarrassment and humiliation and of being ostracized by her church community.

She revealed:

> Divorce is very bad, it is not done, and so I had to just. . .just get through it. No, it
> is not done. The people in church, they don't have divorce. You know, I love my
> child. I love my son to death. He was that, I think he's the reason why I am
> alive…

I noticed during the interview that Nadira sounded tired and discouraged. I

learned later that her discouragement came from a job she believed was below her

education and her intellect. Nadira comes from a well-educated family in the Middle

East, and her parents and siblings all have professional degrees. At one point, she told

me that she had a baccalaureate degree, but I learned later that this may be more of a

college credit certificate in accounting. She proudly pointed out that she had done

accounting work in Egypt. Without the necessary qualifications, however, she has not

been able to find a position in an accounting firm in the United States. It has been

difficult financially for Nadira, coming from a well to do family in the Middle East and

raising her son in the U.S. without much support. She has had to work at several jobs

which she felt were beneath her level of knowledge, education, and experience to meet her financial needs.

Like the other adult students Nadira spoke of another obligation; the housing and supporting of family members, distant and close, who had moved to this country. This expectation created a significant financial burden over the years for Nadira. She explained this away with a wave saying "this is what you do." When asked why she did not return to her home country after the divorce, she shrugged tiredly and changed the subject. Her signal was clear that this was not a topic she would discuss.

Gav

Gav was a 25-year-old Hispanic male in the degree program that was the site of this research investigation. We met in the library on the main college campus. He arrived a few minutes late having just come from work. Gav was well dressed in the business casual mode common among IT workers. He was polite, well-spoken and friendly. Gav, like several of the other study participants, was employed full time as a computer support specialist for the city of Altamonte Springs. Unlike several of the others, however, he was unmarried and had no children. He lived in his parent's home, however his parents spent most of their time out of the country. Gav received some financial support from his parents in the form of not paying full room and board. He was careful to share that he did take care of his own individual expenses such as food, insurances, phone, car, gas, tuition, and books. He graduated from high school approximately eight years prior to our interview, completing an AS degree from a local

community college in two to three years. For a time, he attended the regional state

university's MIS program. He had worked full-time since he began his initial bachelor's

degree coursework at the university, and found it increasingly difficult to balance full

time work, a part time work study position, and fulltime coursework. He elaborated:

> A couple of years ago, I remember my grades started going down, down, down
> because I was working full time. Also, I was doing work study for the college. It
> was hard full time at UC. My grades just started decreasing and I've never been
> one to just drop a class. I don't like to use that option, so I got to the point that I
> was put on academic probation.

When I probed more deeply into how Gav experienced the academic probation

and resulting dismissal, he replied: ". . . it's kind of embarrassing to explain sometimes.

To fail, to get dismissed." The concept of regret and failure in schooling is one that came

up several times during the interview with Gav. He related that his younger sister

completed her four-year degree, and when I asked him about his feelings in regard to this,

he replied that he was ". . .more embarrassed. She did finish." When discussing why he

believed the degree was important to him, his response again reflected the embarrassment

and shame he had, "This is something that I think I will use through my life. It feels like

a big failure, you know."

During discussions of his high school experience, he once again spoke of failure

and procrastination, elaborating:

> In high school, I believe I have some similar issues. I was always like, being like,
> you know, from B to C, going down. The progress reports keep coming. Right
> before the semester ended then I had to work hard to get it back up. I used to be
> in a private Muslim school that was very hard. Like always, I didn't study the
> hardest back then, just enough just to make it through.

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When I asked if he had regrets about the way he performed in high school and more recently in college, he responded with a resounding "Definitely!!" Further when asked about his motivation to continue his degree after failing, he shared the following insights:

> My reasons are more personal than just for (doing it)– because I'm trying to finish to get a better job, and my family. I come from Panama, by the way. I came here when I was 15 years old. And the reason my dad has stayed over there--he keeps working on the Panama Canal. My mom came with us to take care of us. We did over two years of high school basically so we don't have to pay out-of-state tuition when we went to college. So, the dream of theirs – it was always for us to come and finish college here in the United States.

When I asked if his parents' move and sacrifice was an important motivation for him, he replied:

> Yes, yes, of course. And, they are very happy with me because work-wise I have come a long way; I have a good job. It's a stable position. It's good pay. But it's something that I feel I owe them, a college degree. They worked very hard to make this for us. They sacrificed a lot for us to get here and this is--at least this is what I can do for them, get that paper.

Gav expressed concerns for time management and the stress of combining full-time work with school even without a wife or children.

> I have noticed that I wish that I would have finished this before. Because having to work and come to school, it definitely makes planning more difficult. I have to plan and manage my time a little better. Sometimes when I do a presentation or projects, group projects, if I come out of work at 4:30, the traffic by the time I get home, I'm tired.

He continued, "Sometimes I don't want to touch a book or get onto the computer to do anything, but I have to--which makes me think back. I say, wow, there were days I was just at home doing nothing."

Cole

Cole was a 26-year-old Black male who appeared to be very interested in being interviewed. We met at the library one morning after classes. He arrived about 15 minutes late and was wearing cargo shorts, a tee shirt, and flip flops. He was easy going and friendly throughout the entire interview, leaning back in his chair with the relaxed casual attitude of good looking young males. Cole was different than the other co-research participants in several ways. Though he met all of the study criteria, he was the only one of the eight who was not working full-time, and he had neither children nor family. At the time of the interview, he was not in a serious relationship. He was employed 30 hours per week as an assistant in a small real estate firm. He told me that he was well liked by his boss and as a result his tuition was reimbursed by his employer for A and B grades. Cole lived with a roommate and had some limited financial support from his family. Cole wanted to make sure I understood that he was self sufficient, paying all of his own bills and that he had recently finished making payments on a car.

Enrollment in the Business and Information Management degree was Cole's second attempt at a baccalaureate degree. He has been enrolled in the regional university's Management of Information Services program until it was discontinued. Cole had completed his AA at a local community college, but it took him several years to do so. He told of dropping out several times as he wrestled with selecting what he wanted to do with his life. After completing his AA degree, he transferred to the university, where he related "I just kind of got lost in the crowd, I guess I would say."

Summary

This chapter presented the demographics of the research participants as well as a composite demographic picture of all students enrolled in the Bachelor of Science Business and Information Management at Seminole State College. The chapter offered the individual participant descriptions and narratives of their lived experiences. Their stories were presented through enlightened narratives using the words of the individual participants as well as reflections of the researcher. Chapter 5 will present descriptions of the themes which emerged during participant interviews and triangulated data.

CHAPTER 5
EMERGENT THEMES: ASPECTS OF THE LIVED EXPERIENCE

<u>Introduction</u>

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to richly describe the experiences of adult students and the community college baccalaureate degree. Once all of the data was analyzed several themes emerged. These themes identified in Chapter 3 will now be discussed in significant detail in relation to the accompanying connected narratives of the participants. The emergent themes identified were:

1. Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life

2. Finding Self Through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors

3. The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as Key to Economic Stability

4. Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Attainment

5. The Importance of Communality to Adult Student Participants Feelings of Belonging

6. Neither Difference nor Disadvantage to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree

<u>Emergent Themes</u>

Theme 1: Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life

The first interview I conducted was with Linda. It was during this interview that several terms (strong, motivated, focused, brave, and resilient) began to reverberate through my consciousness. In the majority of the subsequent interviews, the ubiquitous theme of resiliency continued to emerge in various ways. The adult participants interviewed for the study had multiple major life priorities, e.g., school, children, full-time employment often in low wage jobs, and financial stress. They also had other priorities that impacted their ability to manage their lives. Regardless of these factors, the adult student participants persevered with their education. Tom characterized the spirit of resiliency seen in many of the participants when he reflected:

> You know, I fought my way through. I could have quit in high school, I could never have gone on. I got my associates. I fought my way through something that happened at (regional university), and I continued. I could have quit at (regional university).

As presented in Chapter 4, all but one worked fulltime and all were enrolled in at least two or more courses each semester. Several of the students were enrolled in three and four courses. Many of the participants reported that their jobs and their lives were highly stressful. Kenesha related that her job at a call center was ". . . really stressful, but I got to do it." When asked how this job compared to her time in the army, she stated emphatically that this job was:

> More stressful than the army. . . in this position . . . we had to learn how to talk to the people on the phone. They (the people) are always mad. It's pretty stressful. I don't want to do this for the rest of my life.

Linda also talked about her job as being extremely stressful, "It's 40 hours a week there. The job is extremely stressful. I have a lot on my plate at work." Continuing, she discussed how she must balance school, work, and her addiction recovery program:

So now, it is like my hardest thing is doing work, school and going to enough meetings and trying to work that program (AA), you know. Because once I get through--I'm never through--but once I continue to work on that I can get it done, but it's still making the time to get my school work done, you know. So now I am trying to make time to go to a (AA) meeting and then rush home and do five hours of math homework or do I skip that.

When I asked Tom about his life and the priorities he managed, his response was, "Oh, boy. There are a lot of them, work, kids, wife." Interestingly, he did not mention at this point the 20 plus hours he volunteered each week in church related activities. Tom's explanation of this activity is that, though voluntary, they are an expectation of how one expresses their faith.

Sherry was one of the few students who did not have some type of familial support network, and this compounded the challenges of school, family and work for her. "Yeah, I don't have any family here so, it's challenging, but I've gotten used to it. It has been three years so I've kind of figured out how to balance everything."

Mike also characterized the busy life of the adult student:

It's all about time management. That's how I see it. It's not really that hard to accomplish the degree. It's how much you really plan ahead and just, just stick with the program. If you set up your goals, just make sure you follow and manage your time. I have a full-time position, but I am also a parent, and I have to schedule things just so to make it work. I work about 50 hours a week, take three classes, and so I get up at 4 in the morning to study.

When I marveled that his was a busy schedule, he followed with, "Yes it is. Sometimes it is really hard, but you have to do what you have to do to accomplish this."

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One of the younger students, Gav, who also worked full time, spoke of being so tired when he got home from work that all he wanted to do was sleep. "The last thing I want to do is get on that computer and work, but I might have a presentation and you have to do it." He expounded that when he was younger and his parents were paying for school he "didn't realize how good and easy I had it. I kick myself now".

One characteristic revealed in the interviews was that all participants with the exception of one were the sole providers for their families. Tom was the sole provider for his wife and two children; Mike was the provider for a wife and child; Kenesha provided fully for herself and her two children and partially for her disabled grandmother; Nadira, a divorced mother of one, provided for her son and herself. Nadira also told of taking in relatives who came to this country in order to give them a hand so that "they wouldn't have to experience what I experienced." Sherry, also without a major support group, was raising a son and providing for the two of them. Sherry talked about the stress of her role as sole financial provider. While doing so her eyes were downcast and worry was apparent in her facial expressions. She explained:

> I believe this semester is my last for any grant money, financial aid, so I know it's going to be even harder. It will be money out of my pocket or loans, but for me if I have to take out loans to finish school, then that's what I will do.

Kenesha echoed Sherry's financial plight "I am just making it, but I need more." Kenesha was an understated young woman. When I asked specifically what she meant when she says she needs more, she added, "I have to pay for my children, I have to take them to the doctor, get their medicine, pay for day care, pay for food, it's tough."

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Tough, resilient, not deterred by setbacks, and persistent were some of the hallmark characteristics of the study participants. None of the eight participants had moved along a smooth or traditional path to the four-year degree. Linda took 10 years to achieve the AA degree. Nadira, in a new country, had to first learn the language, then make certain her son was well on his way to completing his education before embarking on her own path. Tom had to overcome the perceived stigma of a learning disability before he started community college. Working full-time to support himself, it took another nine years for Tom to complete the AA degree.

Mike, living alone in a foreign country, moved back home to complete his degree. He became seriously ill, however, and had to "stop" out of school for four to five years to recover. Then, while working full-time to support himself, he took another five years to complete the AA degree. Mike remembered stopping out of college all too well and was concerned about a possible recurrence. He shared in our second interview that his wife had asked him to not take any classes this summer so the family could have some much needed together time. Mike was concerned and expressed that he did not want to stop out again; he wanted to keep going. The couple came to a compromise of one course for the summer term. Mike however enrolled in one course for term A and another one for term B. He told his wife he was only taking the one class, and not the two for which he had actually enrolled. There are two insights to be noted here: (a) the stress of full-time enrollment and full-time work on families, and (b) the strength of determination to complete the baccalaureate degree among the adult student participants.

Another example of the stress and turmoil of multiple priorities on adult students was illustrated by Gav. Early in his college career, Gav worked a full-time job, was enrolled in a full course load at a regional university, and was employed as a 29-hour per week work study assistant. He explained he had to do these things to support himself. As one might suspect, Gav's grades dropped, but he revealed that he was too stubborn to withdraw from any of the courses and was not able to curtail his work schedule. Dismissed by the university, Gav took some time off to "decide what I really wanted," and "save some money, so I wouldn't have to work so much." Once he had the funds to work just one job, he went to the community college to "raise my GPA so I could continue with my education." When Gav finally succeeded in raising his grades, he learned that the university he previously attended had cancelled his management in information sciences (MIS) degree. Discouraged, but not deterred, Gav examined several other options before deciding on the new community college baccalaureate program.

In addition to Gav, three of the eight participants related that they had also been sacrificing to move through the same MIS program when they learned the program was cancelled. These three had to reconsider their options, search for other baccalaureate alternatives and apply to another program so they could continue to move forward. All of these participants were males. Tom, the participant who displayed the most anger about the situation, commented:

> Yeah, it was kind of a waste, you know. I really wasted a good part of a year. You work full-time, you go to school part time, and you have to really segment you time to get things done. And you know I feel betrayed, I had deferred on doing things with my kids, or my friends, or my wife or whatever so I could pursue my education. And then for them to come here and say go over to the College of Engineering and get that degree instead. I think the word is asinine.

The women in the study seemed to also get derailed but more often due to children, relationship problems, or pregnancy. Sherry stated, "When I had my son things got harder. I took six months off and then started back to school." Kenesha also interrupted her schooling when she had her first child. Nadira, surviving a divorce, put off continuing her own education until her son was more established. Linda, who because of the depression and sadness that set in after the adoption and talked of "being drunk for ten years," shared that it had taken her more than 10 years to complete the AA. One phenomenon of the adult students' resiliency was seen in their ability to either continue with classes through tumultuous life situations or to return to school once their life turmoil had subsided. Observed in all of the participants, regardless of their enrollment status, was the will to persist in seeking the baccalaureate degree. They were occasionally distracted but not deterred!

Theme 2: Finding Self Through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors

Motivational factors can be described as the intention, desires, need, and goals that determine human behavior (encyclopedia2.thefreedictionary.com). In much of the literature, adult students have been described as goal oriented (Cross, 1982; Howell, 2004; Kasworm, 2003). What was evident in the findings of this study was the motivation of the adult student as coming from two sources: the intrinsic self and the external self. The external self was seen as it relates to the role the adult plays, e.g., mother, father, primary provider. In contrast, the internal self refers to the intrinsic drive the adult possesses as they seek, as Linda stated several times during our interview,

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"something I always wanted for myself." My reflections of all participants revealed that each of the participants demonstrated this dual foundational source of motivation needed to achieve the baccalaureate degree in the midst of the life turmoil and stressors present in their environment.

There are numerous examples from the voices of the participants that conveyed a desire to obtain the degree to further define self. Cole reflected, "It was just more for me . . . just to be the best person I can be." Kenesha, though she was the only person in her large family to finish high school, offered her rationale for seeking the baccalaureate: "I'm the overachiever, actually I just . . . like success. I like to go higher." She continued, "I don't want to sit around and do nothing with my life. So, I'm here." Like Kenesha and Cole, Gav's words also reflected the self-motivation to achieve when he emphatically stated, "I like the idea, I believe in the idea, and I want to do it! I want to finish it!" Mike expressed the concept of self and motivation eloquently when he spoke of education completing him as a person:

> For me, education is everything. If you don't have education, things will be harder in life. Definitely. You won't have as many opportunities if you don't have an education. And, I think even if I'm 100 years old, I'll be still coming to school. It's a different kind of stress, but it's--its good. It really completes you as a person. It's a complement – to your life.

In yet another instance Linda explained how she was seeking that sense of self through accomplishment:

> Well, having that sense of accomplishment is going to be like really big, but knowing that I finally completed something and I didn't spend $900 a semester or a class to do it and having something where I can say, "Look I've done this; I am qualified," I think that it is going to improve the rest of my life. You know, and if I want to get a masters degree later or something, I've got that, I've got that to start from, you know. I think it will be really good

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When I reflected back to Linda that this sense of accomplishment which she mentioned sounded important in regard to how she felt about herself, she agreed and added, "Yes. I need that, you know. I need to know that I've done something, you know, and that it wasn't just some wishy-washy thing, that it was, you know, something of some kind of substance."

I continued to test the phenomenon that achieving the baccalaureate for these students was about an intrinsic motivating force that was driven by more than money or career desire. Nadira, the oldest of the group, and the participant who had the deepest sense of wisdom, clarified this for me by claiming that her reason for enrolling was "To (just) be in higher education, more than money." She explained further:

> Because I like to be smart. I like to look at the things and understand what's going on. So, higher educational level will – that's how I feel. Higher educational level will give me this ability to understand more, to go with the technology with what's going on in the world now because my son is going to be a lawyer, and he will run his own office. I won't be able to understand what's going on or help with his business [unless I have an education].

When Nadira and I spoke about the stresses in her life because of the divorce and the shunning by her church members, she offered an insight into her decision to enroll in the baccalaureate program. Her words illustrate the interconnectedness between managing her life stressors and achieving self through the baccalaureate by explaining "That's what makes me come to school. I'm trying to be stronger. Trying to be me." Linda also talked about the meaning of the degree to her concept of self, "I would be so proud of myself. I mean I was really proud when I got the associates, the AA. I mean, I have been doing it since 2002. It was just, 'Okay, I did this finally.'" Elaborating on the meaning of the baccalaureate to self, she added;

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You know, I need to get that degree, and I don't know how the other people are, but for me, it's more internally and emotionally that I need that degree more so that I can get where I think I should be. Like I need – I need to know that I did that and I finished it.

Mike also illustrated how achieving the degree would finally help him find self by claiming:

Oh, I think I will finally close some of my, my cycles finally. I've been waiting for this for many, many years, and it's not that I didn't want to go to school, but there is always a roadblock, and it will definitely change the way I feel about myself. Yes.

When I probed how the degree would change how he felt about himself, he offered the following statement. "I think it will make me more self confident to accomplish something that I always looked for. It will make me feel more complete as a person, more complete, yes that's it." Tom also spoke of the need to accomplish the degree for the finding of self through achievement and the power of resiliency, he shares:

I think it'll be--personally, I, I'll be happy, you know, because, hey, I set this goal for myself x number of years ago. You know, yeah I fought my way through. I could have quit in high school, I could never have gone on. I got my associates. I fought my way through something that happened at (regional university), and I continued. I could have quit at (regional university). But, from a personal standpoint, this is kind of that--that growing process. You know what I mean, and you're completing something that you set your mind to and--accomplishing something you thought about for awhile.
External motivation was also a strong theme among the participants. External motivational factors for the purposes of this study were children, future children, career opportunities, and financial needs. Snyder (2010) found that children served as the central influence in first-time-in-college students' motivation to complete the bachelor's degree. The current study supported his findings. A majority of the participants identified their children and future children as providing a strong motivational force.

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Five of the eight participants had children, three were single parents. Of all the children, only one was old enough to be independent. Kenesha puts the theme of children as motivational plainly and succinctly when she stated, "My kids motivate me. They get me up. They need stuff. I got to get it. I got to go to work. I have to pay bills. So, they're—they're my main motivation, my kids." Adding to her comments, she described the pain associated with the sacrifices she is making for her children:

> I remember I took my daughter to day care. It was right up here on Lake Mary Boulevard, and she was 2, and she screamed for what seemed to be an hour, and I had to like tear her off my leg. Yeah, it's terrible. I thought she would be used to it by now. Some days she will be fine. But then other days, like on a Monday morning when she wants to be up under mommy all day it's kind of sad. Because I have to leave her there all day. It'll be better for their future, so, but it's sad.

When I suggest that her daughter will be able to see her mom achieve something that a lot of other people haven't achieved, Kenesha's face brightens again and says in her quiet, but knowing way "Right. It will be worth it." Children and their futures was another strong drive for the participants. Kenesha explained another reason for her enrollment was that "I don't want my kids growing up in an apartment for the rest of their lives. It's not the worst, but I want them to have a house."

Mike, from a male perspective, also spoke of his daughter as a motivational factor:

> I want to set the bar really high for my daughter. I want her to, to look at me and say, I can do better than my father. So if I get masters, she can go for the doctorate degree.

Nadira supported the role of children as motivational as well by offering, "I mean that's—that's the key. You know, I love my child. I love my son to death. He was that—I

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think he's the reason why I'm alive, how I moved forward, but that's how I looked at my son."

In addition to present children, the concept of future children was viewed as a motivational factor by several of the participants. Linda, in describing one of the reasons the degree was so vital to her, identified future children as a motivating factor. She shared one of the reasons she was "getting her four-year degree" was that "I want to have children; I want to be able to care for them, afford them." This sense of wanting children that she would be able to care for in the future was noteworthy for Linda, in that she gave up a child while in her teens because she knew she could not afford a child nor "care for her the way she needed." The motivation to have adequate resources to care for a child was critical to Linda's rebuilding of self. The motivation of needing the degree so that she would be able to take care of her children was also present in Sherry's story. Sherry's need to adequately care for her child, like Kenesha's, was much more immediate than Linda's future plans. Sherry explained, "I take care of my son alone. I am the primary provider" and "He goes to private school, he has activities, I need to be able to make that happen."

Families, parents in particular, also play a major role in providing motivation for these adult participants to complete their bachelor's degrees. Gav, who was single, spoke about the sacrifices his parents made by coming to this country so their children could have the opportunity for a U.S. college education. He explained,

> So, the dream of theirs, it was always for us to come and finish college here in the United States. . . .It's something that I feel I owe them, a college degree. They worked very hard to make this for us.

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When I probed about the notion of owing them, he added "Yes. They sacrificed a lot for us to get here and this is--at least this is what I can do for them, get that paper."

The idea of completing the degree for parents who sacrificed so that their children would have a better life also resonated with Cole. Cole offered that in addition to finishing this degree for himself, one of his motivations was his parents. When I asked what motivated him to get the degree, he replied, "Its family, they brought me up to be the best person I can be, and they have supported me in this, they want me to get this done." Cole, like Linda, also shared the idea of preparing for future wife and family "but it's something that if I take that step with a particular lady, I think that's something, that she's happy knowing she's secure with me".

Being the primary income provider was a motivator and a stressor that these resilient adult students must overcome. Of the eight participants, seven were the full and sole financial providers for their families or themselves.

Theme 3: The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as Key to Economic Stability

Each of the eight participants interviewed expressed the belief that the community college baccalaureate was their opportunity to achieve economic stability and a more secure future for themselves and their families. They expressed that the bachelor's degree from a community college embodied the most viable path to the kind of future they sought. The demographics of the study participants revealed that seven of the eight participants were the sole financial providers for their families. Coupled with the responsibility of being the families' financial provider was the compounding concern that

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six of the eight were in entry-level positions which often, and according to the participants, did not provide a family sustainable income level. Only Tom and Mike had positions where they had the ability to fully provide for their families and themselves. Three of the remaining six (Kenesha, Linda, and Sherry) had confided that they were on one of the financial aid programs. Kenesha shared that she was making it in her entry level position, but conceded "I need more," and Linda who worked more than 40 hours per week in a high stress job disclosed that she was at the bottom in her company and stated in a matter of fact manner, "I have no opportunity." Nadira has had to work two and three jobs at a time to provide for her small family. She was currently a low paid manager of a gas station where she feels undervalued, unappreciated, and used, stating "They barely pay me and are now trying to get rid of me by cutting my hours". The stress of the situation has caused her many sleepless nights.

Many of the participants shared that they struggle with paying for schooling and related costs, but all expressed their belief that the struggle would lead to opportunity. Illustrative of the centrality of the theme that the bachelor's degree would open doors to a better life was expressed by the participants' narratives. Linda's following assertion conveys the meaning of the degree to the co-researchers economic future:

> It is going open enough doors to where I think that I will be able to find a job that will keep me financially sustained to where I can have a decent home, have a decent car and not be--if I can get my budgeting correct--not be in debt all the time, you know, like I don't need--I'm not looking for this degree to give me a $15 0,000 income.

Further clarifying her belief in the advantage of having the bachelor's degree, she added, "I think that it will open doors to where if that is something I want, I can work my

way up in the company." Mike echoed Linda's belief by stating, "Economically it's

going to help me a little bit because it will definitely open more opportunities." In

describing how he believes the degree will enhance his career opportunities, Mike added

"Many organizations are looking for people that have the kind of skills that can manage

and do technical and this program will definitely help economically, especially in the

private industry." Further explaining how the degree will help fuel his future

advancement, Mike asserted: "Yes, absolutely, I want to move up. As it is right now, I

have a managerial position, but. . . I see myself in the future running a technical group.

Being like the lead tech person."

Similarly, Gav explained his desire to seek the degree as also connected to

wanting to move up in an organization "If you want to be promoted, you need to have

your degree." Continuing, he offered the following explanation:

> It would just be a lot easier for me to get a foot in the door and just show what I
> can do as far as work goes, because I guess the years of work I have been –
> everyone knows I can work. It's just can I work in that particular setting
> (manager position). So that'd be, that'd be another challenge that I have to
> overcome and just having a degree would take, take a lot of that blow--would
> cushion a lot of that blow (and make it possible).

When I asked Kenesha if she believed her future would be better if she had the

bachelor's degree, she was emphatic in stating that one of the reasons she was getting the

degree was to provide a more financially stable future for her children and herself,

> Of course. That's one of the reasons why I'm here. . . I need more [finances]. I
> don't have a house yet. I am 26 and I want to buy a house. So, that's my next
> step, to save up and buy a house.

Later, she added:

So, I think that once I do get my bachelor's degree, it will help me go higher, if I
decide to stay at Chase, and also do the family business on the side. I think it will
help me get higher up in the company rather than where I'm at now. I'm at the
entry level, but I think it will really impact my life a lot. Economically and [other
ways].

Similarly, Linda contended that "Given that I have no career opportunities right

now, I think that [the degree] it is going to do well [for me]. I need that degree to get me

something to where I can have that opportunity, you know." Linda recognized that

without the degree her options were limited:

I have the personality. I got the salesman's personality; I know it. And so I
figure business would be the best option because there are so many doors I can
open up from that. I can be a marketing director or, you know, I can be the
traveling salesman or whatever, you know. It's just I have to get that degree to
get in.

Cole, the youngest of the group, shared the views held by the other participants that the

baccalaureate degree will enhance and strengthen his economic vitality. He expanded on

his previous thoughts: "Economic wise I think it'd be a big help. I always hear about the

stats about college degrees that there would be an X percent increase in your bottom line.

So I definitely, I definitely want that X amount."

Theme 4: Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

The option of an available community college baccalaureate was specifically

identified as the key to their future by many of the participants. The participants also

shared their belief that there were limited alternatives available for them to achieve the

bachelor's degree. This belief was in alignment with Manias (2007), Walker (2001,

2007) and Williams (2010) who found that adult students had limited options for

baccalaureate degree completion. The participants' responses to questions as to their

options if the community college had not offered this degree are illustrative of their

perceived lack of viable alternatives. Gav's response to this question was typical of those

of other participants:

> That's a good question. I have no idea. I couldn't think of anything after this. I
> don't know, maybe possibly changing states maybe, going somewhere else. I
> don't know if that would help with anything, which I doubt. I have no idea.

Nadira also spoke of her lack of alternatives when she said, "Nothing. I would

have stayed at the gas station." When I pressed her about staying at a job where she felt

belittled, she replied, "Yeah, even though I hated it, yes. Because there wouldn't be any

other--I would be like applying for other jobs but with--with the feeling, oh, no, they are

not going to pick me, you know." Kenesha also shared she would probably still be

"working, just working and taking care of my kids." When I probed to investigate her

thought process in not searching for other alternatives, she divulged:

> No [I would be] just working, I don't know if I would have thought about it
> because of working and the kids. Then my cousin heard about the new
> construction [BS] program and he started to go here, and then I thought I could do
> it too. And then we all started to talk about starting a business….so I came.

Even knowing how important the bachelor's degree was to her future, Linda also

shared that she did not have another plan to achieve the degree, she explained:

> I have no idea. I would have fiddled around at Seminole State a couple more
> semesters until I finally met with someone at [regional university] to have
> someone show me some kind of degree that would fit what I know that I am
> capable of doing. I know what I am good at; I just don't know what kind of
> degree.

Linda spoke of her lived experiences in seeking out other alternatives for the

bachelor's degree. When she described her experiences, her frustration was palpable. In

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discussing her previous attempts to find a viable option she started waving her hands and

shaking her head while she explained:

> I know that [University C] has business programs, but every time I tried to talk to someone, it was too, it was too overwhelming to get all the information. You know, if I went to that [University] partnership center on campus I was just walking out going I have no clue what I just was told. I don't know the footsteps, you know. Whereas, when I went for the BIM [the community college baccalaureate] thing, it was like, oh, and it was all neatly laid out and explained very easily, you know. And I wasn't walking out going, okay what is this program? Whereas, at University C, when I was explained the degree, I had no idea. So, I--I guess it would have been a business major something or other somewhere!

When I asked Linda about some of the private colleges in the area, she confessed,

"I never even thought of a private school because; I associate private with being more

expensive." Sherry, in discussing other options, had considered another state university,

but that alternative would have necessitated a move. She also expressed a high level of

uncertainly over finding an available option:

> I was actually looking into University S and then having to move somewhere else. I didn't really--I don't know. I really don't know what I would have done. I might have stayed. I really didn't want to do another bachelor's program there at University C because I didn't feel like that was something that would interest me. I really don't know what I would have done.

Sherry also spoke of exploring private colleges, but she, like Gav, determined that

the cost was prohibitive. She explained:

> I looked at Private College E, and some of the other technical kinds of colleges, and they were expensive and the curriculum seemed the same, cost was one of the main things. . . I didn't want to dump a lot of money into something that I wasn't going to like, and not be able to transfer credits out of.

Gav had the compounding obstacles of cost and his prior GPA to overcome in

finding an option for completing his bachelor's degree. He explained:

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I tried University SF, but I would have had to leave my job and move, plus not get in, then University FI, same issue. I'm not even going to try University F or University N. A friend suggested Private College N. I had no idea what it was. I went to the website and it says $20,000, I thought that's the whole program, but no that's per semester. I was like, no, I can't afford that.

Cost was an important consideration in determining feasible baccalaureate options for all of the participants. During the interviews, I asked each participant to place the importance of cost on a scale of 1 to 5 with 5 being most important. All of the participants signaled the importance of cost in their determination of which college to attend by assigning a score of 5 to this item.

Tom and his wife toyed with the idea of moving to North Carolina to finish college, but the reality of moving and waiting a year to establish residency dampened their enthusiasm. Unlike other participants, Mike was the only participant who had a plan which he was ready to enact when he found out about Seminole's new baccalaureate degree program. His plan follows: "I think University F. Yeah that would be my next option. Straight business online degree, yes." One reason Mike may have had a viable alternative in obtaining a bachelor's degree was that he worked in higher education and was, therefore, able to take advantage of opportunities to learn about programs through college days and other recruiting events.

Theme 5: The Importance of Communality to Adult Student Participants'
Feelings of Belonging

One of the critical factors evident in the narratives of the adult students in discussing their lived experiences in a community college baccalaureate program was the importance of a sense of communality. This sense of communality was informally

established within the classroom and throughout the campus services through the adult

students' experience of being comfortable with students who were more alike and a

faculty that understood and provided the support adult students often require. Sherry,

succinctly described the essence of communality when she explained, "You're all kind of

like a support system to each other, because everybody is for that main goal to finish the

degree." In contrast to communality, the more current school of thought emphasizes the

importance of college engagement as being imperative for student success and

persistence. Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) posited that institutions should be

encouraged to focus on ways they can impact their academic, interpersonal, and

extracurricular activities to foster engagement. Engagement, however, has been

operationalized in many community colleges as student activities and the development of

student clubs. Due to the multiple priorities and time constraints inherent in the adult

students' lives, the expectation that adults participate in student clubs and extracurricular

activities may be unrealistic. It may only add to their stress and indicate to them that the

college is not attuned to the realities of adult students' lives and what they need to

succeed. College engagement for the adult student may either need to be redefined or

recast to meet their specific needs.

Evidence of this notion of redefining college engagement and replacing it with

communality was the focus of a study conducted by Collins (2009). Collins found that

community college adult students who returned to college at a major regional university

experienced a sense of disconnect between themselves and the university community.

College engagement scores of the group Collins studied revealed that although the

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students were performing academically at high levels, they reported no sense of engagement or community with the university, and actually felt disengaged with their faculty and other students. What this may tell us is that a sense of communality in the classroom may be much more critical to the adult student than engaging in college-wide activities. Students in the present study discussed being comfortable with other students in their classes who were more alike. They appreciated the presence and connection with a faculty that understood their situations and provided support needed by adult students along with services that are efficient and effective for the working person. These supports structures and services constitute the foundation from which communality is developed.

In the narrative statements of the adult participants in this study, one sees that this sense of communality established within classrooms and through campus services, though informal and possibly unintentional, provided the support and institutional framework required by adult students.

In the present study, adult students in community college baccalaureate programs experienced a sense of belonging on the campus and of feeling that there were "other students like me." They did not experience the "other" but rather were surrounded by "me". Deutsch and Schmertz (2011) described this as "a community of peers" (p. 491) and viewed it as important to adult women returning to baccalaureate programs. This community of peers was central in creating an embracing atmosphere where adult students believed themselves to be supported and able to relate to each other's pressures. This communality helped sustain adults as they juggled multiple priorities and the

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demands of academic work. Participants used their voices to discuss their comfort levels, their feelings of belonging and the presence of communality with their faculty, campus services, and other students.

Sherry described her relationship with her faculty in this way: "I feel like if I ask a question, it's going to be answered at Seminole. If I, you know, if I need some one-on-one time with the professor, they stay after class and they will answer whatever I need." Continuing, she added, "The courses I feel are more challenging at Seminole because there's less, I guess maybe less students that they have to grade for. They seem like they care more. They focus on the curriculum more." Continuing, she suggested, "So it seems like a lot more people care." When I probed more deeply on this topic by asking if she felt that the priority was the student, she responded positively, stating, "Yes, the priority of the faculty is you. Yeah. Definitely."

The concept of a caring community arose frequently in my discussions with the other participants. Linda related, "This was the first time in higher education that someone cared." Gav provided an example of the flexibility and understanding that the community college baccalaureate faculty had for their students and the multiple roles each of them managed. He related a discussion one of his faculty members had with his class in regard to the next semester's schedule:

> I remember we were in a class last week and they mentioned that they were planning to open some new classes at 5:30 pm, and a lot of people had concerns about that because they will not be able to make it on time when they get out of work. They [faculty] were like this is the schedule what we currently have, but they mentioned they would talk to Dr. Cheney [the program manager] about it [our concerns with the start time]. So, this is good to me that they ask about the times that can work for you.

Mike described his experience as a more personal education: "It's more personal compared to a big university like X, but it carries all the benefits of X," and continuing he offered,

> I think when you have almost a personalized education, it makes a big difference. Small classes allow you to make questions, simple questions and get answers right away, so it makes a big, big difference. I'm glad the college has this program, really.

Kenesha also talked about the personal communality of the community college in her following statement:

> If I need to speak to a counselor or anything about which classes I need to take, it's easy to just go in and talk to somebody. You know, like some places, I hear, like universities, it's people [who] don't know your face, you know. So, I just feel more comfortable.

One question posed to each of the research participants addressed the concept of seeing oneself as "the other." Students were asked if they believed they were more like other students in the program or more unlike them. With the exception of two, six of the eight students enthusiastically responded that they were more "like" the other students in their classes and on campus. Sherry felt that she was less like other students because of having a younger child, and Nadira said she was unlike other students because she "was Middle Eastern."

The other six students were strong in their belief that they were all more alike. Cole responded to the question with "I'd say more alike," and Mike concurred, "I'm more alike, I would say. Yes. I go pretty well, go along well with my classmates." Mike in describing the other students in his classes said that motivation and trying to better

oneself were the common factors creating solidarity and connecting all of the students.

He explained:

> That's what people have in common when I go to my classes and I talk to my classmates. That's the message I get. They all want to accomplish something. They know exactly what they're going for, even for work or personal accomplishments. These people are working really hard to combine things. That's what I see. I know these are hard-working people.

In describing the community college baccalaureate student experience, Mike also

added:

> That's been a great experience as well because there's a wide range of people that you get to know, people older than me, the very young, but they all have no problem with sharing information with you or understanding the same place with you. They see you as someone--as another person with no difference of age or discrimination for anything, language, you name it?

Gav, another of the younger students at age 26, reinforced Mike's contention by

explaining that he identified with the other adult students in the program "being in the

same position now and having to work. . . . I guess I kind of identify with them now;

older students." Tom also shared many of the same perceptions as the other research

participants, "I'd say alike. I think we're all more alike." Exploring with Tom how this

compared to his recent experience at a regional university, he offered,

> I'd say I was a little bit more different [there]. . . . I actually enjoy the community college environment a little bit more. I mean, they're nice kids [at the university] and there are some really good ones. But, you know, by and large, they're-- they're kids. They're younger. They're younger by a long shot.

Furthermore, Tom supported the reality of communality by referring to

classmates as "we." His response "I'd say alike. I think we're all more alike." signified

the communality of the group, rather than of individual students or, of being the other.

Cole who was previously enrolled in a university program talked about his comfort at the community college. He related that he "liked the atmosphere of the community college" and contrasted "it [the university] is big and you don't see the same thing every day. . . it's distracting. Here it's a little bit more of a focused setting." In support of Cole's assessment, Gav explained, "a community college definitely has a different feel than an actual place like [regional university]. When I asked him to explain what he meant by his comment he explained:

> You notice at [university] let's say you have a question about finance or you go over to the finance department or you have a question about your program. If you have any question, they send you a thousand places. Sometimes you go to one place, they send you to another. They send you back. It's like a huge business. [At community colleges] any questions that you have, they can help you out. And that's something I always liked about community colleges.

Reinforcing his position, Gav added, "They're actually--they tend to be more friendly, have a more human side of things here."

Kenesha also responded to the question with "I would say I'm more alike." She went on to state, "I am comfortable here" and explaining further "I went here already. I just feel more comfortable, you know. I don't like starting over in new places, so it was easier for me to just come here." Linda, one of the more verbal of the participants, shared that "In the classes I have at night, I would say I am more like the majority of them, you know." Reinforcing her response she added further thoughts:

> I would say a lot of us are middle class and a lot of us who aren't and they are poor, they're all on financial aid and I think that that's what is pushing more of them to succeed or to want to do better is because they--this is their only option. If they're on the Pell program or student loan, like, you know--the only way that they're going to be able to get out of whatever financial troubles they're in is with a degree, you know. But I think a lot of us are lower to middle class.

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When I asked Linda if she felt that this statement about income levels described

her, she affirmed that it did characterize her situation.

Sherry, age 25, was one of the two students who reported feeling different from

the others. She proposed that she was different because most of her classmates had older

children, stating: "I'm different only because a lot of the students either had kids and their

kids are grown or they don't have children. . . they say they have free time now because

their kids are grown." When she said this, I reflected back to the hectic life of a full-time

job, four classes and a young child that Sherry manages solo. Even though she indicated

feeling different from the others, Sherry described the benefits she had experienced in the

community college baccalaureate program in contrast to the university program in which

she was previously enrolled. She explained:

> I like working or going to school with older people because I can get--gain
> knowledge, gain things from them, some things that they'd be able to better
> explain to me or--I work better with them. They're accountable when you have
> group projects. You know they're going to show up or finish.

She contrasted her experience at the university:

> It's harder on some people to go to the university and to find parking and then to
> be there with, you know, students who are getting their school paid for. They
> don't really necessarily have to work; if they work it's just for play money.

With this statement, I recalled her earlier concerns about a lack of flexibility at the

university. She share that she experienced missing some tests because her babysitter

didn't show up.

Cole shared similar perceptions of his time at the university:

> Maturity-wise [the community college baccalaureate older students] knows what
> they really want to do. Some students in the university, they're just going to go,
> but they're not putting forth their best effort in it. You see, like I noticed at

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Seminole this semester you always have the dropout rate. I mean some people drop out of the class, but it's not as much as the university and more people show up to class every week at Seminole.

Cole also described benefits of having the opportunity to relate to more mature students in classes:

I think it brings more to the table with just having concrete examples by people who've been there, done that and shared the experience rather than having a lecture, because I'm pretty sure that the professors had the experience before, but to have someone who relates to you like a classmate say the same thing, it definitely does carry a little bit more weight.

In agreement with the above excerpt, Sherry also reinforced the importance of the community atmosphere of her baccalaureate classes:

And [I get] a lot of motivation, from being around people at Seminole that take the night classes--you're in there with people who actually care, they pay attention, they give good feedback, and that you can work with, that you can study with, that you're all kind of like a support system to each other, because everybody is for that main goal to finish the degree. At [university] you know, you're still young. There's a lot of people there. You're partying all night and, they just, I don't know, it's just the feel and the atmosphere is just different from being at university.

Theme 6: Neither Difference nor Disadvantage
to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree

The adult students included in this study did not perceive any disadvantage to having a baccalaureate degree from a community college as opposed to a more traditional university degree. When asked their opinions about community colleges' offering four-year degrees, they were unanimously positive in their remarks. Mike expressed his view about opening up opportunities for those who might not otherwise have the chance to attain the higher degree. He explained:

I think it's great because they will open opportunities for people of low income. I see some of my classmates that wouldn't be able to make it to get a higher degree, bachelors in a university, just because they don't have the resources to do it and this college has opened the doors for them to accomplish that. Otherwise, I don't see these people going to a university; pay the higher rates and just move, travel long distances to University C.

Continuing, he elaborated:

It's a great program, and many people were waiting for something like this, and they have ideas. All the time I hear them say, oh, we should have one for law enforcement or something else. . . . people from the community really will benefit. Also as a parent, I see that I can afford a community college and maybe not the university. So, it's great that community colleges are taking over some programs that universities don't care for.

Cole's perception of community colleges offering baccalaureates centered on providing options for those who were financially disadvantaged, "I think it'd be an additional option just in case like someone who, someone who's not as financially capable. I know I'm not financially capable, so it definitely does help."

Gav saw the community college baccalaureate as providing a much needed second chance for students. Using himself as an example, he shared his thoughts:

Personally, it was my saving grace, I guess, to find this program so close to home, available without having to move because this was my only option. Actually, when I tried University C, tried other colleges, I was unable to get in them. I was thinking, you know, this is it nothing else!! And then when I realized Seminole was offering it, I was like, wow, there's a chance, a second opportunity. And that's something I really appreciated. So, for me, it's a great idea.

Offering a different perspective Sherry argued:

I think that in the long run that it would actually be better because they're [community college baccalaureates] tailored towards people who really are looking to further their career and that have, you know, they've got all extra family and work and this is what's important to them, so they want to finish this degree. They're putting forth their best effort for it, to it, and they have the experience. A lot of them do have experience in what they're already doing. They just want to secure it with a degree.

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Tom viewed the community college baccalaureate as advantageous for those who work full-time as well. He supported his position:

> I think, I think that's great. I think that community colleges serve a great purpose. I mean, I think University C was a good school, but I think a community college is more, is more directed or it seems like it's more directed towards somebody who is either working full time or working to support themselves, whether they're a younger person or whether they're an older person or whether they have a family or whatever--it's directed towards that.

When I asked Linda for her position in regard to the question of the community college baccalaureate, she quickly replied "I love it!" Explaining more, she emphasized some benefits she recognized:

> The classroom sizes are smaller, and it is cheaper. I can't afford to go to University C. It is just too much for me, especially since I am paying on my own. So having a bachelor's through another school, I still feel like I am doing the footwork that I want to do to have that kind of degree, but I don't have to shell out an extra $500.00 [a semester].

Kenesha agreed, "I think it is great, uh-huh." Exploring more with her, she asserted, "Well because it's closer to home, and it's easier. There are smaller classes, and the professors--like we know each other on a name basis, so--I think it's good." Continuing, she reflected on her own situation, "Well, I think it's great. It's more convenient for people like myself that have kids and have other obligations and things."

Moving to the idea that the degree may be seen as lesser than a four-year college or university degree, Cole offered: "I would say that it probably carries the same as like a regular university baccalaureate. Um, I would say that it is a bit--a bit more simple because it has a community college setting which it's more personal compared to a big university like UC, but it carries all the benefits of University C." Linda was effusive in

her defense when presented with the notion that there might be a disadvantage to the

community college program:

> It's ridiculous. I mean--I have friends that go to the university, and they hardly learn anything from the teachers and everything else is done by teacher's aide. That person, the teacher's aide is not a qualified, licensed educator, and I know that we all have to be licensed to teach, so why should universities be considered better when the majority of the time, from my impression, they're hardly there-- they're hardly as present as something at a community college. They're licensed. They went and did the same testing that someone at University C did to get--to have this opportunity.

> Cole explained his position:

> I didn't really have any like reservations. I would, I understand people having reservations about it, especially if it's just starting and they're just getting like their first set of students from that program. But, um, I don't see it as any different from a four-year school like University C because they are just pumping out students. And, most of their classes are like online based and you're not really learning too much from an online class than if you're here taking a regular class as well as, um, it's a smaller class, so, it's more concentrated to the student and their concerns rather than just saying, here you go. Good luck. So, I'd say that there's an advantage to having community colleges have four-year degrees than not.

> Mike also discussed the community college baccalaureate from each individual's

perspective:

> I think that the person is the one that makes the difference, not just the diploma that has a fancy name, University of this or that. It's the people that really make the difference, and we get a high education here at the college.

> Tom offered that he initially had concerns about receiving a bachelor degree from

a community college: "Initially I think there were concerns." In explaining his position,

he expanded,

> Initially, I did. I think that it's one of those things where you kind of get into that rut where you're sitting there saying, 'Well, you know, what's going to be taught at the community college?' but I think that overall the course load is very similar to what University C taught and to me that was, you know, it's okay."

When I explored further to gather his impression of the attitudes of prospective employers, he stated, "I think if they do that, then that's up to them. You know, what I mean?" When I questioned him further about possible employer concerns about the degree, he replied that he did not believe it would be an issue. Mike agreed with this stance in regard to employers, stating, "If they had the chance to look at the quality of work, they will say this person got a good education regardless where that education came from."

Cole drew comparisons between the new community college baccalaureate degree program and a small elite private and very expensive college in the area:

> I think that, for example, here [Seminole] it has that sort of potential [College R] because we have a lot of professors that have work experience like Professor C, and Professor W, she has worked with Proctor and Gamble for years, so she knows the business setting, and she conveys it multiple times in our, in our lessons. So, it's just an amount of time before businesses know what the type of professors that we deal with and also with Professor C. who has that experience as well and who is, from what I hear, an awesome teacher.

Cole, however, confessed that he initially had concerns about obtaining a community college baccalaureate "In the beginning when I first left University C that was one of my concerns" however he adds "I was told by my boss, my then boss at University C, it doesn't really matter where you get it from as long as you have that paper, that's what they're looking for--at least in my field which was IT."

When I queried Sherry about any concerns about a community college degree and if it would make a difference at the law firm where she was employed, she confidently replied:

> I think it will be better just to have the degree. I don't think there's a difference-- from the places that I've worked, I don't think it really matters where you've

gotten your degree from, so I don't think that's going to be a big issue unless you work at like a really prestigious law firm or something or--but as long as I have the degree, I think it will be good.

She added, "There are people at my law firm with degrees, and I don't know where the degree is from. I don't think my employers know or care, just that you have one and can do the job." Mike agreed with Sherry and the other participants, in his response:

> I think that the person is the one that makes the difference, not just the diploma that has a fancy name, University of this or that. It's the people that really make the difference, and we get a high education here at the college.

Summarizing, Kenesha agreed, "I think it's great. It's more convenient for people like myself that have kids and have other obligations and things." Continuing, she offered, "I like having the program here because it is more convenient for me. It's a closer proximity for me and--and for other people that are here, too."

Summary

In this chapter, each of the emerged themes was explored from the participants' perspectives, reflections, narratives and triangulated data. Once the major themes were identified, the co-research participants provided verification and confirmation of their experiences which aligned with the themes. The identified themes were:

1. Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life

2. Finding Self Through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors

3. The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as Key to Economic Stability

4. Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment

5. The Importance of Communality to Adult Student Participants' Feelings of Belonging

6. Neither Difference nor Disadvantage to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree.

CHAPTER 6
RESULTS

Introduction

   The chapter contains a discussion of the thematic findings as they relate to each of

the research questions, the conceptual framework, and the literature reviewed for the

study. There were three research questions designed to provide a framework through

which the lived experiences of adult students and their decisions to enroll in a community

college baccalaureate could be explored.

   The data collected from the eight participants were gathered through semi-

structured interviews, demographic questionnaires, deep researcher reflection, member

checking, and field notes. The process yielded rich descriptions from the participants

about their experiences. The questions were also instrumental in enabling a descriptive

composite picture of their lived experience with the degree. The emergent themes

provided a unique perspective of adult students as they manage life in the pursuit of

attaining educational goals.

Summary and Discussion of Findings

Research Question 1

   What narratives do adult students tell of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a

community college baccalaureate degree program?

   This question was designed to explore and uncover themes that might emerge

from the perspective of adult students about their decisions to enroll in a baccalaureate

program. Three thematic findings that answer this research question were generated from the invariant constituents.

The first was that *adult student participants found self through intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors.* All of the participants in the research study were able to clearly express their motivations for enrolling in the baccalaureate degree program. Participants described the significance that achievement of the baccalaureate would have on their lives and their sense of self. Each shared the intrinsic and extrinsic factors that provided motivation to overcome life's obstacles in their journey towards the degree. That children and family were frequently identified as major sources of extrinsic motivation was congruent with the literature that was reviewed. Mike, in describing the impact he hoped the degree would have on his children expressed, "I want to set the bar really high for my daughter." Kenesha shared that she was enrolling in the degree because she wanted a better life for her children; she did not want them to "grow up in an apartment."

The narrative power expressed by many of the participants regarding the centrality of their intrinsic motivation to achieve the degree and define or redefine self was unexpected. Mike described this intrinsic motivation as "the degree will complete me" and Linda shared that achievement of the degree "will be something of substance," adding that "I need this degree for myself, to know that I accomplished something worthwhile." Cole reflected that the degree "is just more for me" and Nadira eloquently described the interconnectedness of the achievement of the degree and finding self in her phrase "trying to be me."

This intrinsic motivation to achieve the baccalaureate degree echoed the findings of Cross (1982) and Kasworm (2003) who found that adult students had purposeful plans to accomplish the degree for themselves and their families. What was unexpected, however, was the power of this intrinsic motivation on the adult students' decisions to enroll in the baccalaureate program. Every participant mentioned the need to achieve the degree "for myself." Often, the discussion of motivations for pursuing the degree began as they conveyed their desire to achieve the degree as a means of defining who they were. It was only after stating their passionate narratives involving finding self through the degree that the participants turned to the more pragmatic reason for enrollment--economic benefits.

A second theme emerged from their narratives about motivations. *Adult student participants viewed the community college baccalaureate degree as key to economic stability.* The belief that the baccalaureate would provide important opportunities for achieving financial stability was a strong and frequently described external motivator for each of the participants. The theme of career advancement and economic stability overlapped with the theme pertaining to the intrinsic motivations of adult students. Moustakas (1994) posited that overlapping themes is not an uncommon occurrence due to the interconnectedness of the human experience. Any human experience is frequently linked to a constellation of life factors and must be viewed as a comprehensive whole. Life experiences cannot be dissected and viewed discretely but must be viewed as part of and impacting the whole (Moustakas, 1994).

This focus on career advancement and economic stability was a central theme for each of the co-researchers and has been one of the important motivational forces described in the literature on adult students (Cook, 2002; Cross, 1982). More recently, Grothe, in a 2009 study of students who enrolled in community college baccalaureate programs, also found that financial advancement was an important consideration for students. Consistent with Grothe's findings, the seeking economic stability through the achievement of the baccalaureate degree was a prime motivational force for adult students.

I suggest that the convergence of the dual motivations of the adult student, the finding of self and the need for economic stability plays a much more powerful role in the adults' decision to return to college than the single motivation of completing the degree for economic security.

A third theme emerged as the participants described their experiences as adult students returning to college and participating in a community college baccalaureate degree program. It was clear that these adult student participants were resilient in managing their lives and therefore a significant theme evolved: *Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life.* The adult student participants shared the narratives of their lived experiences in their decisioning to begin enrollment. Key to their decisions to enroll was their belief in their ability to overcome encountered obstacles and their ability to persevere in schooling despite the turmoil of their lives. The participants in the present research study linked their ability to overcome life's obstacles as a prime factor in their decision to enroll in the baccalaureate program. These adults told stories of their

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educational lives that were fraught with experiencing and meeting the challenges of complications and difficulties. One of the participants discussed a 10-year alcohol and drug addiction, another a debilitating illness, and others described poverty, young children, single parenthood, and learning disabilities as some of the difficulties which impeded their educational progression. All of the participants displayed a resiliency which enabled them to move past challenges and embrace the risk of re-entering higher education. Each understood the difficulties that would need to be faced in undertaking the degree, yet all participants made the decision to move forward. Sherry's comment of "When I had my son things got a little more difficult" and Kenesha's declaration of "I got to do what I got to do," were perfect examples of this resilience and persistence. In studying resiliency in adult women returning to college Howell (2004) advocates for viewing resiliency as a response that promotes successful adaptation and achievement. The participants in this study exemplified resiliency as an adaptive response to their life challenges.

The theme of resiliency was addressed from a slightly different perspective by Richardson and King (1998) who discussed the multiple burdens, roles and responsibilities that must be negotiated by the adult student. Important to this discussion was the finding that the adult student participants interviewed for this study were not able to set aside their primary roles, e.g., Kenesha's statement of "I got to do, what I got to do." This negotiation or management of multiple priorities was supported by McPhee (2006) who found that adult students described themselves as employees first and

students second. This study adds to this notion by suggesting that the roles of caretaker, primary provider, and parent also take precedence over the role of student.

One of the key findings of this study was that the successful management of multiple priorities was imperative to the adult student participants' ability to successfully return to college and to navigate the obstacles they faced in this endeavor. Each of the participants discussed the multiple priorities in their lives and how they had been able to manage these. One of the co-researchers, Mike, told of stretching the truth about the number of classes in which he was enrolled by telling his family he was enrolled in one class for the summer term when in fact he was enrolled in two. Mike's strategy was linked to his need to complete this degree so that he could successfully compete for advanced management positions.

The multiple pressures in the lives of adult students must be taken into consideration. The thought by higher educational professionals that schooling must take priority in the lives of adult students is to ignore life as the adult student experiences it. There is limited opportunity to set aside family and employment priorities. Successful adult students must be able to manage through and juggle all of their roles. Without this ability to manage competing priorities simultaneously, I offer that the adult does not enroll.

Research Question 2

How do adult students perceive and describe meaning to having access and opportunity to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program?

This second research question was designed to reveal and describe the meaning to the adult student participants related to having access to a community college baccalaureate degree program. Two themes emerged which together provided a rich response to this question. First, it was clear, in responding to this question, that once again adult student participants viewed *the community college baccalaureate degree as key to economic stability*. In their roles as adult students, the co-researchers in this study viewed the baccalaureate degree as the primary and often sole means of achieving economic stability. The belief that the baccalaureate would provide important opportunities for career advancement was a strong and frequently described belief of each of the participants. The adult students' beliefs in the net benefits and return on investment of the baccalaureate degree allowed them to view their sacrifices as part of an overall plan to achieve something financially worthwhile for themselves and their families. When Kenesha discussed the sacrifices she was making in leaving her children so she could attend college, she ended her narrative with "It will be worth it. Yeah. It will be worth it." The thematic finding of the adult students' belief that the baccalaureate degree was key to their financial success is important in understanding the adult student in the college environment.

This research question also called upon participants in the study to share their perceptions of obtaining a baccalaureate degree from a community college rather than a

traditional four-year institution. The discussions, perceptions and narratives expressed by the participants brought forth yet another theme: *Adult student participants perceived neither difference nor disadvantage to obtaining a community college baccalaureate degree.* In discussing this question, those interviewed expressed that they did not perceive any difference or disadvantage to baccalaureate degrees offered by community colleges and those offered by traditional universities. In fact, adult students were quick to cite advantages such as small class size, comfort in the environment, rigor and relevancy of the curriculum, relationships with faculty, ability to get questions answered and costs as reasons for their beliefs. These described benefits were consistent with those identified by Grothe (2009).

None of the participants in the study expressed any reservation about obtaining their baccalaureate degree at a community college nor did they believe there would be future negative consequences for employment because of it. One of the students cited that his employer (University C) recommended he consider the community college for his baccalaureate degree.

Consistent with my research findings, Manias (2007) also found that community college baccalaureate students had prior positive experiences at community colleges. All of the adult student participants in the present study had prior community college experience, and many were able to recall specific instances in their earlier experiences that supported their present positive views of the baccalaureate degree. Sherry, who also expressed positive views of community college baccalaureate degrees, contrasted her experiences at a community college with her time at University C. She related that the

community college faculty had made such an impact on her life and education that she still kept in touch with them.

Of interest in regard to this area of questioning was the puzzlement and surprise of the adult student participants when the issue of disadvantage and difference between the community college baccalaureate and the more traditional university degree was mentioned. I had anticipated that the students would express concern about the possible disadvantage of a community college baccalaureate; however, the opposite was true. The refrain of "Why would there be a difference?" was heard several times from the participants. Tom offered that the rigor of the courses was the same, and Mike thought the demands were greater because of the smaller class size and increased attention by the faculty. Linda, being more vocal and expressive, stated, "That's ridiculous!"

The position of the student in support of the legitimacy of the community college baccalaureate was reflective of contemporary literature on the new baccalaureate model, yet inconsistent with the criticisms expressed by higher educational professionals. Several authors have questioned the legitimacy and quality of community college baccalaureate degrees, referring to the new degrees as lesser than (Campbell, 2005), inferior (Eaton, 2005; Glennon, 2005), and not up to the pedagogical rigor of a traditional baccalaureate degree (Townsend, 2005). The adult students' voices about the community college baccalaureate did not lend any support to these concerns. Rather, they were in agreement with Grothe (2009) who reported that employers and community college baccalaureate graduates had high regard for the education received.

Research Question 3

What meaning did the community college baccalaureate have for adults' decisions to return to college for a four-year degree?

This question was posed to better understand how and to what extent the availability of a community college baccalaureate degree impacted the adult student participants' decisions to return to college. An understanding of the degree from the view of the adult student can provide important information for state policy making bodies and college administrators as they wrestle with decisions on whether to initiate or curtail new baccalaureate degrees. Two themes emerged from interviews which responded to this research question.

First, because of a number of significant life obstacles, along with their status as non-traditional students, *adult student participants perceived limited alternatives to baccalaureate degree attainment*. Central Florida is home to numerous higher educational opportunities, including local and regional public institutions, fully online colleges, and numerous private, for profit and not for profit higher educational choices. Still, the adult student participants voiced concern and frustration over their perceived lack of educational alternatives. When asked about his options should the community college baccalaureate not have been available, Gav shared with considerable anxiety, "That's a good question. I have no idea. I couldn't think of anything after this." Seven of the eight participants echoed Gav's anxiety and confided that they did not have an alternate plan. This concern over limited options for adult students has been reported in previous literature on students and the community college baccalaureate. Manias (2007)

and Williams (2010) wrote that between 16% and 20% of the students enrolled in community college baccalaureate programs believed they had no other viable options. In the present study, only one of the eight participants saw any other viable option. Nadira, reflective of the anxiety caused by her perceived lack of alternative options for higher education, confessed that her alternative was to do "nothing. I would have stayed at the gas station." In another example of the difficulty of finding other options, Linda responded, "I have no idea" when asked about an alternative plan. Kenesha's response that she would be doing "nothing, just working and taking care of kids I guess," reflected the confusion and frustration adults face when seeking baccalaureate options that fit within their lives. The finding in the present study regarding adult students' views of limited options for higher education were typically attributed to the high costs of other programs and their lack of flexibility. This emergent thematic finding aligned with that of Russell, (2010) who described cost as a deterrent, Manias, (2007) who identified location as a constraint and Kasworm (2003) and Walker (2000, 2001, 2005) who found limited flexibility as a constraining factor to degree completion by adults.

Findings from previous studies on adults and baccalaureate degrees (Ruud et al., 2010) have also noted the limited higher educational opportunities for adult students. One of the major premises upon which the community college baccalaureate was justified is the need to provide adult students with feasible educational options. Walker (2002, 2007) and Fanelli (2007) have postulated that the new baccalaureates offer educational opportunities to new groups of students. These findings were certainly born out in the

present study as the adult students expressed their beliefs that they had few, if any, other viable options for baccalaureate degree completion.

Co-researchers described the importance of the informal communality established in their programs and classrooms through the existence of several factors. Primary among these factors was the presence of "others like me." Adult students saw themselves as part of a community where they were more alike than not, all having multiple priorities, responsibilities and resource limitations. All but one of the students described feeling more alike than different from fellow classmates, and every student spoke of being comfortable in the community college environment. Thus, a second theme emerged in response to this research question: *The Importance* of *Communality to the Adult Student Participants' Feelings of Belonging.*

Communality is a result of student and faculty interactions with one another. Faculty members were described by the adult student participants as important catalysts in the development of communality. The relationships adult students developed with each other as well as their faculty established a spirit of communality where students felt supported. Flexibility shown by faculty in considering students' wishes was cited as an important indicator of the faculty's understanding and appreciation of the needs of adult students. Sherry characterized the baccalaureate program in the community college as an environment where everyone was there "as a support to each other." Mike discussed his observations that all of the students were "the same, and that no one cared about differences in age and language." What became obvious through the participant narratives was that this sense of communality was informally created by faculty together

with the students within each of the classrooms, and appeared to be more important to the students than planned college- wide engagement activities.

Based on the narratives of the co-researchers in this study, therefore, it would appear that communality, not engagement in college-wide activities, is key to the adult student participants' feeling of belonging. This understanding is critical to appreciating the power communality plays in the successful integration of the adult student into higher education. The call for attention to the needs of adult students in higher education has not gone unrecognized in the literature. Howell (2004) described adult students as feeling marginalized in higher education, and Collins (2009) urged universities to become more welcoming places for their adult students.

Though none of the previous research on the community college baccalaureate degree described communality in the classroom, Grothe (2009) found that community college baccalaureate students identified discomfort at the university as one reason for their enrolling in the community college degree. My study supported this finding and also identified discomfort at the university as a deterrent to baccalaureate enrollment. When Kenesha spoke of the university as being too big, she was in reality expressing her discomfort in that environment. Linda also talked about not understanding what she was told at a university admissions office, Tom called his former classmates "just kids," and Nadira told of being lost on a bigger campus. Sherry needed more flexibility from her professors, and Gav spoke about his need for a second chance. All of these narratives support a description of adults who yearn for an educational environment where they are not the "other" and who have found it in the community college.

Thematic Findings Related to Kingdon's Multiple Stream Theory

In this research, a modification of Kingdon's Multiple Streams (MS) approach was used to view the phenomenon of the adult student and the community college baccalaureate in a new way. MS primarily focuses on policy development and agenda setting from a legislative view. Kingdon's model has three major components (a) identification and definition of a problem, (b) the selection of alternative, and (c) the political environment. For the purposes of this study, Kingdon's model was modified for use with adult students and their sense making of the community college baccalaureate.

Problem Identification

The first component of the model, problem identification, was modified to determine (a) the problem or problems adults are trying to solve by returning for the baccalaureate degree, (b) the reasons for their going back to college to obtain a baccalaureate degree, and (c) the problems or obstacles they have encountered during their quest to return for the bachelor's degree. In the data analysis, the following two themes aligned with this component of the model: *Finding Self Through Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivational Factors* and *The Community College Baccalaureate Degree as Key to Economic Stability*. Problem identification, as described by Kingdon, has a more negative tone than what was revealed in this study of adult students. On reflection, I would conceptualize and modify this aspect of Multiple Streams theory from problem identification to goal attainment. The participants were less motivated by solving a problem and were rather motivated by attainment or achievement of goals. Specifically,

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it was the dual power of finding self and achieving economic stability that drove these students to make a powerful though difficult decision.

Choosing from Alternatives

The second component of the model, choosing from alternatives, was both appropriate and significant to the study in that there are many options or alternatives offering baccalaureate completion programs in the region. How and why adult students choose the community college baccalaureate is of interest to higher educational professionals such as the researcher and should also be of interest to policy makers as they consider expanding the role of the community college. In Florida, there have been several options for the baccalaureate degree, i.e., traditional state universities, state universities offering baccalaureate programs on community college campuses, private colleges, for profit colleges and universities, and fully on line degree programs. The alternatives available to adults and their perspectives regarding the CCB were explored in this study. In the data analysis, two themes aligned with the second component of the model: *Limited Alternatives to Baccalaureate Degree Attainment* and *Neither Difference nor Disadvantage to Obtaining a Community College Baccalaureate Degree.*

Using MS theory provided powerful insights into the adult students' decision making process as well as to the theory itself. Without the framework provided by Kingdon in terms of alternatives, the researcher might not have explored so deeply the reasons adults chose the community college when so many other perceived options were available. It was only by delving deeply into how adult students chose the community

college did the researcher realize that the adult student perceived no other alternatives. In essence, the other available alternatives were not ever perceived by the adult student as realistic options and were, therefore, essentially never seriously considered. In Tom's discussion of his contemplation of transferring to a college in North Carolina, his words of what it would have taken to make this move belie that any real serious consideration was given to the option. There was only one participant, Mike, who had a realistic and attainable option, all of the others were lost for other alternatives. Without a focus on alternatives I suggest that this theme would not have emerged.

The Political Environment

The final component of the model, referred to as the political environment by Kingdon (1995), was modified to describe in the students' own voices their prior educational experiences, the life and familial environment of the adult, and how their environment contributed to their choosing to enroll in a CCB. Two themes were aligned with this component as a result of viewing the phenomenon and data analysis through the lens of MS: *Resiliency vs. Obstacles: Managing Life* and *The Importance of Communality to Adult Student Participants Feelings of Belonging*.

Delving into the adult students' environment and life circumstances to understand the phenomenon and meaning of the community college baccalaureate degree provided the essential foundation for the discovery of the emerged themes. Hearing from each participant in their own words their life story and life circumstances in which they exist brought out the essence of each individual, their journey, their hopes and dreams, and

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what shaped them. Without exploring this aspect of self, I as the researcher might not have understood the driving force and strength it took for Linda to remain clean and sober for eight months and the powerful role the community college baccalaureate played. Additionally without a focus on the life situations or environment of these adults, their other obligations such as, Kenesha's grandmother, Tom's church activities and Nadira's role in helping her family assimilate to this country, might not have emerged. To miss this aspect of the adults lived experience would have resulted in a less comprehensive understanding of their life constructs.

In summary, through the analysis and synthesis of the adult students' descriptive narratives of the community college baccalaureate experience, it was determined that Kingdon's Multiple Streams theoretical framework as modified for this study was an appropriate and robust lens through which the phenomenon could be described and understood. The framework employed provided opportunities to glean insights that may have otherwise gone unnoticed such as the power and benefits of establishing communality within the classroom environment.

CHAPTER 7
IMPLICATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This chapter discusses the implications of the study for legislative and policy informing bodies, community college administrators and finally faculty who are each faced with addressing the challenges inherent in the widespread movement called the community college baccalaureate. Important recommendations for all of those involved with the development of community college baccalaureates as one strategy to meet the needs of adult students who seek the baccalaureate are provided.

Findings from this study cannot be generalized beyond the research participants involved. However, the findings should act as a guide for the higher educational professional and legislative representatives to gain an understanding of the important issues adults face in returning to college and the potential role the community college plays. To conclude this chapter, consideration for further research is presented followed by the researcher's perspective.

Purpose of the Study

The study captured the lived experience of eight adult students enrolled in a community college baccalaureate degree program. Participants, in their own words, spoke of their experiences in regard to higher education in general and most specifically about their enrollment in a community college baccalaureate degree program. The study sought to capture their thought processes and motivations to enroll, frustrations

encountered with limited higher educational options, life obstacles faced in their pursuit

of long term goals, their beliefs concerning the community college baccalaureate, and the

advantages and disadvantages they experienced in one baccalaureate program.

Six themes emerged from the research that provide insight into the meaning the

new model for bachelor attainment has for the adult student. The connected narratives

provided a description of the meaning of the degree through the voices and experiences

of adult students and set the stage for continued research.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications for Legislative and Policy Informing Bodies

It was clear throughout the study that the adult student faced many dilemmas in

their decisions to return to college. One of the major stumbling blocks for the adult

learners was finding a viable option to complete their baccalaureate degrees. The factors

impeding their progress have been detailed in this dissertation through their own voices.

The major recommendation for policy forming bodies is that serious consideration

be given to providing educational options for the adult student which fit within the

structure of a life filled with competing priorities. One major understanding from the

study is that these competing priorities and multiple roles cannot be set aside easily, if at

all. The community college baccalaureate with its lower cost, accessibility, convenient

locations, and environments accustomed to meeting the needs of nontraditional learners

should be expanded nationally wherever there is statewide concern over adult baccalaureate attainment rates.

Recognizing that adult students are often focused on achieving the degree for future financial reasons, governing bodies must keep in place processes which require community colleges to document that any program initiated be driven by state and local workforce needs. Such degrees should result in graduates being able to find high wage local employment in their area of study. States should require intermittent program reviews which focus on performance outcomes such as completions, placements and salaries of graduates.

Implications for Community College Administrators

Adult students in the study have reported on several areas worthy of serious attention from community college administrators. One of the significant implications for administrators in regard to the development of new baccalaureate degrees is the recognition that adults seek degrees leading to careers which provide financial gain and economic stability. In this light, administrators are cautioned to only initiate degrees that have documented and unfilled labor needs and which prepare graduates to enter family sustaining careers. The present research highlights the importance of ongoing systematic labor need analysis prior to any new degree approval.

Community college administrators are also cautioned to resist engaging in the development of baccalaureate degrees for prestige and to be deliberate and purposeful in offering programs leading to high demand careers. This caution was first articulated by

Milliron (2005), and this current study provided data to support his position. The

thematic findings in this study were based on data which supports much of the anecdotal

but unsubstantiated literature positing that the need for the community college

baccalaureate is connected to helping adults seek better careers (Walker, 2000, 2001,

2005 & 2007). This finding of the study gives weight to the career seeking motivation of

the adult student. In the infancy of community college baccalaureates, Burrows (2002)

cautioned community college administrators to carefully assess the bandwidth of their

financial resources prior to developing new baccalaureate degrees. The current study

supports her recommendations based on the themes which emerged from the participants'

narratives. Several of the factors described by the adult students, which made the

community college baccalaureate both attractive and viable, are also cost intensive. For

example, participants specifically mentioned resource intensive services such as, small

class sizes, staff and resources to guide the progress of the adult learner, student service

resources to assist with managing multiple priorities, flexible course scheduling, and

instructional options. Each of these services comes with significant cost that must be

maintained to encourage student completions. This recommendation supports Walker's

early position, as an advocate for the baccalaureate movement, that community colleges

offer services and instructional delivery systems which are flexible in meeting the adults'

needs (2005). The finding also adds another dimension and further clarifies Burrows

(2002) position cautioning college administrators about the costs of baccalaureates.

The significant finding of the importance of the adult students' intrinsic

motivation and the finding of self through degree attainment may represent a paradigm

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shift in mission for community colleges which must be explored and considered. This research suggest that as important as its mission related to transfer and workforce development, is the exploration and quest for self-actualization by the adult student. The role the community college plays in the development of full human expression is often downplayed in our colleges focus on measuring more tangible outcomes such as graduation rates, placements and graduate salaries.

A final implication for college administrators emerging from the study is in the area of faculty employment. With the faculty credentialing requirements of regional accreditation, Campbell & Leverty (1999) posited that community colleges would be pressed to hire faculty with terminal degrees. Hofland (2011) further validated this concern, finding that during the baccalaureate evolution of one community college the percentage of doctorally prepared faculty rose from 6% to 24%. Within this paradigm shift, college administrators must be cautious to hire faculty who appreciate the community college mission, have a heart for the nontraditional learner, are aware of and committed to meeting the needs of adult students, and are focused on the primacy of teaching and learning. The practice of hiring faculty who are experienced university faculty in order to have the required number of doctorally prepared faculty must be tempered by the assurance that newcomers have a passion and respect for the community college student. Whether new faculty are from industry or universities is irrelevant. Administrators must face the reality that the uniqueness of the community college's cultural mission requires formal plans to transfer these traditions to new groups of faculty.

There are inherent risks associated with hiring doctorally prepared faculty who do not have a central focus on the students' learning. Thus, another recommendation is that community college administrators who contemplate offering baccalaureate degrees embark on an aggressive program to support their existing community college faculty in acquiring in-field doctoral degrees. Such support can range from increased tuition reimbursement dollars, more sabbatical offerings, reduced course load, time off, and loan support programs. In supplementing such efforts, staff development officers must actively provide intensive education and training for faculty new to the community college system.

Implications for Community College Faculty

As heard from the voices of the adult student, faculty are at the heart of creating a spirit of communality within their classrooms. The research participants eloquently described the positive role that faculty interaction played in each of their academic pursuits. Additionally the co-research participants fervently voiced their appreciation of a faculty group which demonstrated an awareness of their needs and experiences by offering flexibility in the learning environment. This flexibility must, of course, be balanced with offering a curriculum that is experience rich and rigorous in content so as to adequately prepare students for the careers and futures they desire.

Adult learners with multiple roles are frequently not able to participate in college extra-curricular activities, and it is therefore the faculty who provide that link for the student with the college campus. For the adult student, the college classroom is the heart

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of the college experience. Faculties provide the support needed by adult students to encourage their degree completions. They help in building confidence and, importantly, offer a model of professional behavior adult students require.

In light of the present study and its findings, there are several important implications for faculty. As the number of community college baccalaureates grow, so will the numbers of adult students. It would be wise for community college faculty to continue learning and exploring the challenges adults faces when returning to the classroom. A modification of the semi structured interviews conducted by the researcher to aid the faculty in understanding the experiences of the student would prove to be helpful for faculty and their administrators. This process would permit educators to hear and understand their students' concerns and needs.

Communality should be the goal. Instructional activities that focus on projects and team work will help build communality within the classroom. Orientations held during class times the first weeks of the semester would also be helpful in fostering communality. A powerful story told by one student regarding the faculty bringing the proposed schedule for courses with the times to be offered for the following semesters was greatly appreciated by the students and conveyed an awareness and sensitivity to students' needs. This single act communicated respect, an acknowledgement of the complexity of the adult students' lives and the communality described by Sherry "We are all there as a support to each other."

Finally faculty must keep their focus on the student learning. Research on the community college campus should be directed at improving pedagogy and more specifically student learning.

Implications for Admissions and Recruitment Professionals

Marketing and recruitment plans for community colleges tend to focus on the institutions' strength in helping prepare prospective students for careers and transfer. Though there is ample evidence to support these essential purposes, the current research also points to a much larger but essentially unknown and infrequently discussed outcome of the community college baccalaureate. The role played by community college baccalaureates by providing opportunities for adults to reach their personal development goals, to attain self-actualization and to find self is an important function. These lofty endeavors seem to be the purview of small and often private liberal arts colleges; however this research offers that the community college baccalaureate is instrumental in leading adults to achieve these essential but higher level human needs.

Marketing, recruitment and admissions professionals would be wise to capitalize and promote such significant outcomes. The concept of attaining a private college experience with the additional benefit of a career focused degree at an affordable cost would be very attractive to adult students as well as other groups new to colleges.

Recommendations for Future Research

There are several recommendations for future study that were derived from the current investigation. These recommendations could be helpful to higher educational professionals as they embrace the expanded role of the community college in helping adult students achieve the baccalaureate degree. The first recommendation is to replicate the existing phenomenological study with a larger group of adult students who are enrolled in several different community college baccalaureate programs. A broadening of the current study would provide rich detail and allow comparisons between programs as well as identify commonalities to facilitate and promote student success. A further recommendation is to follow the progress of the current co-researchers as they move closer to graduation. A longitudinal case study approach would enable educators to describe the path, obstacles and challenges adult students face as they progress to completion. This approach would provide additional information specifically on key predictors of success and failure of adult students enrolled in community college baccalaureate degrees. Shah (2010) compared students enrolled in community college baccalaureate education programs with their university counterparts. It would be advantageous to replicate Shah's study to include other degree areas such as business and nursing using the participant selection criteria from the present investigation.

There has been limited study on the long term impact of the community college baccalaureate on statewide rates of adult attainment of baccalaureate degrees. This would be important data for states who currently allow community colleges baccalaureate and for states considering adding community college baccalaureate degrees. Such

outcome data would add to the existing literature on the effectiveness of the community college baccalaureate model. In addition, this type of data would help to reframe the discussion in the political realm by providing solid evidence as to impact on attainment rates. There is a wealth of anecdotal evidence and a paucity of solid data surrounding the phenomenon of the community college baccalaureate. The results of the present research and the recommendations for future research outlined in this final chapter would aid higher education in making informed choices which recognize the centrality of the adult student.

Another important recommendation for further research on adult students is to apply the theoretical framework modified for employ in this study in additional phenomenological human science research. The Multiple Streams theory gave rise to significant understandings that may not have been apparent with other frameworks. Though Multiple Streams theory has been intended for use in policy and agenda setting studies, the unique perspective, when applied to the individual, brought forth unexpected insights. It permitted the exploration of the multiple facets and environmental circumstances within individuals' lives that led them to attend a community college baccalaureate.

Researcher's Reflection

Much like the students in my study, I embarked on this project, juggling multiple roles and priorities while persevering through life's turmoil. Having observed firsthand the role of the community college in helping new groups of students achieve the

American dream, I also began the research with a healthy respect for this truly American system. As an administrator, I understand all too well the imperfections and fallacies of this and any educational organization. Yet, my admiration for those who work in community colleges grows as does my belief in their value to our society.

As I listened to the voices of the students interviewed and with whom I collaborated over these past several months, significant differences between their circumstances and my own became very apparent. Although I am very much like them, there were important differences. The turmoil many of these students encountered often left me with my mouth agape and my emotions in unrest.

The stories of their journeys to and through higher education broke my heart. When Tom revealed that a high school guidance counselor suggested he was not college material and I subsequently realized that the journey he had been on for the past 10 years was to disprove her hypotheses, I felt shame for our profession. In Linda's story where she described that her encounter with a community college faculty and advisor was the first time she felt the care and nurture of someone in education, my heart soared. The overwhelming expression from the participants was that *this time*, in a community college baccalaureate program they would finally achieve their life's dream. It was through their experience and my subsequent knowing that *this time* in higher education we got it *right*. For all of the political maneuvering, the agendas, and the power games, the right strategy was put in place to help adult students achieve the American dream.

A second powerful realization that moved me was how resource-thin each of these students appeared. In the midst of minimal financial resources, an incredible lack

of time, overscheduled lives, and often a history of deficiency in their prior educational lives, these students persisted. How they persevered was, and remains, a source of amazement to me and a testament to the power of their motivational forces.

As a final point, I believe that what makes community colleges so special is that as a whole these institutions are committed to assisting students in achieving their goals. These adult students, who come to class after long days of work and other responsibilities, must inspire all of us in higher education to do what we can to help them achieve their dreams. Understanding the life environment of the adult students and the meaning the new baccalaureate models have on degree attainment and the finding of self is important for all of us in higher education.

APPENDIX A
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

<center>**Interview Protocol**</center>

Introduction to participant: Hello, thank you for coming and agreeing to meet with me to talk about your perspectives and feelings regarding the community college baccalaureate. Your participation is very important to helping us understand how the community college baccalaureate is viewed by adult students.

Explanation of the research study to the participant: This research study is looking at adult students, age 24 years and older, who in addition to school have other priorities. Based on the questionnaire you completed you meet the selection criteria, is that correct? Great. I will be asking you a series of semi structured open ended questions that will help me understand your life and your decision to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree.

Explanation of the interview process: The interview will take approximately 45 to 60 minutes. I will be audio recording the interview so that I can accurately capture what you are saying. Your name and identity will be protected and held confidential. Do I have your permission to record our interview? If you are uncomfortable at any time during the interview please let me know. I will be taking some notes during the interview, you may see these notes if you wish.

Follow up: Once the interview is transcribed I will contact you so that you are able to review the transcription and ask any further questions. This review is an opportunity for you to confirm that the interview captures what you were trying to say. If we need further clarification we may meet again if you wish.

Do you have any questions at this time?

Opening Questions: Can you tell me what you know about community college baccalaureate degrees?

      a. Do you know the difference between this degree and one from a university?

      b. How do you feel about community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees?

Research Question # 1: What narratives do adult students tell of their reasons for choosing to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program?

1) Can you talk about factors that motivated you to start pursuing a baccalaureate degree at a community college?

      a. How would you describe what was going on in your life at the time of your decision to enroll in the program?

      b. What is the highest level of education your parents achieved?

2) Can you talk about problems of life challenges you were trying to address by enrolling in the community college baccalaureate?

      c. Any life situations such as any changes in your circumstances that might have motivated you to return to school?

      d. Changes in job

      e. Changes in family

      f. Who is the primary income provider in your family?

      g. Can you briefly discuss yours or your family's income level?

3) Can you discuss some of the demands in your life and on your time as you pursue the degree?

      h. Probing: family, work, children

      i. How many hours do you work per week?

    j.   Are there any other priorities in your life or circumstances that you haven't discussed?

Research Question # 2: How do adult students perceive and give meaning to access and opportunity to enroll in a Community College Baccalaureate?

4) What are some of the past challenges which prevented you from enrolling in and/or completing a baccalaureate degree?
   a. What prevented you from completing your degree previously
   b. Can you discuss your past educational experiences?
   c. High School?
   d. College?

5) Given the proximity of more established four year colleges, would you share your thought process about selecting the community college baccalaureate from the other available alternatives?
   a. There are many other colleges in the area, both public and private. How did you make the decision to enroll in a community college for your baccalaureate?
   b. Did you look into any other colleges as an option?
   c. What factors did you consider in making your decision?
   d. How did you make the decision to enroll in this program?

6) On a scale of 1 through 5 to what extent did the following factors influence your decision to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree program, with 1 signifying no influence and 5 signifying tremendous influence?
   a. Location, closeness to home or work?
   b. Online classes?

     c. Costs compared to other colleges?

     d. Community college mission?

     e. Faculty?

     f. The degree you wanted?

     g. Class size?

7) If this program or community college baccalaureates were not available what would you have done?

     a. If Seminole State did not have baccalaureates what would you have done?

Research Question # 3: What meaning did the Community College Baccalaureate have on the adult's decision to return to college for a four year degree?

8) What are your perceptions or thoughts on community colleges offering baccalaureate degrees?

     a. How did having an available community college baccalaureate influence your decision to return to college?

     b. On your decision to return or continue college?

9) Can you talk about any prior experience you might have had with a community college?

     a. Did you attend a community college

     b. Any one you know attends/attended a community college?

     c. Their or your general impression?

10) Can you describe your perception of students who attend community colleges and how you fit in at a community college?

     a. Older?

b. Smarter/Not smarter?

c. Working?

d. Married?

e. Poor/Rich/Middle class?

f. Are you more alike or different from the students you see in your classes?

11) How do feel about having more adults, older students in your classes?

a. Does having more adults on campus influence you or have any impact?

b. Make you feel more/less comfortable?

12) How do you feel a community college baccalaureate will affect your career opportunities

a. Career advancement?

b. What types of concerns do you have about attending a community college for your baccalaureate?

c. How do you think an employer will view your degree?

13) There are some who have argued against community colleges having baccalaureate degrees, saying the degree would be inferior to a university baccalaureate degree. What are your feelings about this?

a. Do you have any concerns?

b. Did this concern you?

c. How do you feel about this?

14) Have you set any goals or expectations for yourself in terms of having the baccalaureate degree?

a. How do you think having the degree will affect your life from a personal view?

b. From an economic view?

c. From a family or life circumstance position?

15) Are there any thoughts or feelings you want to share or discuss about this program, or community college baccalaureates?

a. Is there anything that we haven't discussed that will help me understand your decision to enroll in this program?

Thank you for taking your time to talk with me today; I know how busy you are and how valuable your time is.

APPENDIX B
DEMOGRAPHIC QUESTIONNAIRE

Community College Baccalaureate Survey

Directions: I am a doctoral student at UCF and am interested in learning about why you chose to attend a Community College Baccalaureate program. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions on this form. Use a pen or pencil and fill in the circles completely. Thank you!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

1. Age
    - O 18-23
    - O 24-34
    - O 35-44
    - O 35 and over

2. Sex
    - O Male   O Female

3. Select one or more of the following that best describes you:
    - O Caucasian
    - O Black
    - O Hispanic
    - O Asian Pacific
    - O Other _____

4. Are you married?
    - O Yes   O No

5. Children
    - O None   O Two to Three
    - O One   O Four or more

6. Are you employed?
    - O Full Time   O Part Time   O Not at this time

7. If part time, how many hours per week:
    - O 1-10   O 11-19   O 20 or more

8. Are you the primary provider of your family/children?
    - O Yes   O No

9. Is this the first baccalaureate (4-year degree) program you attended?
    - O Yes   O No

10. Did you complete your 2-year degree at a community college?
    - O Yes   O No

10a. If yes, which community college did you attend?

11. How many years has it been since you completed high school? _____

REQUEST

****

If you are 24 years of age or older would you be willing to participate in a one-on-one interview, so that we can learn more about why students are choosing Community College Baccalaureate Degrees?

O Yes   O No

If yes, please provide your name and the best way to contact you:

Name: _____

Cell Phone: _____

Home Phone:_____

E-mail address:

_____

Thank you for your time.

APPENDIX C
INFORMED CONSENT

EXPLANATION OF RESEARCH

Title of Project: The Community College Baccalaureate and Adult Students: A
Qualitative Analysis

Principal Investigator: Angela M. Kersenbrock, Doctoral Student

Faculty Supervisor: Dr. Rosa Cintrón

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Whether you take part is up is
voluntary.

As part of my dissertation to complete the doctorate in Higher Education I am conducting
a study on adults who chose to enroll in a community college baccalaureate degree
program.

The purpose of this qualitative research project is to discover and understand the meaning
and perceptions that adult students have about the community college baccalaureate
degree..

By participating in this study you will help educational professional understand the role
of the community college baccalaureate in helping adult students obtain their
baccalaureate degree.

In order to participate in the study you must meet the following criteria:

1. Be age 24 years or older who has not completed a previous baccalaureate
   degree.
2. Be an adult student who has priorities other than school alone. Study
   participants must also be employed full or part time, or have other
   responsibilities such as the care for family or children.
3. Be accepted as a degree seeking student in the Bachelor of Business
   Information Management degree program at Seminole State College, and
   enrolled in at least 6 credits of 3000 or 4000 level business courses.

Purpose: The purpose of this qualitative research project is to discover and understand
the meaning and perceptions that adult students have about the community college
baccalaureate degree.

Site Location: The study will take place at the Sanford/Lake Mary Campus of
Seminole State College of Florida.

Participation: Between 5 and ten students who meet the study criteria and agree to participate in the study will be provided with a consent form and asked to participate in a face to face interview that will last between 45 and 75 minutes. The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. Each of the audio recordings will be transcribed. The interview will consist of approximately 16 open ended semi structured interview questions. The purpose will be to understand your decision making about enrolling in this baccalaureate program and what meaning it has for you.

Prior to each interview, participants who have already signed a consent form will be asked to verbally consent to the interview. Participants will be informed their participation is voluntary and that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

Participant confidentiality will be protected by using pseudonyms. All collected data such as field notes, digital recordings, transcripts or other notes will be kept in a locked and private location. The information will only be available to the researcher, the transcription service (with all identifying factors redacted), and the dissertation research committee.

Participants will be given the opportunity to review the transcribed interviews and all notes pertaining to their individual interview.

Once the study is completed all collected data will be destroyed.

Researcher Contact Information: If you are interested in participating or have questions please contact: Angela M. Kersenbrock, Graduate Student Higher Educational Leadership Program, College of Education, 407-463-2201 or Dr. Rosa Cintrón, Faculty Supervisor, College of Education, Higher Education and Public Policy at the University of Central Florida.
Due to limitations on the number of participants it is possible that not everyone who meets the criteria and agrees to participate in the study will be chosen.
Once you have been chosen, the selection criteria confirmed and have agreed to participate I will contact you regarding scheduling the interview appointment.

APPENDIX D
FIELD NOTES OBSERVATION FORM

FIELD NOTES OBSERVATION FORM

Participant code_____
Time_____
Date_____

Researcher observations	Verbal/non-verbal cues	Reflections	Notes

FIELD NOTES OBSERVATION FORM

Participant code _Kenesha_
Time _8:45_ / _4:45 pm_
Date _4_ | _19_ | _2012_

Researcher observations	Verbal/non-verbal cues	Reflections	Notes
Casually dressed Calm thoughtful/deliberate self described introvert – Kept watch on time – NO - not calm – Very stressed.	perfectly still V. organized w/ nt books, planner – WOW - NEAT! Frowning when talking about her extended family	Very shy steady in control – flat affect? emotions on an even keel – everything was in her planner – work, school, kids - doctors Doesn't see that what she is doing is out of the ordinary.	Struggles w/ math – lots of priorities – ex army – follow up why eyes? – Finds her customer service call center job more stressful than military? Oh oh - also takes full resp. for blind grandmother.

2

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APPENDIX E
PARTICIPANT TRACKING FORM

PARTICIPANT TRACKING FORM

Participant's Name	Date of Interview	Time of Interview	Code	Notes

APPENDIX F
LISTING AND PRELIMINARY GROUPING EXAMPLE (STEP 1)

Hierarchical Name	Number of Sources Coded	Number of Coding References
Nodes\\background\attended baccalaureate program before\UCF\lost in the crowd, not motivated, needed kick in the rear	1	1
Nodes\\background\attended baccalaureate program before\UCF\son go to UCF	1	1
Nodes\\background\attended baccalaureate program before\UCF\take or took classes	3	9
Nodes\\background\attended baccalaureate program before\UCF\UCF counselor recommended I come over here	1	1
Nodes\\background\attended baccalaureate program before\UCF\work study, hard	1	2
Nodes\\background\attended community college before	6	10
Nodes\\background\attended community college before\Brevard Community College	1	1
Nodes\\background\attended community college before\Lake County, got through 5-6 courses	1	2
Nodes\\background\attended community college before\Seminole	1	2
Nodes\\background\attended community college before\Valencia	2	7
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college	1	1
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college\data base administrator before	1	2
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college\pregnant, everything harder	1	1
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college\volunteer work five years out of high school	1	3
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college\want to go to law school	1	2
Nodes\\background\before decision to go to community college\worked for Hyatt	1	1
Nodes\\background\degree, certificate, or education	1	1

APPENDIX G
REDUCTION AND ELIMINATION EXAMPLE (STEP 2)

Hierarchical Name	# Sources Coded	# Coding References
Nodes\\concerns about degree from community college\doesn't matter where get it from, as long as you have paper or bachelor's	7	10
Nodes\\concerns about degree from community college\don't think employers know or care where degree from	1	3
Nodes\\demands, burdens, challenges\figured out how to balance everything myself, or planning, or time management	5	6
Nodes\\demands, burdens, challenges\figured out how to balance everything myself, or planning, or time management\homework or studying	5	5
Nodes\\demands, burdens, challenges\number of classes	10	10
Nodes\\demands, burdens, challenges\take care of family member or family	4	7
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\community college\atmosphere or environment is different from being at university	4	4
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\community college\carries all benefits of university, classes at same level, good as any other degree	3	3
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\community college\community college more flexible	2	4
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\community college\liked community college as opposed to university	3	7
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\community college\positive, comfortable, or good experience with community college	6	8
Nodes\\difference between community college and university baccalaureate\University\university, big class size	4	5
Nodes\\find out about program\seeking other options	5	9
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\finally decided what want to be	3	7
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\getting older or grow older the harder it's giong to be, so I better start now	4	5
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\go back to get a Bachelor's	4	5

Hierarchical Name	# Sources Coded	# Coding References
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\night classes	4	10
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\set goal for myself to get baccalaureate degree, work towards it or finish it	4	7
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\there with people who care, pay attention, know where want to go, driven, or serious	3	6
Nodes\\motivation to go to or complete school\wanted to or want to finish or graduate, or want degree	7	13
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\ages of students\comfortable or love that some students are older or identify with them	7	11
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\ages of students\see older adults, feels good, comfortable	4	4
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\ages of students\some students are younger, some are older or median age	5	7
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\ages of students\students are older or I am oldest	4	6
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\alike community college students	6	9
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\community college students are working	4	6
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\community college students income	4	4
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\paying their bills, pay bills, or financially independent	4	8
Nodes\\perception of self and other students\worked hard, put nose to the grindstone, or fought	3	8
Nodes\\ranking\class size	4	19
Nodes\\ranking\class size\can ask questions, room to talk, learn from others	6	8
Nodes\\ranking\class size\professors remember your name, know me, give you one on one time, contracted on student concerns	4	6
Nodes\\ranking\class size\small or only seats in each class	7	10
Nodes\\ranking\costs	10	23
Nodes\\ranking\costs\5	6	6
Nodes\\ranking\costs\can afford or cheaper	3	7

Hierarchical Name	# Sources Coded	# Coding References
Nodes\\ranking\costs\can't afford	4	9
Nodes\\ranking\costs\financial aid, FAFSA, scholarship, loans, or grants	5	6
Nodes\\ranking\costs\other universities cost to much money or compare to other universities or colleges	8	13
Nodes\\ranking\costs\paying for school on my own or money out of pocket	5	7
Nodes\\ranking\degree\degree path or degree wanted	7	16
Nodes\\ranking\location	9	19
Nodes\\ranking\location\closer to home or proximity, not drive or travel	6	10
Nodes\\ranking\online classes	8	15

APPENDIX H
HORIZONS AND UNITS OF MEANING EXAMPLE (STEP 3)

Example Step 3--Patterns and Horizons of the Experience

Clustering and Thematizing the Invariant Constituents to Form Themes

1)   Creating clusters of related categories
2)   Discovery of common patterns

Prior Baccalaureate Attempt
- Attended baccalaureate program previously
- Attended UCF

Children and family as motivational
- Accomplish degree for family
- Set a higher standard for my children
- Also many expressed intrinsic motivation to achieve the degree

Adult Students and Multiple Priorities (Adult students and the stress of multiple priorities)
- Work full time (all but one)
- Have children
- Figured out how to balance everything
    - Figured out how to manage work, homework, studying
- Importance of planning
- Importance of time management
- Primary provider sole provider in all but 2 cases (related to importance of costs)
- Take care of my family
- Take care of my children
- Take care of another family member
- Take care of self; recovery
    - Sense of responsibility for others in addiction recovery
- Importance of night classes
- # of classes (the stress)
- Responsibility of church activities

High Value on Achieving Baccalaureate Degree
- Help me get in a better place
- Stable secure income and career
- Opens doors
- Contributes to opportunities
- Need the degree for opportunities
- "Don't want my children growing you in an apartment"
- Accomplish degree for my family

Baccalaureate seen as the key to career and economic stability
- Helps to move up
- Need for promotion/advancement
- Need the degree
- Don't want my children growing you in an apartment
- Want to buy a home

APPENDIX I
CONTENT MATRIX (STEP 4)

Horizons of Meaning	Nadia	Cole	Kenesha	Linda	Mike	Tom	Sherry	Gav	Totals
Prior baccalaureate attempt	X	X			X	X	X	X	6
Interrupted bacc/higher education		X	X	X	X		X	X	6
Children and family motivational	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Multiple priorities (as stressors)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
High value on achieving baccalaureate degree	X	X	X	X	X	x	X	X	8
Baccalaureate seen as key to career and economic stability	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Comfortable at community college		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	7
Cost major stressor/issue	X		X			X	X	X	5
More like other community college students		X	X	X	X	X		X	6
Prior experience or positive view of community college	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Positive view of community college baccalaureate	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	8
Limited alternatives	X	X	X	X		X	X	X	7
Intrinsic motivation	X	X	X	X	X	X		X	7

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