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# Increasing Access to Post-Secondary Education: A Mixed Methods Study of the Charleston Clemente Program

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Increasing Access to Post-Secondary Education:  
A Mixed Methods Study of the Charleston Clemente Program

by

Mariane Asad Doyle

A DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of  
The Graduate College at the University of Nebraska  
In Partial Fulfillment of Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Major: Educational Studies  
(Educational Leadership and Higher Education)

Under the Supervision of Professor Marilyn Grady

Lincoln, Nebraska

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Increasing Access to Post-Secondary Education:  
A Mixed Methods Study of the Charleston Clemente Program

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University of Nebraska, 2013

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There is an economic gap that favors adults who have higher levels of educational attainment (United States Department of Labor, 2010). With more than 9.3 million Americans over the age of 25 facing unemployment as of June 2012 and over 79% or 7.4 million of those unemployed Americans having attained less than a Bachelor's degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), the current need for college access measures and programs that address the adult population is an imperative one.

The Charleston Clemente Program provides a tuition-free course in the Humanities to economically-disadvantaged adult students for a total of two-semesters. Along with free books, bus passes, and food, the program culminates in six units of college credit and a unique learning experience. This study sought to describe the Charleston Clemente Program as a potential model for supporting college access for the economically-distressed adult student as well as to discover the unique characteristics of this program that opens educational opportunities to underrepresented populations at institutions of higher education.

This mixed methods study required data from interviews of faculty and students, and from student surveys. The data were collected separately and simultaneously using a

parallel convergent design, and were mixed during the interpretation. Five core themes emerged through this process:

1. Humanity and the humanities, or “giving back”
2. Accomplishment, persistence, and perseverance
3. Redemption and transformation
4. Finances and access
5. The power of one.

Implications regarding the efficacy of this program and its potential for duplication at other institutions are discussed. A pragmatist approach is used in this mixed methods study as both qualitative and quantitative data are collected and analyzed in order to best address the research problem.

## Acknowledgments

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To my husband, Tim Doyle, daughter, Morgan Grace Doyle, son, Brady Doyle, and my dad, Asad Mikhail Asad, I owe my life. Without each of you, I wouldn't be who I am today. Doylee, you are my rock and my heart. Thank you, Dad, for never letting me fall or fail, and thank you for "modeling the way." Morgan and Brady, you are truly my inspiration and are my tiny teachers. I am forever indebted to my dad, mom, Salwa Abdel-Mesih (God bless her soul), and big brother, Raymond Mikhail Asad, for the strength it took to leave home and come to this beautiful country of opportunity in order for me and my children to become who we are meant to be.

To each of my extended family members and close friends who have encouraged me along way, know that I remember each word and hug. And, to my fellow "Grady's" – we've shared so much and I am always on your team! Lori, I am forever grateful to you, my wonderful friend! Thank you for laughing, listening, and cheering. Dr. Kohli, faculty, and students of the Clemente program – I couldn't have done this without you!

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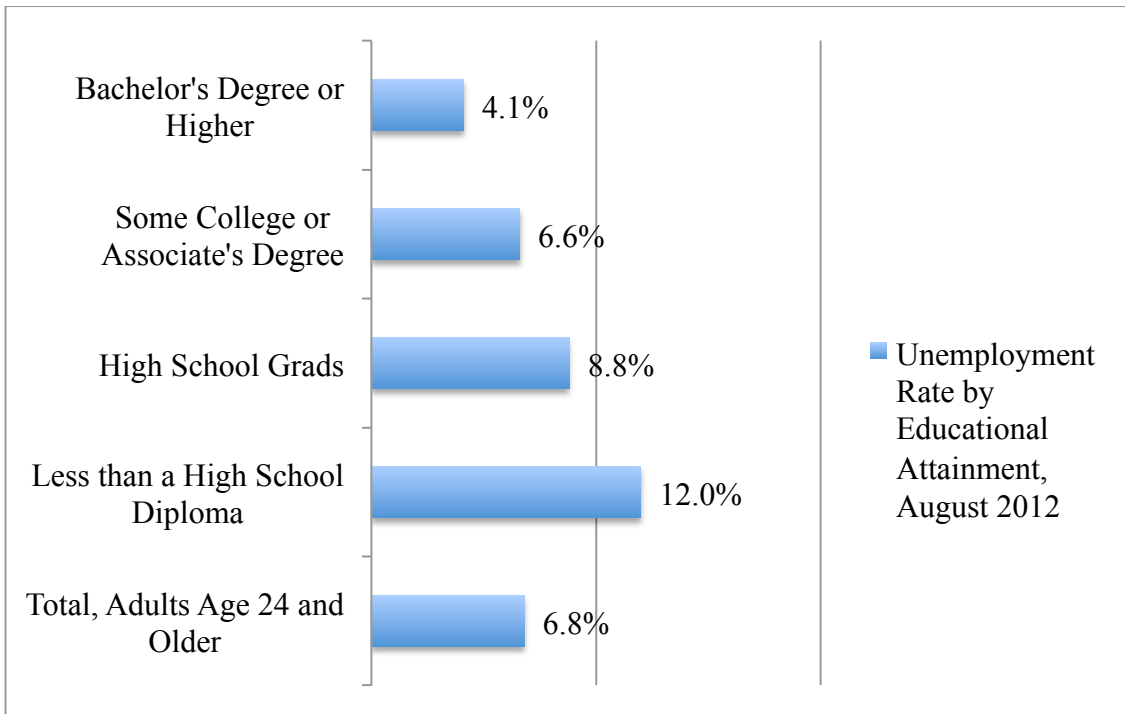
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## Chapter 1: Introduction

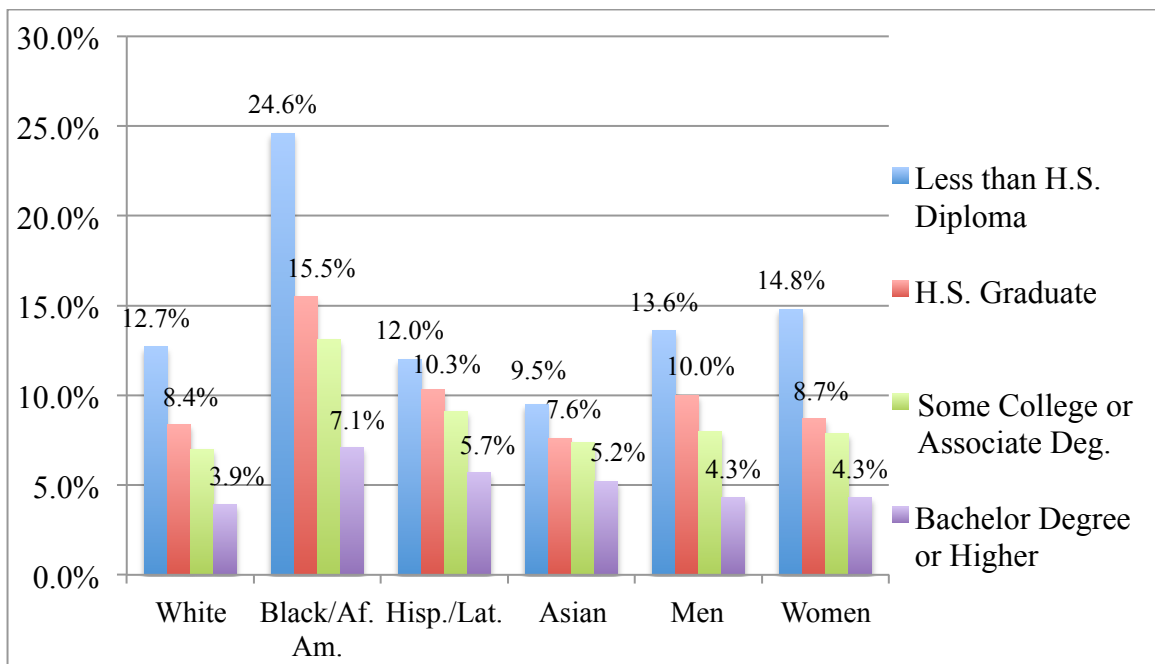
“The way you end cycles of poverty is through educational opportunity” (Duncan, 2011).

Data from 2012 show (Fig.1) that educational attainment impacts an individual’s ability to maintain employment and increases the earnable living wage significantly. The Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) reported that as of August 2012, adults over the age of 24 with less than a high school diploma experienced a 12% unemployment rate in the United States, those with a high school diploma faced an 8.8% unemployment rate, and for individuals with at least a Bachelor’s degree, unemployment is at a noteworthy 4.1% (United States Department of Labor, 2012).



**Figure 1: Unemployment Rate by Educational Attainment, August 2012**

Unemployment data by ethnic and gender sub-groups further demonstrate the impact of educational attainment on each population. African American/Black individuals faced a 24.6% unemployment rate – nearly double the rate experienced by their Caucasian/White counterparts who encountered a 12.7% unemployment rate. However, as additional education is attained, unemployment rates and gaps between ethnic sub-groups decrease. It is also significant to note that gender gaps in unemployment are detected when educational attainment is at the high school graduate or less than high school diploma levels, but is minimized at the Bachelor degree or higher level.



**Figure 2: Unemployment Rate by Sub-Groups, Ethnic and Gender, August 2012**

In the fall of 2010, the BLS published a spotlight on college education that illustrated the vast economic gap correlating to educational attainment data (United States Department of Labor, 2010). In 2009, adults over the age of 25 with a Bachelor's degree

earned nearly twice the median weekly salary of their high school graduate counterparts. High school graduates earned an average of \$626 per week and Bachelor's degree holders earned an average of \$1,137 per week (United States Department of Labor, 2010).

### **Investing in Post-Secondary Education**

In order to improve the country's economic status and to support the ability of adults to obtain gainful employment, opportunities to access post-secondary education is imperative. These data illustrate that financial need is an implicit obstacle to access for those adults who are most in need of additional education. This study is focused on one example of a post-secondary program that targets access for economically-disadvantaged adults.

The previously presented data addressing employment and educational attainment illustrate the importance of post-secondary education. The Obama administration has taken note, investing more than four billion dollars from 2008 – 2012 in K-12 education through various competitive grant opportunities, such as Race to the Top and Investing in Innovation funds, that will better prepare children for college and career (Duncan, 2012). A share of that investment was used to bolster the Federal GI Bill under the Post-9/11. That program supported United States Veterans interested in completing their post-secondary education. [The Administration notes, “all but nine states cut funding to higher education” (Duncan, 2012).] The Federal Pell Grant program that supports undergraduate students who have demonstrated financial need also received added temporary funds that help increase access to post-secondary education for some students. The President successfully obtained agreement in Congress in June 2012 to maintain the

3.4% interest rate on subsidized federal student loans for undergraduates (Peralta, 2012). However, the legislation supporting the temporary Pell Grant funding will expire in 2013 and the “maximum grant is scheduled to drop by about half in 2014” (Kingkade, 2012). Further, economically-disadvantaged graduate students will no longer have access to subsidized federal loans under the new bill; instead, they will have to borrow through the higher-interest, unsubsidized Stafford loan program that accrues interest while the student is still in school and is subject to increased interest rates (Kingkade, 2012).

The federal government’s fiscal investment has been in the development and improvement of K-12 education in order to better prepare students for their future after high school and this move is supported by research (Engbert & Allen, 2011). However, a significant proportion of adults also appear to be in need of post-secondary education in order to obtain gainful employment. With more than 9.3 million Americans over the age of 25 facing unemployment as of June 2012 and over 79% or 7.4 million of those unemployed Americans having attained less than a Bachelor’s degree (U.S. Department of Labor, 2012), the current need for college access strategies and programs that address the adult population is imperative. Funds addressing this national need are, to date, limited to the sources detailed above and state-supported funding that, as previously noted, have been cut nationwide.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the practices and outcomes of the Charleston Clemente Program as a potential model of support for access to higher education for economically-distressed adults.

**Research questions.** The central questions of this study were:

1. How effective is the Charleston Clemente Program at supporting college access?
2. What impact does the program have on its participants?

Sub-questions of this study include:

1. Is the Charleston Clemente Program a viable and replicable model for increasing college access among the economically-disadvantaged adult population?
2. Do students of the Charleston Clemente Program pursue educational goals after participating in the program?



## Chapter 2: Literature Review

The dearth of research available since 2003 on increasing access to post-secondary education, particularly for economically-disadvantaged populations, is surprising in the 2013 economic milieu. Although some research addressing this topic describes K-12 characteristics and programs, the adult re-entry population is all but ignored. Outside of academia, several popular texts have been published elucidating the need to increase the level of educational attainment nationwide in order to maintain the United States' place in the global economy. Business and industry have chimed in on the conversation, demanding that educators better prepare future participants in the workforce as jobs go unfilled due to a lack of preparation while the nation's unemployment rate remains at 9%.

Bill Gates (2011), former CEO of Microsoft and current co-chair of the Gates Foundation, commented on the correlation between economics and education: "There's a lot of uncertainty today about our nation's economy, but there is no uncertainty that a high-quality education is key to economic prosperity for all of our people – and for us as a nation" (pg.1). Again, the focus in program development to address this gap has been on the K-12 sector as the data consistently show that high-quality academic preparation is a key predictor to college enrollment (Walpole, 2007). And, as a significant proportion of the available jobs are STEM related (science, technology, engineering, and math), recent funding and programmatic concentration – particularly during the Obama administration – prioritizes STEM educational initiatives (Koebler, 2011). Although STEM industry leaders have a clear interest in the development of future participants in the workforce, there is an immediate need to educate the over 7.4 million unemployed

adult Americans who comprise over 79% of the nation's jobless population and are without a baccalaureate degree.

In higher education, outreach targets incoming freshmen following the standard high school to college trajectory. The K-12 outreach focus is supported by the Federal TRIO programs that “serve and assist low-income individuals, first-generation college students, and individuals with disabilities to progress through the academic pipeline from middle school to post baccalaureate programs” (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). A portion of these programs is directed towards informing and educating adult students regarding higher education, outreach into the community and experiential opportunities are not addressed (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). The implication is that potential students from a low-socioeconomic background or those who are economically-distressed will need to seek out the supportive programs that could function as a bridge to a college experience and degree. However, research that addresses low-income and underserved populations identifies several predictive factors that present barriers to accessing higher education that need to be evaluated when designing outreach programs.

### **Poverty and Higher Education: The Clemente Program**

In contrast, the Clemente Course addresses the Humanities and is designed to provide educational access for economically-disadvantaged adults. In a recent longitudinal study conducted among the Massachusetts Clemente Courses, the goals for the Clemente program included:

- To provide students with a bridge to continuing education in their lives;

- To foster students' awareness and appreciation of the cultural heritage encompassed by the traditional humanities disciplines;
- To foster students' intellectual development, promoting their engagement in political life and furthering their ability to improve their own lives and those of their families. (Rosi, 2011)

The data from this study is promising with 67% of program alumni interviewed pursuing higher education within one year of completing the Clemente course (Rosi, 2011, p. 28). Participants in the program must qualify as economically-distressed and are provided with the course tuition free. The additional supportive elements vary by site with some offering bus passes, childcare, meals, and/or technology to help facilitate the attendance and retention of student participants. Upon successful course completion, Clemente Course programs that participate with Bard College can provide up to six units of college credit to their alumni (The Clemente Course in the Humanities, 2012). Indeed, 41% of the case study participants indicated that they used the credits to help fulfill course requirements in their respective college programs (Rosi, 2011, p. 23). By addressing the personal, social, and educational needs of students, the Clemente Course provides a holistic approach to outreach, recruitment, and support for adults and potential post-secondary students.

**History of the Clemente Course in the Humanities.** In 1995, Earl Shorris, a noted author and recipient of the National Humanities Medal, founded the Clemente Course in the Humanities (Hilton, 2009-2013). Shorris explained in an article in Harper's as well as in his book, *Riches for the Poor*, that his research on poverty in America took him down a very unlikely path one day at Bedford Prison in New York.

There he met an extraordinary inmate, Neicie, who educated him in her own way when he inquired, “Why do you think people are poor?”

‘You’ve got to teach the moral life of downtown to the children. And the way you do that, Earl, is by taking them downtown to plays, museums, concerts, lectures, where they can learn the moral life of downtown.’ (Shorris, 1997)

This conversation led Shorris to understand that there must be a bridge out of poverty – what Neicie called ““a moral alternative to the streets”” – and he created that bridge using the humanities. Beginning at the Roberto Clemente Family Guidance center in Manhattan and in collaboration with Bard College, Shorris opened the first Clemente Course with the help of volunteer faculty and students recruited from various neighborhood support institutions like the Youth and Family Services program in the South Bronx (Shorris, 1997).

Shorris detailed his minimal criteria for student admission to Clemente in his article:

1. Age 18 – 35
2. Household income: less than 150 percent of the Census Bureau’s Official Poverty Threshold
3. Educational Level: Ability to read a tabloid newspaper
4. Education Goals: An expression of intent to complete the course (Shorris, 1997).

Having determined these initial criteria, Shorris determined the services that needed to be offered for a viable program. These would include:

1. Bus or Subway fare for each student

2. Evening classes
3. Childcare
4. A meal during class (Shorris, 1997).

The coursework includes a few fundamental topics in the humanities: literature, history, art, writing, and philosophy. Shorris stated that of the first Clemente Course cohort, 10 students out of 16 program graduates went on to attend a four-year university or nursing school. The remaining students had either enrolled at community college or were working full-time (Shorris, 1997).

**The Charleston Clemente program background.** After a harrowing experience with cancer, the founder of the Clemente Course in Charleston, South Carolina, Dr. MaryAnn Kohli, decided that her time was not her own, but rather was God's time. "Like a library book, I was on loan from God and would go back from whence I came. Thus, I figured I had better get busy doing what God would have me do" (Hankla, 2012). The first Charleston Clemente course cohort of students was welcomed at Trident Technical College in 2005. Of the 38 students who enrolled that year, 28 completed the course and 27 continued to take credit courses at the college (TTC Institutional Research Office, 2013). In this study, I explored the quantitative data associated with enrollment, completion, and retention as well as the demographic data of enrolled students to deepen the understanding of students served and the successes of the Charleston Clemente program in increasing access to post-secondary education.

The students in Charleston are recruited from "homeless shelters, drug and alcohol rehabilitation centers, veteran villas, prisons, and from the ranks of the working poor, financially unable to enter college" (Trident Technical College, 2012). According

to the director of the program, students are specifically recruited from these facilities to ensure that economically-disadvantaged populations are served (Faculty Interview, 2013). The program there focuses on American History in the first semester course followed by literature, philosophy, and writing in the second semester course. Upon successful completion of both courses, students earn 6 college credits through the college (Trident Technical College, 2012). The Charleston Clemente program offers its students free tuition, bus passes, free textbooks, meals at both of the weekly meetings, and faculty or community member mentors. In addition, free refurbished computers have been provided in previous years when grant funding was available (Trident Technical College, 2012). According to their website, the Charleston Clemente course has achieved a 65% completion rate as compared to the Clemente Course average of 50% completion. Recently, the Charleston Clemente Program became the Southeast Center and the faculty and leadership are interested in providing mentorship to other institutions in order to expand Clemente in the region (Trident Technical College, 2012).

## Chapter 3: Methods

### Research Design

The purpose of this mixed methods study was to explore the practices and outcomes of the Charleston Clemente Program as a potential model of support for access to higher education for economically-distressed adults. It was imperative that multiple methods of data collection and analysis were employed. A mixed method design provided for the inclusion of both closed-ended measures and open-ended observations (Creswell, 2002).

I used a convergent parallel mixed methods design as both the qualitative and quantitative phases of this research project occurred simultaneously with equal emphasis placed on both (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2010). I was able to obtain the data both separately and concurrently using this methodology, and integrated the data during final interpretation (Creswell, 2005). This allowed the program's impact and efficacy to emerge through a full, rich description as is typical in a case study (Stake, 2005) while supported with added validity through quantitative data that can be used to further corroborate findings. According to Creswell and Plano-Clark (2006), "the purpose of this model is to end up with valid and well-substantiated conclusions about a single phenomenon" (p. 64-65). The results of this study will contribute to the development of a college access model that attends to a population whose need has been commonly described, but not successfully addressed.

**Positioning the researcher.** Context is paramount to the validity of any research. In order to establish context, it is important that the researcher make explicit the philosophical assumptions that she or he holds true (Creswell, 2006). I used a

constructivist paradigm or worldview because I believe that my prior experiences and background have an impact on my interpretation of the study's findings. Constructivists understand that they must “position themselves’ in the research to acknowledge how their interpretation flows from their own personal, cultural, and historical experiences” (Creswell, 2006). Studying the Charleston Clemente program required that I evaluate and disclose my own biases, values, and background in order to bracket my experiences and context as a researcher, and approach the interpretation of my study's data with greater objectivity. Consumers of research are equally concerned with understanding the researcher's position as personal beliefs regarding ontology and epistemology combine throughout the research process (Merriam, 2009).

As a social constructivist, I make meaning through interactions with others and my own experiences. As of 2013, I have taught college courses in the humanities for eleven years and instructed high school English and English as a Second Language courses for two years. This is my seventh year as an educational administrator working with high school and adult students. My bachelor's and master's degrees are both in English. My interactions with students, professors, and my own academic studies have each validated my constructivist approach to inquiry as meanings are “varied and multiple” requiring that, as a researcher, I “look for the complexity of views” (Creswell, 2006). My research depended on my ability to “rely as much as possible on the participants' views” (Creswell, 2006), and I was able to do so, in part, due to my inexperience with the context of the majority of my study participants: the Clemente students.



My upbringing has primarily been a middle-class one, though I have experienced varying degrees of poverty. I have had limited interactions with individuals who were homeless or suffered from addiction to harmful substances. I have no experience with the consumption or abuse of these substances and struggle with understanding substance abuse that leads to the catastrophic destruction of family, career, and personal well-being.

Through my work in academia and my life experience as a woman of color, I have become an advocate of equity and access. The Clemente course provided a combination of attributes that were personally motivating: a program that grants access to post-secondary education using the humanities as a pathway to college and catalyst for the personal transformation of economically and socially marginalized individuals. Once I discovered that this program existed, it became imperative to me that I conduct this study and share my findings.

**Study site.** There are 18 known Clemente programs offered in the United States that may include multiple sites affiliated with each listed program (The Clemente Course in the Humanities, 2012). Up to 65 Clemente Courses have been offered worldwide (Trident Technical College, 2011). The Charleston Clemente Course was chosen for study due to a number of factors. Now entering its eighth year in operation, the program has already served more than 360 students. This longevity provided historical data and increased the likelihood of study participant availability. In addition, the Charleston program is unique in that it is the only Clemente Course currently offered in the entire southeast region of the United States and Trident Technical College recently agreed to become the Southeast Center for Clemente as a result (Trident Technical College, 2011).

I discovered this site and the existence of the Clemente course while researching programs that helped provide college access to economically-disadvantaged adults. A short description of the program in a brief on Service Learning Award Winners from the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education led me to inquire further into the program and contact the program's director in Charleston (South Carolina Commission on Higher Education, 2008). My research was warmly welcomed by the director who later contacted Earl Shorris, the founder of the Clemente Course. Mr. Shorris extended his support and urged me to proceed with my research. He passed away only a few weeks after this initial contact and left a strong impression in his wake.

While I knew my study would focus on the Charleston Clemente program, I wanted to establish baseline data by extending my study to Bard College in Annandale-on-Hudson, New York. Bard College provides college credits to students attending Clemente courses nationwide that have applied to become affiliates of the program. In exchange, they require "interim and year-end reports on the course for review" (Bard College, 2012). I contacted the program director at Bard College who also welcomed my research and exchanged several emails with me. We later engaged in telephone conversations regarding the data I needed to gather to establish a baseline on the Clemente Course nationwide against which I would compare the Charleston Clemente Course data.

Weeks before flying to Bard College to acquire and study the data, the program director discovered that all data was in a storage room, piled in boxes reaching the ceiling. None of the data had been reviewed or evaluated and no reports were available. The individuals involved in managing and overseeing the Bard Clemente course would

also be difficult to bring together for interview purposes. As such, I maintained my focus on the Charleston Clemente course as a bounded system (Merriam, 2009). Data emerged solely from this study site, and impact and efficacy of the program was evaluated within this bounded system.

Trident Technical College's (TTC) Institutional Review Board required that all research activities occurred off-campus and not interrupt instruction. Selecting the actual location for my study, then, became critical. I had to find a place that was easily accessible to both student and faculty participants. In addition, technology had to be available at the site for students to complete the survey online, if they wanted to participate in both parts of the study. With the program director's help, I learned that most of the student participants lived in the shelters in downtown Charleston, allowing me to narrow my search of potential interview locations. I discovered that residents at the homeless shelter frequently visited the public library downtown as it provided them with access to technology, reading material, and shelter throughout the day. It was easily accessible by bus and on foot. However, a Charleston resident had to make the meeting room reservations. The program director kindly obliged and we were able to establish an interview availability schedule using this site.

**Sample.** A total of n=22 study participants including current and former students completed surveys, and n=20 participants were interviewed from the Charleston Clemente Program at Trident Technical College including faculty and current and former students. All current and former students in this program who could be contacted by the director were invited to complete the survey as well as participate in the interviews. The University of Nebraska-Lincoln and Trident Technical College (TTC) Institutional

Review Boards both approved a poster that solicited survey participants (Appendix A). The poster became necessary when TTC stipulated that all surveys and interviews must be completed off campus. This added challenge meant that the information regarding the study had to be disseminated in unobtrusive ways including the survey poster and the invitation to participate in the interview study shared by the program director via email. Ultimately, however, word-of-mouth was the primary method of soliciting participants. Current and former Clemente students aware of the study were soon advocating for participation among themselves.

The program director had shared with the students that a sizeable number of participants was necessary in order for the study's data to be valid. During the second day of my study, it appeared that my interview numbers were going to fall short. Within a few hours discussing this with the program director, several students began calling to make interview appointments and one former student offered to rent a van and fill it with students who would like to participate in the interviews. While I did not accept this offer, it showed me the on-going dedication of the Charleston Clemente course's participants to the program.

The Clemente program services only the economically-disadvantaged, making the economic element of the demographic description a default one. However, gender, age, ethnic, and educational attainment data were collected via survey as optional demographic questions. The n=20 interview participants included one (n=1) program director and four (n=4) supportive faculty members, each of whom contributed additional qualitative data that helped describe the program, its benefits, and overall feasibility more completely. As participants were not individually identified, their responses were

numerically coded and lists were checked and verified by numerical identification only. Participants were divided and labeled as Student 1 – 15 and Faculty 1 – 5 in order to ensure the anonymity addressed in the IRB and individual consent forms signed by each participant.

### **Quantitative Data Collection**

I requested a total of three quantitative data items from Trident Technical College:

1. Total number of students who have accessed the Charleston Clemente Program since it began in 2005,
2. Total number of students who have successfully completed one (1) semester of the Charleston Clemente Program,
3. Total number of students who have successfully completed two (2) semesters of the Charleston Clemente Program.

Trident Technical College's Institutional Research and Assessment office generously provided added data to better illustrate the overall program and adds an additional data set to further corroborate the data discovered during this study. To summarize, the following data sets were included in the Trident Technical College data report covering the 2005 – 2012 academic years:

1. Enrollment data for each year and total enrollments,
2. Completion data for each year and total enrollments,
3. Persistence data at Trident Technical College for each year and total enrollments,

4. Demographic data totals for all students including those who dropped prior to census, by gender, race/ethnicity, and age range.

I obtained the following additional quantitative data through the survey:

1. Demographic data (e.g., age, gender, ethnicity),
2. Educational status of the participant both before and after enrolling in the Charleston Clemente Program,
3. Course enrollment and completion,
4. Attainment of college credits through program participation,
5. Educational goals and the impact of the Charleston Clemente Program on their pursuit,
6. Clemente Course goals achieved during participation,
7. Important elements leading to enrollment and retention in the program.

### **Qualitative Data Collection**

Data were collected through voluntary surveys and interviews. Participants responded to questions regarding their perceptions of the program and its impact. They were also asked to evaluate its success. The qualitative data obtained in this study helped to fully describe the Charleston Clemente program and to ascertain its validity as a model for increasing college access for economically-disadvantaged adults.

### **Variables and Measures**

**Survey items.** The survey items listed here are shown in the sample of the survey found in Appendix B.

1. When did you attend the Charleston Clemente Course?

2. Did you complete the Charleston Clemente Course? (If “no,” the survey directed participants to question number 6)
3. Were you issued college credit through Bard College for successfully completing the course?
4. Were you issued college credit through Trident Technical College for successfully completing the course? (If “no,” the survey directed participants to question number 6)
5. If you were issued college credits, do you believe that those credits helped increase your access to college?
6. What was the highest level of education you had completed BEFORE participating in the Charleston Clemente Course?
7. Please indicate your CURRENT educational goal by selecting one of the options below:
  - a) GED/High School Diploma
  - b) College Certificate
  - c) Associate Degree
  - d) Bachelor Degree
  - e) Post-Baccalaureate Certification (including teaching credentials)
  - f) Graduate Degree
  - g) Not Applicable
8. Have you obtained a degree or certificate AFTER participating in the Charleston Clemente Course? Please select all that apply:
  - a) No

- b) GED/High School Diploma
- c) College Certificate
- d) Associate Degree
- e) Bachelor Degree
- f) Post-Baccalaureate Certification
- g) Graduate Degree

9. Have you pursued additional **college** courses AFTER participating in the Charleston Clemente Course? (If “no,” the survey directed participants to question number 11)

10. Did your participation in the Charleston Clemente Course influence your decision to pursue additional college courses in a positive manner?

11. What were the most important aspects of the Clemente Course that helped you to enroll in and/or complete the course? Please select one or more response(s):

- a) Tuition-Free courses
- b) Free transportation (bus passes)
- c) Free childcare
- d) Free meal
- e) Subject matter of the course(s)
- f) The instructor(s)
- g) My classmates

12. What goal(s) of the Clemente Course do you believe were achieved during your experience with the program? Please select one or more responses.



- a) I became a life-long learner
- b) I learned how to continue my education
- c) I am more aware and appreciative of the humanities
- d) I am an engaged and active citizen
- e) I have improved my life
- f) I can improve the lives of my family members
- g) I have increased self-esteem
- h) I am more self-confident

13. Do you believe the Charleston Clemente Program provided you with access to college?

14. Do you have any additional comments regarding the Charleston Clemente Program that you would like to add? (An open text-box was provided)

15. What is your gender?

16. With which race or ethnic group do you most identify?

17. Which category below includes your age?

**Interview items.** There were two separate interview protocols; one addressed students of the Charleston Clemente program and the other addressed supporting staff including the program director and supporting faculty. The interview items can be reviewed here and in Appendix C.

***Interview protocol 1: Students***

1. Describe your background.
2. Describe your previous experiences or perceptions of college education.
3. What led you to enroll in the Clemente program?

4. Describe your experiences in the program.
5. How has the Clemente program affected you?
6. What are the benefits of the program?
7. What are the best aspects of the program?
8. What would you say to a person who is interested in participating in the Clemente program?
9. What are your educational goals?
10. What are your career goals?
11. Has the Clemente program influenced your educational and/or career goals? If so how?

***Interview protocol 2: Faculty and staff***

1. Describe your background.
2. Describe your affiliation with the Clemente program.
3. How did you become interested in this program?
4. What is your perception of the impact the program has had on the students?
5. What are the benefits of the Clemente program?
6. What are the best aspects of the program?
7. What supports are available to Clemente students?
8. Has the program impacted college access for economically-disadvantaged individuals? If so, how?
9. What are the most successful elements of the Clemente program?
10. What changes or enhancements do you anticipate making to the program in the future?

11. How could other colleges or universities in the country adopt this program?
12. What is your role Trident Technical College? What are your responsibilities?
13. How long have you worked at the institution? How long have you worked with the Clemente program?
14. Will you continue to support the program? Why or why not?

### **Data Analysis**

**Quantitative data analysis.** In order to analyze the quantitative data results of the survey and the preliminary quantitative data provided by Trident Technical College, the data were first summed for each variable. The variables included gender, ethnicity, and age range as well as past and current educational attainment levels. SPSS software was used to analyze the survey data. Descriptive analysis of the data was used to determine frequency and percentages as well as measures of central tendency. A total of n=22 participants were surveyed.

**Qualitative data analysis.** The analysis of qualitative data began with word-for-word transcription of the Charleston Clemente student participant interviews and the staff and faculty interviews at Trident Technical College. A total of n=20 participants were interviewed. After transcription, the interview transcripts were coded and six themes that represented similarities among each of the cases were identified (Creswell, 2006). The results have been reported using data tables and illustrative figures. The results and their implications are also discussed.

**Research questions.** Following are the research questions addressed by the study:

1. Is the Charleston Clemente Program a viable and replicable model for increasing college access among the economically-disadvantaged adult population?
2. Do students of the Charleston Clemente Program pursue educational goals after participating in the program?

**Research objectives.** Following are the research objectives addressed by the study:

1. To describe the efficacy of the Charleston Clemente Program as a model supporting college access.
2. To evaluate the impact of the Charleston Clemente Program on its participants.

**Mixed methods study procedures.** Study participants were identified using the criterion sampling method as each individual must have been a student in the Charleston Clemente program (Creswell, 2007). They were each invited to participate in the interview using an email letter that was sent to them by the program director and a poster that was approved by the University of Nebraska and Trident Technical College institutional review boards was used to invite participation in the survey. Each participant signed an informed consent document that described the voluntary nature of the study.

Anonymity was an important consideration in the study. Each participant was assigned a random number and his or her interview data were coded accordingly. Interviews were taped and transcribed; tapes are currently stored in a locked cabinet in my office and will remain there for one year. Once that time period has elapsed, the tapes will be destroyed. The participants were informed that the study would be shared

with the professional community, however their individual data would not be traceable. Surveys were anonymously completed online using the weblink provided.

Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval of the study was first obtained from Trident Technical College on November 12, 2012 (Appendix D) and then submitted to the University of Nebraska-Lincoln (UNL) IRB in order to obtain my research institution's approval (Appendix E). The UNL IRB approval was obtained on November 26, 2012; the approval ensured that all ethical concerns were addressed. An informed consent form was included in the approval package (Appendix F) and was obtained from each interview participant while the voluntary nature of the survey was disclosed in the header material included on the survey. An affirming checkbox that required each participant to acknowledge the voluntary nature of the survey and provided informed consent information was included in the survey. Interview participants indicated their initial consent by contacting me directly by telephone or email in response to the cover letter request for volunteers with a date and time for the interview. The informed consent form also readdressed the audio recording of the interview, that I would transcribe the tape of the interview, the data would be coded to ensure the anonymity of the participants, and that both tapes and transcripts would be stored for one year in a locked cabinet in the researcher's office, after which time they would be destroyed.

**Validity.** In order to maximize the reliability and validity of the survey questionnaire items, the following were addressed.

**Face Validity** was assessed by obtaining informal feedback from work and school colleagues on the survey format and clarity. Because conveniently accessible colleagues

work in the K-12 sector, it was necessary to share the survey with local college and university faculty and administration with whom collaboration occurs frequently.

***Content validity*** was obtained through the dissertation proposal process during which an expert panel – the dissertation committee – convened and reviewed research instrumentation including the survey.

The validity in the study was established through triangulation of the data gathered in the survey, the interviews, and the quantitative data provided by the college. Because both current and former students were surveyed and there was a mix of quantitative and qualitative data, confidence levels in the data were improved as triangulation bolsters its validity (Hatch, 2002; Stake, 1995).

## **Chapter 4: Quantitative Results**

Quantitative data were obtained from two sources: the voluntary survey study and the Trident Technical College Institutional Research Office. These data were analyzed using SPSS statistical software. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the n=22 survey participants. All of the survey participants were either former or current Charleston Clemente program students.

### **Survey Results**

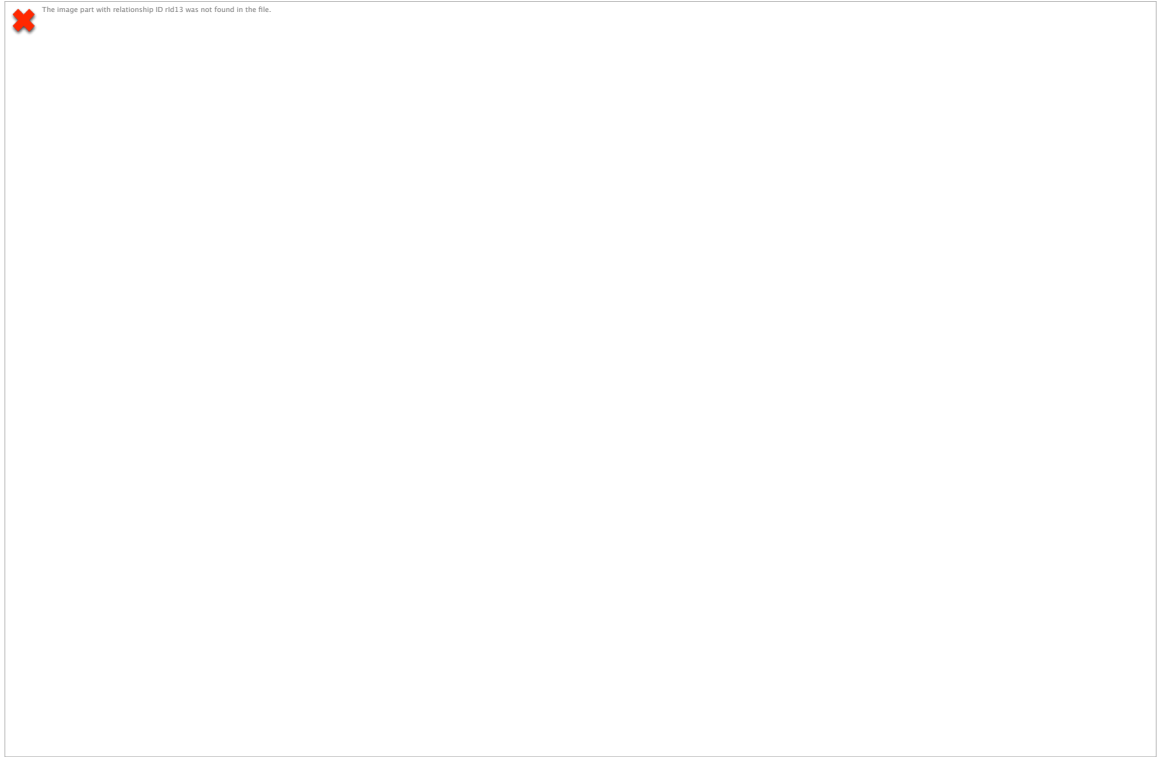
All of the n=22 survey participants positively acknowledged the informed consent clause included in the survey design in accordance with the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's IRB approval. The survey included demographic questions regarding gender, race/ethnicity, and age range. The gender breakdown of participants was 68.2% male and 27.3% female. Some of the participants (4.5%) omitted gender identification. The majority of participants were either Black/African-American (40.9%) or White/Caucasian (40.9%). The racial/ethnic breakdown of the survey population is illustrated in figure 3 below. Note that the survey specified for both the Black/African-American and the White/Caucasian groups were to be indicated only if the participant was not Hispanic/Latino.



### **Figure 3: Clemente Survey Participants, Ethnic/Racial Demographics**

The majority of survey participants, 54.5%, were between the ages of 50 – 59 with the next largest group falling between the ages of 40-49 at 18.2%. Combined, the majority of survey participants, 72.7%, were between the ages of 40 – 59.





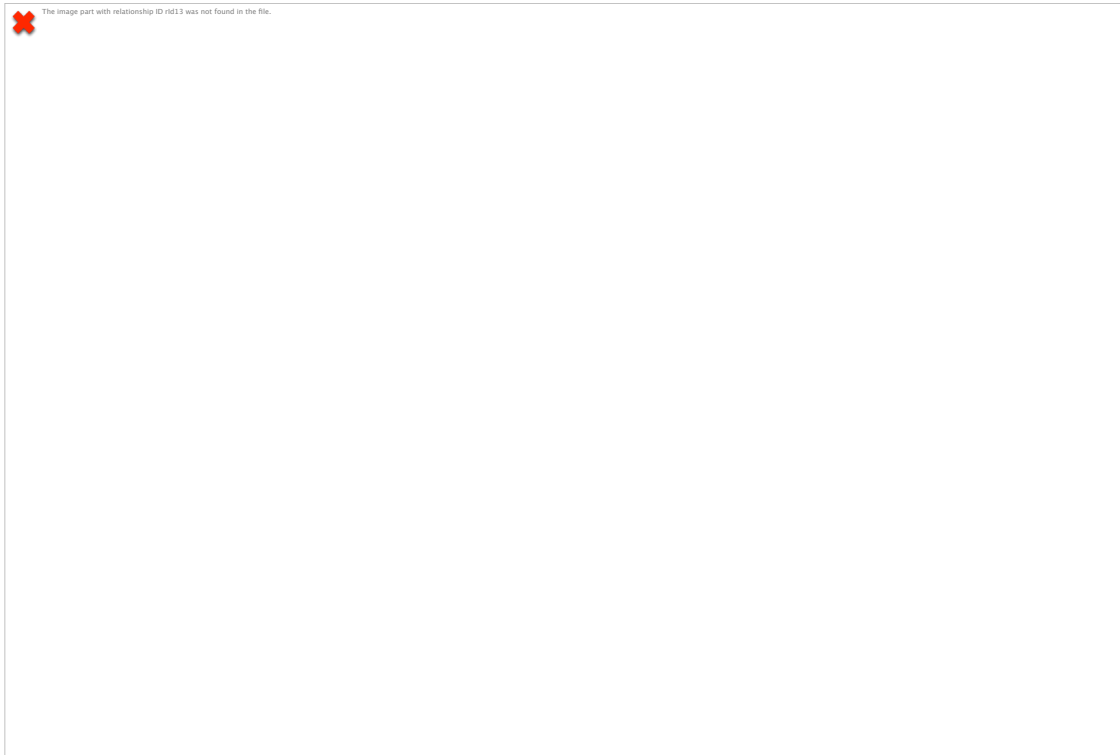
#### **Figure 4: Survey Participants' Age Range**

The survey participants attended the Charleston Clemente program during a range of years from 2009 to 2013. None of the participants had attended during the early years of the program. The majority attended in 2012 followed by 2011. The combined majority of survey participants attending during the years of 2011 – 2012 composed 68.2% of all survey participants.



**Figure 5: Year Participants Attended the Charleston Clemente Program**

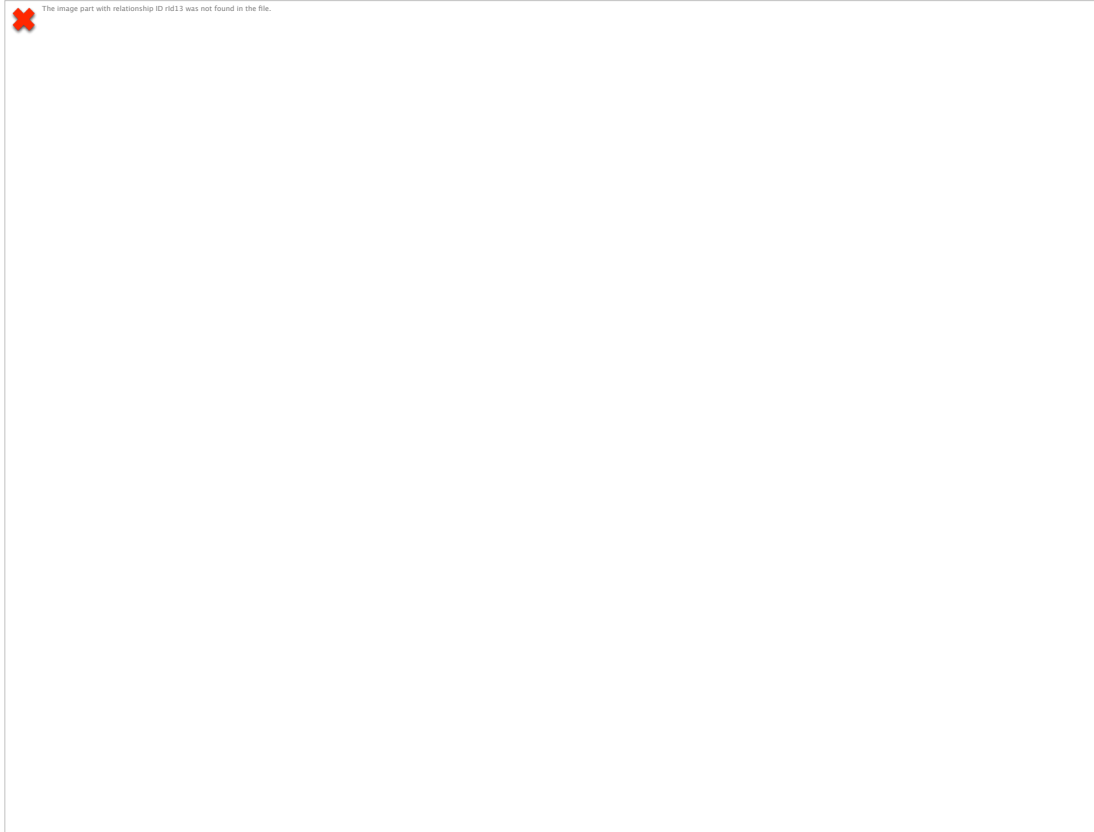
Fifty-nine percent of survey participants completed the Charleston Clemente program, 31.9% did not complete the courses, and 9.1% were currently enrolled. Of those who completed the program, 92.3% of them were issued college credits through Trident Technical College and all of these same participants believed that the college credits helped to increase their access to college. Therefore, of all survey participants, 54.5% of obtained college credits through the program and believed that those credits increased their access to college. However, it is not to be missed that nearly all survey participants believe that the Charleston Clemente Program increased their access to college (90.9%).



**Figure 6: Clemente Program Completion and the Impact of College Credits Issued on Survey Participants' Perception of Increased College Access**

**Educational attainment and post-Clemente program educational goals set and completed.** Survey participants provided their pre- and post-Clemente course educational attainment information. They each shared their educational goals upon completion of the Clemente program in the survey as well as any degrees or college certificates attained after completing the program. A substantial proportion (59.1%) of the survey participants had at least taken some college courses prior to their enrollment in the Clemente program and 22.7% had a college certificate or degree before Clemente. A majority of participants (72.7%) completed additional college work after attending the Clemente program, and 31.8% have completed a college certificate or degree. Participants who believed that the Charleston Clemente program influenced the decision

to pursue additional education also represented a majority (77.3%). Figure 7 illustrates educational attainment before participation in the Clemente program.



**Figure 7: Education Attained by Survey Participants Prior to Enrolling in the Charleston Clemente program**

**Clemente course goals.** Several program goals were established for the Clemente Program in 2005 as part of a program evaluation model designed at the University of Massachusetts at Amherst's Center for Public Policy and Administration (Devlin, 2005). A total of 14 goals divided into three areas for measuring progress were identified:

I. Activity Goals

1. Teach students knowledge about traditional humanities disciplines

2. Provide knowledge about reflective, critical, and political thinking and writing
3. Encourage active participation in class discussion, expression, and communication
4. Facilitate learning by providing necessary conditions
5. Provide transferable credits to eligible students

## II. Bridging Goals

1. Promote students' intellectual development
2. Enhance students' self-esteem
3. Enhance students' self-efficacy
4. Enhance students' self-confidence
5. Increase students' awareness of importance of education
6. Foster students' appreciation of the traditional cultural heritage of the humanities

## III. Outcome Goals

1. Increase students' engagement in democratic society
2. Improve students' ability to take charge of their own lives
3. Improve students' ability to ameliorate the lives of their families

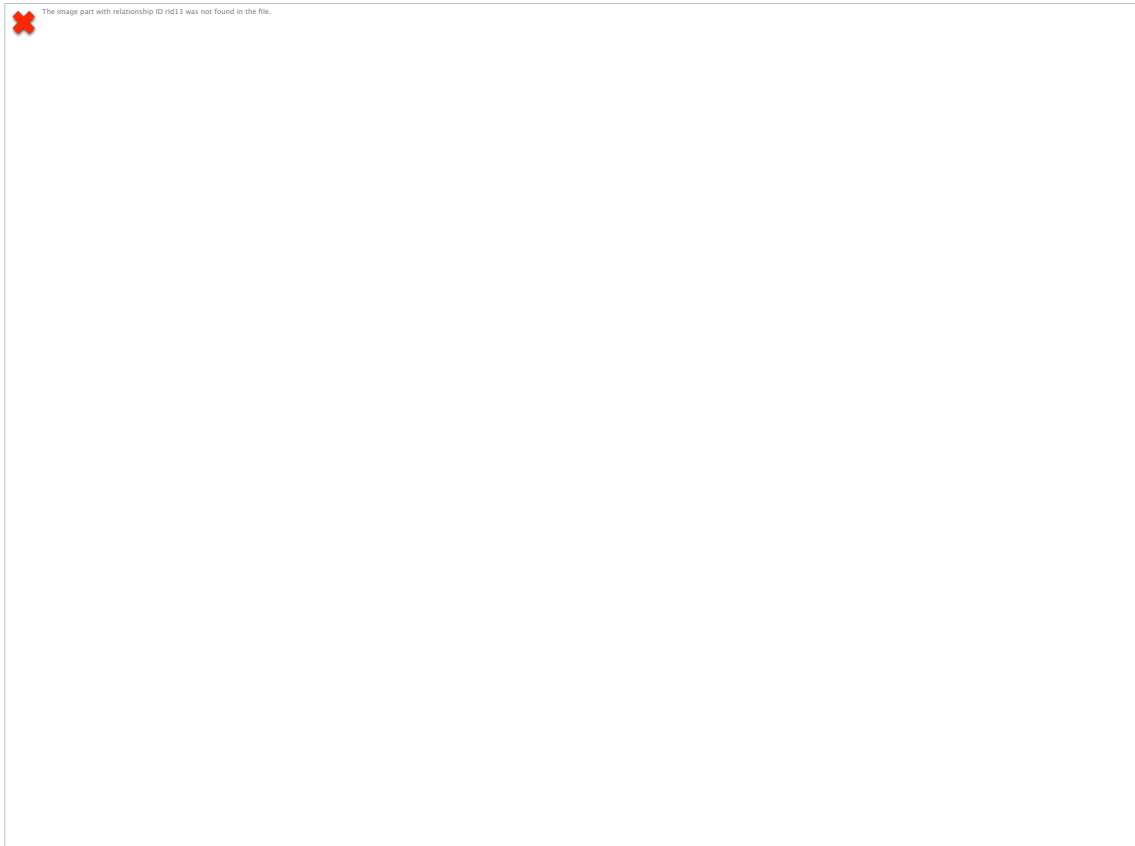
As the program evaluation model notes, several of these goals overlap (Devlin, 2005). In addition, they are articulated in academic language that could be inaccessible for some participants. In order to clarify the survey study, I simplified the language and addressed program goals by consolidating those that overlapped and assessing others through more

detailed questions in the survey, as in the questions regarding college credits. Following is the consolidated question:

What goal(s) of the Clemente Course do you believe were achieved during your experience with the program? (participants may select more than one)

- I became a life-long learner
- I learned how to continue my education
- I am more aware and appreciative of the humanities
- I am an engaged and active citizen
- I have improved my life
- I can improve the lives of my family members
- I have increased self-esteem
- I am more self-confident

Figure 8 shows what Clemente goals were achieved according to the survey participants.



### **Figure 8: Clemente Program Goals Achieved According to Survey Participants**

My survey was also designed to inquire about Activity goal #4 in more detail. The goal, facilitate learning by providing necessary conditions, speaks to the elements of the program that make it viable for adult students who are economically-disadvantaged or are new to the college experience. The survey question had seven possible responses and participants could make multiple selections. In addition, this question probes for enrollment and retention factors that support the Charleston Clemente program:

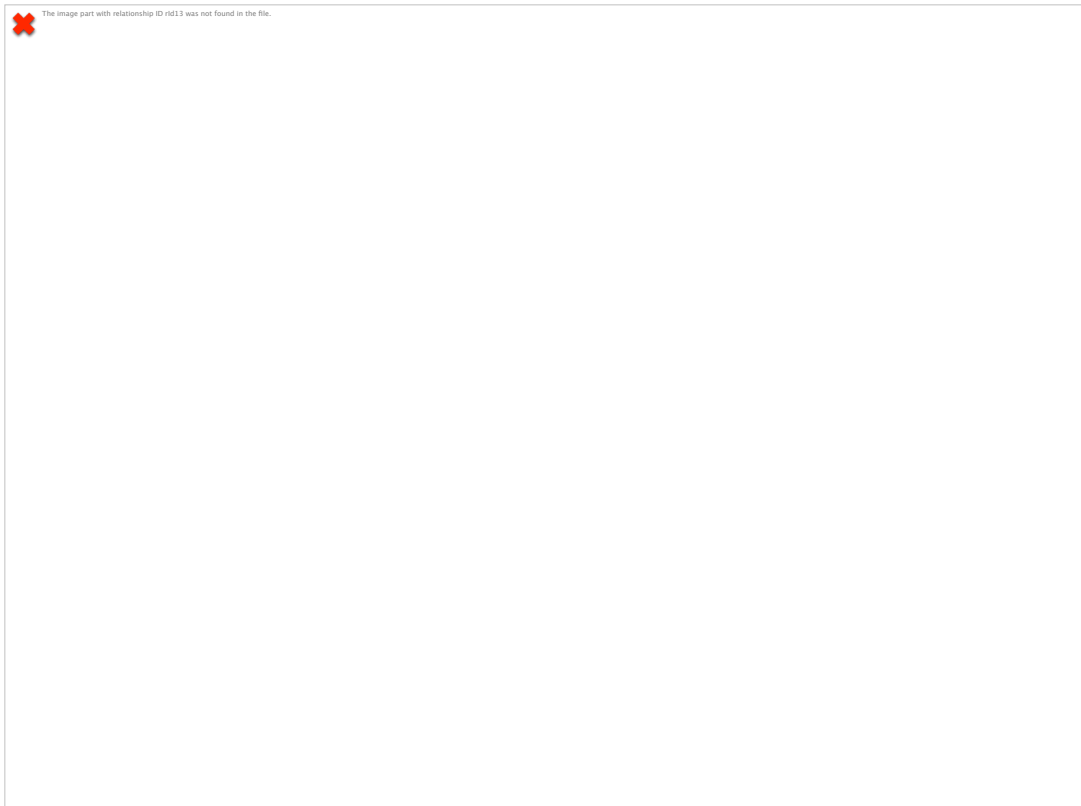
What were the most important elements of the Clemente Course that helped you to enroll in and/or complete the course?

18. Tuition-free courses

19. Free transportation

20. Free childcare
21. Free meal
22. Subject matter of the course
23. The instructor(s)
24. My classmates

As figure 9 illustrates, the survey participants identified tuition-free courses and the instructors as the most important aspects of the Clemente Course closely followed by the subject matter:



**Figure 9: Aspects of the Charleston Clemente Program that Most Influenced Enrollment and Retention According Survey Participants**



### Results from Trident Technical College (TTC) Clemente Course Report

The data provided by TTC's Institutional Research Office includes enrollment, completion, and retention data as well as demographics from years 2005 – 2011. Preliminary data was provided for 2012, but is incomplete and unofficial, therefore omitted from this study.

Of the 251 students who enrolled in the Charleston Clemente Course from 2005 – 2011, 145 of them completed the course and 72 students continued on to take credit courses at Trident Technical College. Table 1 details these data:

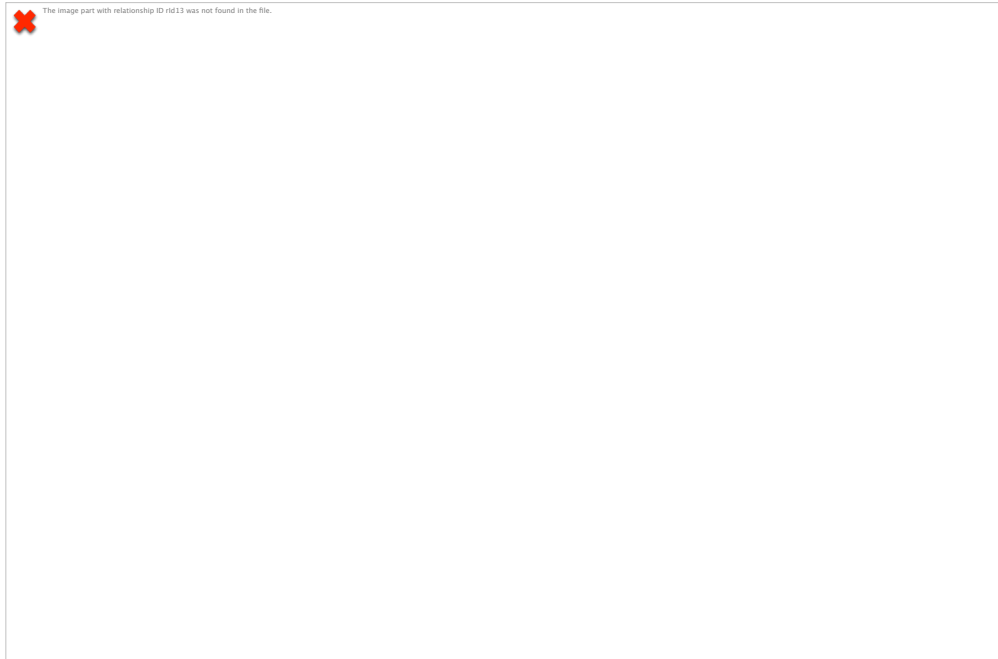
| Year Enrolled    | # of Enrollments | # of Completers | # of Completers Enrolling in Credit Courses |
|------------------|------------------|-----------------|---|
| Spring/Fall 2005 | 38               | 28              | 27  |
| Spring/Fall 2006 | 51               | 22              | 11  |
| Spring/Fall 2007 | 35               | 20              | 11  |
| Spring/Fall 2008 | 40               | 22              | 6   |
| Spring/Fall 2009 | 30               | 15              | 7   |
| Spring/Fall 2010 | 30               | 21              | 9   |
| Spring/Fall 2011 | 27               | 17              | 1   |
| <b>TOTALS</b>    | 251              | 145             | 72  |

**Table 1: Trident Technical College Institutional Review Office reported Clemente Course Enrollments, Completers, and Retained Students by Year**

Of the 251 enrollments, 57.8% completed the Clemente Course. Of those completers, 49.7% were retained at Trident Technical College as demonstrated by their pursuit of credit courses on campus. These data do not indicate if students who enrolled in credit courses off-campus were also tracked for overall college retention.

**TTC reported demographic data.** The demographic data reported by TTC's Institutional Research Office include gender, race/ethnicity, and age range. However, the demographic data describes all students who enrolled in the Clemente Course including all drops prior to census. As such, these data describe a total of 372 participants. The

gender breakdown is 51.61% female and 48.39% male. The race/ethnicity demographic breakdown is similar to that of the survey participants and illustrated in figure 10:



**Figure 10: Race/Ethnic Breakdown of Clemente Course Participants as reported by Trident Technical College**

The age ranges reported are diverse with the majority of participants reported between the ages of 41 to 51 and over. Table 2 provides the frequency and percent of participants by age range:

| <b>Age</b>   | <b>Frequency</b> | <b>Percent</b> |
|--------------|------------------|----------------|
| 20 and under | 19               | 5.11%          |
| 21 – 30      | 77               | 20.70%         |
| 31 – 40      | 68               | 18.28%         |
| 41 – 50      | 111              | 29.84%         |
| 51 and over  | 97               | 26.08%         |
| Total        | 372              |                |

**Table 2: Age Range of Clemente Course Participants reported by TTC Institutional Review Office**

## Chapter 5: Qualitative Results

Twenty interviews were conducted for this study including fifteen students and five faculty members. The interviews were coded randomly by number (i.e., Student 1, Student 2, Faculty 1, Faculty 2, etc.) in order to maintain confidentiality and anonymity as was addressed in the institutional review board approval documentation and the informed consent documents that each interview participant signed. All of the interviews were conducted in a meeting room at the city public library as the Trident Technical College institutional review board approval stipulated.

Several prominent themes emerged after transcribing and coding the interview data by hand. Faculty and student interviews were coded separately as two distinct data sets and then combined. Initially, it appeared as though the themes were distinct to the two groups with some overlap. After several more readings of the transcripts and further coding, I discovered that my in vivo coding – using the participants’ actual words as codes – were contributing to the appearance of distinct code groups. Upon closer inspection, it became clear that both groups were communicating the same significant points using different language. Five themes that encompass both the student and faculty interviewees’ perspectives on the Charleston Clemente Program emerged:

1. Humanity and the Humanities (“Giving Back”)
2. Accomplishment, Persistence, and Perseverance (improved self-esteem)
3. Redemption and Transformation
4. Finances and Access
5. Relationships and the “Power of One”

**Theme One: Humanity and the Humanities, or “Giving Back”**

Both student and faculty interviews pointed to the importance of “giving back” as a driving force and outcome of the Clemente program. In addition, some students directly connected the need for humanity as a verb in relation to the humanities discipline, particularly in addressing fellow citizens in need. Student 3 called the humanities a “thing” that has left a void in many lives: “the humanities is a thing that’s missing from the lives of a lot of people and it does make a difference.” Student 5 saw the faculty as role models of humanity and felt inspired by their giving to consider giving back: “And then when I saw the people in there, how they volunteered their time and how they want to help – kinda makes you want to pass it on.” Student 9 embraced the essence of the humanities by acknowledging the importance of multiple perspectives and internalizing his understanding of humanity as a need to help others:

But, what better environment for someone to get someone’s point of view and to get a better point of view. It just really opened my eyes to [see that] people aren’t always what you think they are. You know what I mean? And that’s definitely true [ . . . ] If there is one thing when I get done with education, I know I want to help people. And, I got a lot from this class.

Later in the interview, Student 9 focused on the altruistic element of the Clemente program:

There are few things that are truly altruistic in this world and I think this is one of them. Doing something because it’s the right thing to do is a breath of fresh air for some people. I mean, they aren’t doing it for the money because there is none.

You know they're doing the Clemente course because they feel like they are making a difference and they are.

This statement is interesting due to its generalized implications as well as its specific meaning with respect to the Charleston Clemente faculty. Student 1 further illustrated a general sense of humanity's need to positively impact others:

Because there are a lot of people that I think could give so much to society. We just never have the opportunity because we don't know we have it. Most things are like you stay on your side of town and we'll stay here. [The Clemente course] is a breakdown of barriers.

With humanitarianism leading the way and a curriculum focused on the discipline, students like Student 1 have already begun giving back. He is currently volunteering at Trident Literacy while Student 15 is a student worker in the Clemente program where she feels she can give back by helping others who are walking in similar shoes.

The Clemente faculty saw the depth of value in the humanities as a context for transformation. Faculty 3 referred to the Clemente program founder's vision (Earl Shorris) as one of individual empowerment through the humanities and saw this curriculum and context as having greater potential for long-lasting impact than a job training program:

Earl talked about empowering the people. Knowledge, typically knowledge of the humanities, is empowering them to be citizens and to be more able to participate in their society and to contribute. The poor give a lot even though they don't have very much to give. Somebody on the streets will share their last

cigarette with somebody and you still see that in the Clemente Program. They will help each other and give to each other.

The experience with the humanities as a subject matter, then, transfers to the way individuals in the program interact with people going forward. Within the program, participants help one another. Then, when they have completed the program, “they feel that they have an incredible gift to share with others and that’s why they talk about it so much and bring others into the program. So they have something to give and are not just takers” (faculty 3).

This truth impacted the overall success of this dissertation study as the student participants themselves went to great lengths in order to serve and to support me as a graduate student looking to learn more about their program. As faculty 4 reminded me, the Clemente program inspires a sense of community among individuals as human beings regardless of social rank or status. This humanitarian context leads participants to become social advocates and responsible citizens. Faculty 4 shared her perspective on the kind of education experienced in the Clemente program and its humanitarian impact:

It’s a different kind of education in a sense where you sit down and you eat together. You know, professors eat with students and we talk. [. . .] And so it’s a bonding of various strata of society. It’s an intellectual exercise; they get to start thinking for themselves. I think they become more citizens [. . .] they vote, they feel it matters what they do, that they can change some of this. So, I think it creates a more responsible citizen. You see it – my students are helping me to help you. That’s how it works.

Faculty 4 founded the Clemente program in order to have her own lasting impact or legacy in the world that is a positive one, “I think a brush with mortality makes you realize there’s no real telling, you know, if you’re in remission forever or you know what. So if you’re gonna do something, do it now. And, I wanted to do something that’s left behind that’s good.” After a difficult experience with cancer and treatment with chemo and radiation therapy, she encountered the Clemente program and became determined to bring it to Trident, “it has been some of the most meaningful work of my life. It has been the most grueling, the most frustrating, and the most exasperating, but also some of the most exhilarating work of my life.”

Having a lasting, positive impact on the world is a recurring theme in humanities curriculum, among the faculty delivering the program, and for the student participants themselves. In addition, it’s the reflexive context of the program as one that delivers humanities content while also impacting humanity that makes this theme both powerful and unique. Faculty 5 addressed the topic directly, “I’m here to help my fellow man [. . .] and I think that’s what we’re supposed to be doing while we’re here on earth.” She sees the Clemente program as an “opportunity for fellowship and acceptance,” mirroring Faculty 4’s description of the program experience for both faculty and student participants. The reflexive nature of the program is succinctly described by faculty 4:

It’s not just about a student; it’s about being a human being. And, you know, in some ways, I think it’s what the humanities are supposed to be about – humanity. It’s not about one-upping or showing off or omniposity. It’s about soul-to-soul, human condition, shoulder-to-shoulder.

**Theme Two: Accomplishment, Persistence, and Perseverance (Improved Self-Esteem)**

Student interviewees repeatedly noted the Clemente Program's ability to improve their self-esteem by giving them the opportunity to accomplish something through persistence and perseverance in spite of grave challenges including homelessness, hunger, addiction, and finances. Faculty noted this in their interviews as well, however there was the added sense of persistence and perseverance in spite of the challenges. Faculty member 1 shared that he taught "for free the first year or two because [the college] didn't have any kind of budget, but now the college pays me a couple hundred a semester." He shares that the benefit to students is "to show them that they can do something. And, to the ones that graduate, show that they can carry through something." Student 7's comments correlated directly with Faculty 1's observations. Student 7 noted, "that's one of the things Clemente gave me was a little perseverance." He revealed his own struggles with government agencies such as the Veteran's Administration and Social Security. He felt that the Clemente program provided him with the perseverance to pursue his benefits and continue his education towards a final goal of a Master's degree.

Several faculty members' comments were focused on the student impact of the Clemente program. After having experienced failures over and over again, students are provided the opportunity to succeed:

I sometimes think that [Faculty 4] gets discouraged, and I do too, that we lose students. But, I remind her, even a student who has only come to one class leaves a little bit different. And, the more classes they come to, certainly if they can



complete a couple of semesters, it will have a greater impact on them as a student and their self-esteem. They've succeeded at something. Most or all of the students in the Clemente program have had a huge meltdown of failure in their life, sometimes several failures in their life. And so, to accomplish something, to keep coming to class is an accomplishment. To be able to read a college textbook, to write an essay, and then to graduate from the course at the end, all of those things say that they can actually accomplish something. (Faculty 3)

Four of the five faculty members interviewed each referred to improved self-esteem as a student benefit in the Clemente program. Faculty 5 connected the sense of accomplishment to the program's ability to open the doors of continued learning for student participants: "it's an excellent bridge if they want to continue their education, a feeling of accomplishment, and a boost of confidence."

Student interviewees repeatedly shared their sense of improved self-esteem, confidence, and accomplishment. Some articulated this directly as "self-esteem" while many others simply said "I can do this" when referring to reaching and surpassing academic milestones. It became clear through the interviews that many students did not believe they could succeed in college and that the Clemente program provided the opportunity and entre into a world that was seemingly out of reach: academia.

When asked about the benefits of the Clemente program, Student 1 stated, "the most important one is self-esteem." He also shared how the program is "an opportunity to get our foot in the door." The significance of this comment is paramount to the efficacy of Clemente as a college access program; it facilitates post-secondary learning for a student population that might not have otherwise considered college. As Student 1

indicated, “self-esteem is very important; most of us are not very high on ourselves.”

The Clemente program helps build or rebuild that self-esteem.

An interesting perspective on the development of this sense of accomplishment and increased self-esteem was provided by Student 4 who attributed prior failings to a “fear of success.” He also indicated that the strongest benefit of the program was “to help the individual understand that they can be successful. They can go back to school and get an education. They can start all over and make it.” Student 5 echoed the same sentiment while sharing Clemente’s impact on his educational and career goals; he believed that the program influenced him because “it showed me that I can do it.”

### **Theme Three: Redemption and Transformation**

Over and over again, the student interview participants shared stories of being “lost” in the world and then redeemed and transformed through their experience with the Clemente program. Most of them had experienced addiction to drugs and/or alcohol and had either destroyed or lost important relationships with loved ones from spouses to children and beyond. Student 12 shared that not one of his five children would speak with him anymore. Upon graduating from the Clemente program, however, one of his sons came to graduation to see him obtain his certificates and speak as class valedictorian. The theme of accomplishment, then, is closely intertwined with redemption and transformation. Student interviews typically progressed from a background description that detailed drug abuse, failed marriages, and, in some cases, devastating illnesses that essentially put each of these participants on the “wrong track” in life. As they persisted through the Clemente Program, however, many of them were able to begin moving their lives closer to a positive and productive track leading towards

increased income, continued education, and careers. The redemption process was transformative in nature not only because of the financial impact on students, but also because of the intellectual one through the humanities curriculum. This transformation was most clearly articulated by the faculty interview participants.

“No other teaching that I’ve done since I started in 1978 do I see people changing before my eyes every time I teach” (Faculty 3). The faculty members repeatedly refer to the transformative power of the humanities curriculum to the extent that it has “spilled over into the other courses, too; I think it’s affected the way I teach” (Faculty 3). It is, perhaps, this “way” of teaching that makes the transformative difference for the Clemente student population. Faculty 4 described it as an opening or opportunity for those who could not see any more options in life and needed something that would redirect them towards a positive and productive direction:

I think it’s the idea and the vision of another possible life from the one they have because a lot of my students are in shelters. You know, they don’t see that intellect is important. It doesn’t matter what they’re wearing or if they’ve got a job or social position. And then they have some incentive to move forward.

By treating students who have been accustomed to being an ignored population with respect as members of humanity and as the curriculum demands, the faculty often facilitates transformation. Faculty 5 shared her perception of society’s reaction to this fragile population as demeaning. “I know we tend to look at these folks as the invisible part of society. We don’t make eye contact; we don’t acknowledge them.” She believes that by treating her students with respect and holding them to the same standard as all students, she is able to facilitate their learning successfully. Perhaps transformation is

readily accessible as well because, as Faculty 5 shared, “I just think sometimes the person who is in the worse situation appreciates the opportunity more than the person who is not in the worse situation.” Faculty 2 called them “dream students” who are “willing to participate and so willing to try.” Their life challenges have provided for experiences that they integrate into their studies of the humanities and, perhaps, make them ripe for change and transformation. Faculty 3 captured this quality of the Clemente program as he described its most successful elements:

I come back to the whole idea of changing and transforming people who have low self-esteem, who don't think they're capable of doing a lot of ordinary things in life. To get them on a road – it might not even be education; it might be a steady job, getting an apartment to live in, or leading a more normal life – that might not have been possible through the normal social services or non-profits they interact with.

He explained that while there are several other programs, non-profits, and initiatives out there that attempt to address the needs of this population, he believes that “there is something about the Clemente program that has a better advantage than these other programs.” It opens doors, provides supports, and stimulates the intellect of adults who oftentimes did not know there were other possibilities out there.

#### **Theme Four: Finances and Access**

The Clemente program is designed to facilitate access to college for the economically-disadvantaged, making finances and access themes nearly by default. Eleven of the student participants were living in shelters or had other equally distressing living arrangements due to poverty. As previously discussed, their financial situations

may have been exacerbated by addiction, making them a further marginalized population in society. Several student interview participants indicated that their primary reason for initially enrolling in the Charleston Clemente program was to obtain a bus pass and for the free meals. Student 2 shared how the bus pass provided him with access to job interviews that could have rectified his financial status. He also gained access to computers to facilitate his job search through the college. Student 7 shared that the free tuition provided him with access to an educational opportunity and “something to do” other than drink as he was trying to become sober at the time he enrolled.

Some students also found that access to college meant access to financial aid that could help them get back on their feet (students 9, 11, 12, & 15). Others obtained access to healthcare and disability accommodations (student 5). Faculty members felt that the Clemente program initiated access to college support systems available to all matriculated students. Faculty 2 indicated that several of the departments at the college would come to assist students including financial aid and economic development. Faculty 3 spoke highly of the mentors assigned to students through the Clemente program who help support student success while participating in the program and beyond. He also indicated that the developmental courses in English and math become available to them as college students through Clemente and he shared that Trident Technical College has a robust offering of supports for all students that Clemente students can access. These include the Student Success Center, counseling, tutors, the library, and computer programs. Counseling also helps students with personal problems and financial ones. Faculty 3 shared that Trident’s engagement with community in a variety of ways is part of what led to his commitment to the college and that he sees the Clemente course as “a

unique community service that Trident serves that reaches a part of the community that none of our other programs reach.”

The college’s ability to financially sustain the Clemente program also impacts access. Most of the faculty members shared their concern regarding the pressure that the fiscal instability of the program places on its director leading to a lot fundraising and grant writing efforts. The director and one faculty member each have only one release section to manage the program and handle fundraising, making the increased sustainability of the program a challenge to secure. Faculty 4 shared her vision of how the Clemente program could be optimized:

My biggest wish is that it be institutionalized. If an institution could own it where the director could busy herself with perfecting the class and the curriculum, and intermingling with the students rather than the constant fundraising and the constant worry about paying for everything, I think that would be a wonderful thing.

The financial aspect, then, has an equally stressful impact on the program, faculty, and students who participate in Clemente. Stability of the program could lead to its increased success in meeting the goals previously articulated, particularly that of college access for the economically-distressed adult.

### **Theme Five: Relationships and “The Power of One”**

With only two exceptions, all student and faculty interview participants stressed the importance and impact of the program director (one of those exceptions was the director herself). Throughout the interviews, one gets a sense that she nearly single-handedly transformed the lives of students and those of her colleagues. Further,

relationships among students and faculty are powerful and sustained throughout the duration of program participation and beyond. Those relationships build a sense of community that supports the individual student participant. Faculty 3 described the multilayered relationships developed in the program as a “community formed with other students and the bond they form with other students, and the mentor, especially with [the program director] and me, and the instructors.” He believed that the best aspect of the program is in “belonging to a community” and that the students sense that they not only are among a group of people, but that they “undoubtedly have friends and supporters” within this group. Faculty 5 referred to this phenomenon as an “opportunity of fellowship and acceptance.”

Combining the themes of transformation, redemption, and community, Faculty 2 described her perception of the program’s impact as “transformative” as they have “watched students go from the street to working on their MA’s.” She is hesitant to credit instruction for that impact, however, and instead relates it to the environment provided by the Clemente program where the participants become students who experience a “different dynamic of socialization.” She further expanded this definition to include the humanities as students develop a new “sense of self” while also learning to “understand their roles in their communities. They begin to understand that they’re not an outsider and they do indeed begin to play a role.”

The program director’s influence on the success of the Charleston Clemente program was noted by faculty members as extending from each of their initial recruitment to teach and otherwise facilitate the program to her tireless commitment to supporting the program in myriad ways. From teaching the course herself to obtaining

funding to finding ways to help individual students, the director's impact as described by faculty is immeasurable. Even more so is her impact as described by the student interview participants. Student 1 spoke of how she "never gave up on me and she kept pushing me." He called her "an inspiration" who never passes judgment, but "wants to see that we can become who we're supposed to be." In many cases, as is the case with Student 1, she was the reason for the student's enrollment in the Clemente program. As he said, "there's a lot of people who go out and do something because it has to be done. [The program director] goes out and does it because she wants to. I mean she really cares about the people she's helping." He referred to her as his "idol;" a sentiment that is frequently repeated throughout the student interviews making the relationship with this one individual as powerful, if not more so, than the community students experience in the program.

The "Power of One" was reinforced throughout the student interview participants' descriptions of the program director. She was described by Student 3 as someone who "definitely cares about what she's doing and who she's dealing with." Student 4 called her "the backbone of the whole thing" who "makes it happen." In some cases, the program director became the intervention herself, beginning the process towards redemption and transformation for her students. Student 6 credited her with getting him involved with and staying in school beyond the Clemente program. Student 7 shared his gratitude for the program director, saying that he's "very thankful" for her while Student 8 fully credited her with bringing her to the program. Student 8 told me that this dissertation should actually have been about the program director, not just the Charleston Clemente program.



One of the most poignant descriptions of the program director came from Student 9. He felt that “she sifted through to find the diamond in the rough and she sees it in everybody.” He later explained that it is her efforts at supporting and sustaining the program that speak volumes: “when you see what [she] puts into it herself, of making these things and driving it, and puts everything into it. And, when it comes to the kudos, she gives everything to the students. I mean, that’s an amazing person.” Similarly, student 12 said that his primary reason for enrolling was the program director and that she “don’t take no credit for anything.” Several other student participants indicated that it was her infectious enthusiasm for the program that supported them and sustained them for the duration. Student 8 voiced her desire for the director’s contributions to be acknowledged and appreciated, adding, “she’s amazing; I can’t say enough about her.” With the director’s support and the development of a sense of community and collegiality among participants, faculty, mentors, and other supporting parties to the program, relationships appear to have become a foundational element for the success of the Charleston Clemente program.

## **Chapter 6: Discussion**

The purpose of this mixed method study was to explore the practices and outcomes of the Charleston Clemente Program as a potential model of support for access to higher education for economically-distressed adults. There were two central research questions and two sub-questions addressed by the study. The central questions were: How effective is the Charleston Clemente Program at supporting college access? What impact does the program have on its participants? The sub-questions of the study were:

1. Is the Charleston Clemente Program a viable and replicable model for increasing college access among the economically-disadvantaged adult population?
2. Do students of the Charleston Clemente Program pursue educational goals after participating in the program?

### **Effectiveness at Supporting College Access**

The Charleston Clemente Program only serves economically-distressed adults, therefore addressing a disadvantaged segment of the population by design. The demographic data provided by Trident Technical College further illustrated the population served by the program. Only 44.6% of all participants were White/Caucasian making the underrepresented racial/ethnic groups the majority of participants in Clemente at 55.4%. Again, the program is intended to serve adults, but the finding that more than 75% of students served were 31 years of age or older and 26% were over 51 years of age was significant. In January 2013, the AARP's Public Policy Institute issued a brief on the state of unemployment in the nation, citing an increase in unemployment among the 55 and older population from January 2012 (Rix, 2013). More than two million individuals of this population remained unemployed as unemployment decreased for the

nation overall (Rix, 2013). With this data in mind, the Charleston Clemente program appears to be addressing the needs of a critical group in society both in economic and human terms: the economically-distressed, ethnically/racially underrepresented, older adult.

The quantitative data was further corroborated by the qualitative data obtained through the interviews. All faculty members perceived that the Clemente program increased college access by providing entry to a non-mainstream population and following up on that entry with a layered support system starting with the community and relationships established in the classroom. The program director was cited in nearly every interview as instrumental to the outreach and support that the Charleston Clemente program demands in order to successfully serve the demographic targeted by the program. With a 57.8% completion rate and with nearly 50% of those completers (29% of all participants) continuing on to take credit courses at Trident Technical College, the data shows that this program does make a significant impact on the college-going rate of the population served.

The survey further illustrated the participants' perception of the program's impact on college access. More than half of the participants (54.5%) obtained college credits through the Clemente program at Trident Technical College and 90.9% believed that Clemente increased their access to college. Of the 22 survey participants, 20 participants or 91% of participants stated that they had established an educational goal after completing the Clemente course and 16 of those participants or 73% identified a post-secondary degree or certificate as their educational goal. When asked about specific goals of the Clemente Program, 54.5% of survey participants indicated that they learned

how to continue their education through Clemente and 27.3% believed that they became life-long learners.

The survey also further corroborated the qualitative data captured through the interviews. When asked to identify the most significant aspects of the program that impacted enrollment and retention, survey participants cited several of the Clemente Program elements included by design to support these important program goals. Some of the aspects evaluated by survey participants as having the greatest effect on enrollment and retention were free tuition (72.7%), free transportation (40.9%), the subject matter of the course (59.1%), and their classmates (40.9%). Free tuition directly impacted access because it addressed one of the primary college access obstacles faced by this participant group: finances. This also connects to the survey theme of finance as students and faculty faced the fiscal challenges of life and sustaining the program. Also noted in the qualitative data was the importance of community that the survey participants expressed by indicating the importance of their classmates to their enrollment and retention.

Perhaps most compelling, again, was the relationship between survey and interview data on the importance of faculty to program participants. Survey respondents ranked the impact of the instructors on enrollment and retention highest among all the indicators at 77.4%. The interview participants repeatedly shared that their sense of community with the instructors was important, and also that the program director's enthusiasm for the program and belief in all participants had a significant impact on their initial enrollment in the program and their ability to persist in spite of challenges.

### **Clemente Program Impact on Student Participants**

The Charleston Clemente Program's impact reached beyond college access to greater social and personal issues. The interview participants were often supported by the community established in the program to challenge addiction with several citing successful sobriety post-Clemente. The survey participants were specifically asked about the program goals that were achieved during their experience with the Clemente program. The highest ranked goal was increased self-esteem and increased self-confidence with 63.6% of survey participants indicating both goals were achieved through Clemente. This is again corroborated by the qualitative interview data and increased self-esteem became a primary theme in the study. Figure 9 illustrates the survey respondents' perception of program goals achieved. Goals that extend beyond the individual to society and their personal communities include their role as active and engaged citizens and their own ability to improve the lives of their families are each addressed. It is significant that more than 59% of survey participants did find that their experience with the Clemente Program led to becoming more engaging and active citizens, showing that Clemente has a big picture social impact extending beyond the primary goal of the study, college access.

### **Viability of the Charleston Clemente Program and Ability to Replicate**

Faculty interviews addressed the questions of viability and the ability of other post-secondary institutions to replicate the program. Each faculty member was optimistic regarding the ability to replicate, but only if the financial burden of the program is adequately addressed. Two of the faculty interview participants indicated that contacting and working with a mentor Clemente program such as their own would help to ensure the success of a new program elsewhere. Faculty 4 specifically stated that it is her wish to

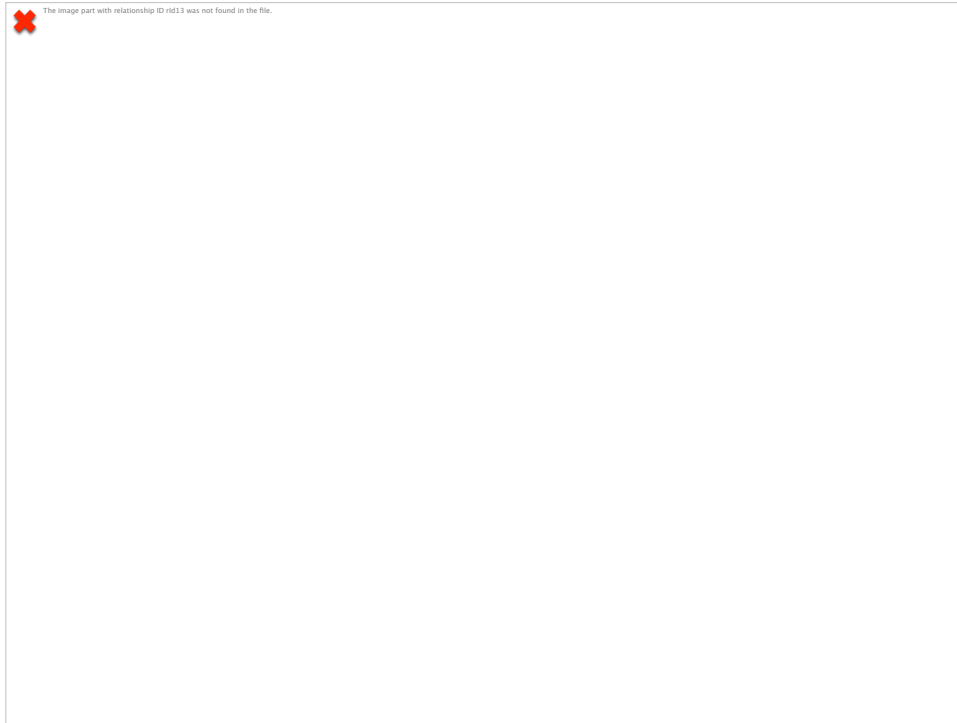
see the program become institutionalized so that it is fully supported and program directors and faculty can busy themselves with curriculum and instruction in the program as well as the continued social supports required by the population this program addresses. Through these interviews and in reviewing enrollment and retention data, it is evident that colleges looking to replicate this program would have to evaluate the big picture in order for the Clemente program to be sustainable. There must be a desire to positively impact the community and to effect change for one of the most challenged populations in the community: economically-distressed and ethnically/racially underrepresented older adults.

The program director did indicate that she felt adding free childcare service would encourage enrollment among younger adults. However, that is an additional expense that colleges would need to weigh against the long-term program outcome of college access and retention in credit courses post-Clemente program enrollment and completion. Fiscally speaking, colleges can evaluate the financial impact of running the program with the local retention of approximately 30% of all program participants according to Trident Technical College's data and the revenue generated by those added ADA that would not have otherwise been captured. Again, adding more supports aimed at retention for the population served in each community could increase this number, though it is already significant.

### **Clemente Student Participants and the Pursuit of Continued Education**

As discussed in the college access section of this chapter, Clemente program participants do capitalize on the opportunity presented by the course. They obtain college

credits and continue to establish educational goals post-Clemente. Figure 11 illustrates the survey participants' educational goals:



**Figure 11: Survey Participants' Current Educational Goals**

All but six participants established post-secondary educational goals and 72.7% of survey respondents indicated that they had completed additional college courses after participating in the Charleston Clemente program. With 49.7% of Clemente Course completers continuing on to take credit courses at Trident Technical College, continued post-secondary education does appear to be an outcome of the Charleston Clemente program. In addition, of the 15 student interview participants, only two were not college-going or had decided to pursue other goals that were career-related or personal. Two of the students had continued on to college outside of Trident. Faculty interviews and some student interviews also referred to students who had pursued post-secondary educational

goals at colleges other than Trident, including several Ivy League students who returned to speak at graduations and one student interview participant who had gone to San Francisco for college. There were a few who referred to their own pursuit of college coursework at The Citadel and Charleston College, both post-secondary institutions that are available to them in the local area. However, quantitative data was not available to track these enrollments. It is significant that the 30% college retention rate, then, is a local data point that would likely increase if additional data regarding the continued pursuit of educational goals by Charleston Clemente program participants were tracked outside of their enrollment and retention at Trident.

### **Limitations of the Research**

The study site was limited to the Charleston Clemente program although there are at least 18 Clemente programs offered nationwide. As not all instances of the Clemente program have affiliated with Bard College, the program count is not exact. I had intended to gather the data that is reported by each of the sites to Bard College who manages program affiliation, but those data were not readily available, leading me to focus exclusively on one example of the Clemente program. The study site may have also presented additional limitations because the majority of participants were recruited from homeless shelters, battered women's shelters, VA hospitals, and other organizations that serve underrepresented and marginalized populations. The study could have benefited from comparative data on a national scale to better illustrate demographics served, recruitment strategies used, and the impact of added or different supports.

The reputational technique was used to identify survey study participants (Kish, 1965) and the snowball technique (Miles, 1984) helped to identify information-rich cases.



The sample size and population was limited to the reach of the program director and word-of-mouth among program participants who shared the opportunity to participate in both the interview and survey studies. The Trident Technical College Institutional Review Board required a poster and flyers to be used to share the details regarding survey participation. This study could have benefited from a greater sample size, but I was limited to these techniques in order to preserve student confidentiality.

A further limitation of the study was the longitudinal tracking of data addressed only post-secondary retention of all enrollments at the study site. Trident Technical College retained data on students who enrolled in credit courses at Trident after participating in the Clemente program, but not those who enrolled in courses at other educational institutions. This data would have been helpful to better illustrate the impact of the program on college access. In addition, no data was provided regarding the issuance of credits through the Clemente program and the possible relationship between the completion of these credits to retention at Trident.

## Chapter 7: Conclusions and Recommendations

### Conclusions

The Charleston Clemente Course in the Humanities does increase college access for the economically-distressed adult. Data collected through this study indicates that not only does the program achieve this goal, but it also addresses ethnic/racial populations who are underrepresented in post-secondary education systems as well as older adults. The Charleston Clemente program targets recruitment efforts to enroll participants who are among the most marginalized in society: the homeless, those suffering from addiction, and individuals who have faced myriad challenges in their lives that made a post-secondary education a seemingly unattainable goal.

The support systems provided by Trident Technical College and the faculty who serve the Charleston Clemente program are primary factors contributing to the program's success. The strategies are in place, some by design and others by the sheer will of the faculty leaders and community members, in order to effectively recruit and retain students in the program and beyond. Several of the strategies are highlighted in the table below along with their intent – either recruitment or retention or both.

| <b>Strategy</b>         | <b>Recruitment or Retention?</b> |
|-------------------------|----------------------------------|
| Free tuition            | Both                             |
| Free bus pass           | Both                             |
| Free textbooks          | Recruitment                      |
| Free meals              | Both                             |
| Community/Relationships | Both                             |
| Mentors                 | Retention                        |
| Student organization    | Retention                        |
| Counseling support      | Retention                        |
| Financial Aid           | Retention                        |
| Student success center  | Retention                        |

|   |      |
|---|------|
| Access to technology and college facilities (i.e., library, computer lab) | Both |
| Access to healthcare  | Both |

**Table 3: Recruitment/Retention Strategies used by Charleston Clemente Program**

The study surfaced a key factor in the success of the program: the power of one. With few exceptions, each of the interview participants indicated the importance and value of the program director's influence and enthusiasm on the Charleston Clemente program. This left little doubt that without her altruistic contributions and tireless effort, many lives may have continued without the redemption and transformation that were key outcomes of the program and a prominent theme in the study. The program director embodied two essential elements in Clemente: the humanities and leadership. A principal theme in the research was humanity and the humanities. The subject matter allowed students and faculty to fully immerse themselves in the content and within the context of their daily lives, struggles, and contributions to society. Further, it led to the development of a community in the classroom and, as one faculty member stated, a sense of fellowship that is unique to Clemente.

Leadership was not discussed in this study, but the program director exemplified several markers of transformational leadership (Northouse, 2012). Specific practices are key to establishing transformational leadership including modeling the way, inspiring a shared vision, enabling others to act, and encouraging the heart (Kouzes & Posner, 2002). The program director led by example and demonstrated expectations through her own actions. She gathered a faculty team and obtained the support of the college in order to impact the lives of others. Through her leadership, the essence of the humanities reached

a population that is often sidelined from the overall experience of humanity and from academia.

The Charleston Clemente Program can be replicated at other institutions and the Clemente course has found success in at least 18 locations in the nation as well as on the international front. It does require a commitment to community outreach and college access for the economically-disadvantaged adult. The institutions that look to establish or support the Clemente program must have some sense of contributing to the greater good in balancing the fiscal impact of running the program and a better “big picture” sense when examining revenue potential to offset program costs. Ultimately, the study has shown that the program’s impact on college access and retention is significant and that is worth further investigation by interested institutions.

### **Future Research**

As previously indicated, it would have benefited the study to have national comparative data sets. The Charleston Clemente program was selected, in part, due to its longevity as compared to other similar programs. However, it was difficult to establish baseline data to compare the success of the study site’s program without the national data. In the future, additional research efforts to capture that longitudinal data on Clemente programs nationwide could have interesting implications.

Additional future research would include the implementation of the strategies and curriculum to adolescent participants who may be struggling with high school graduation. Students enrolled in juvenile court schools or alternative education programs may be able to benefit from the humanities content and the college preparation potential that this program offers. Longitudinal data including college enrollment and retention after

completing a high school level Clemente program would also prove interesting from a higher education perspective.

With the findings regarding leadership and the power of one, additional studies focused on leadership of similar programs that address the needs of marginalized populations in society may contribute to the development of future leaders in higher education, particularly at the community college or adult education levels. These institutions aim to react to and meet the immediate economic and educational needs of the community, making the demand for transformative leaders an imperative, particularly when implementing targeted programs to address critical segments in the community.

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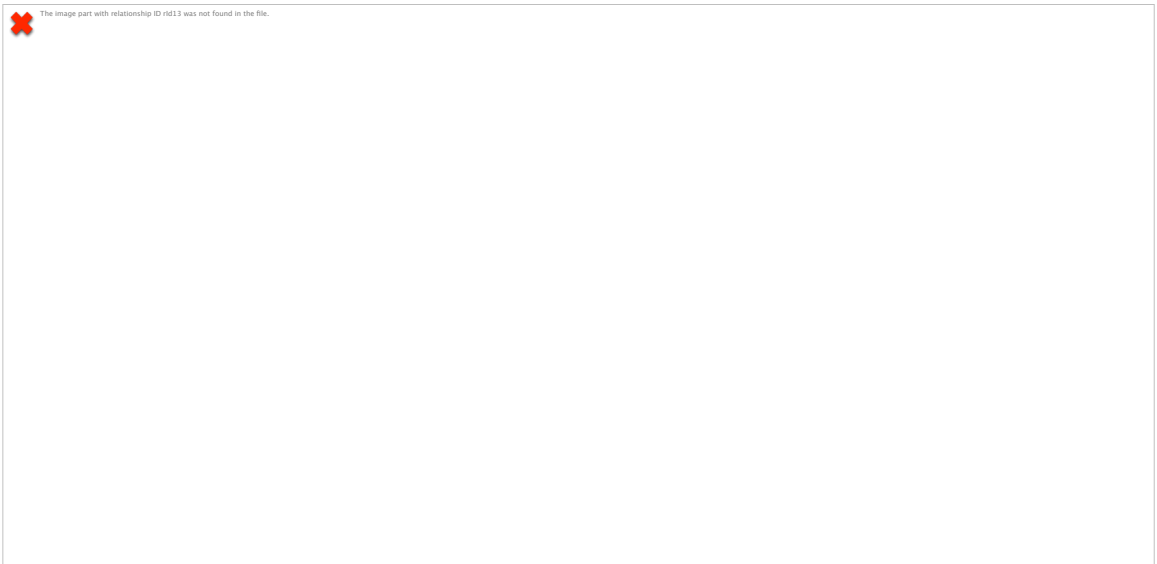
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## Appendices

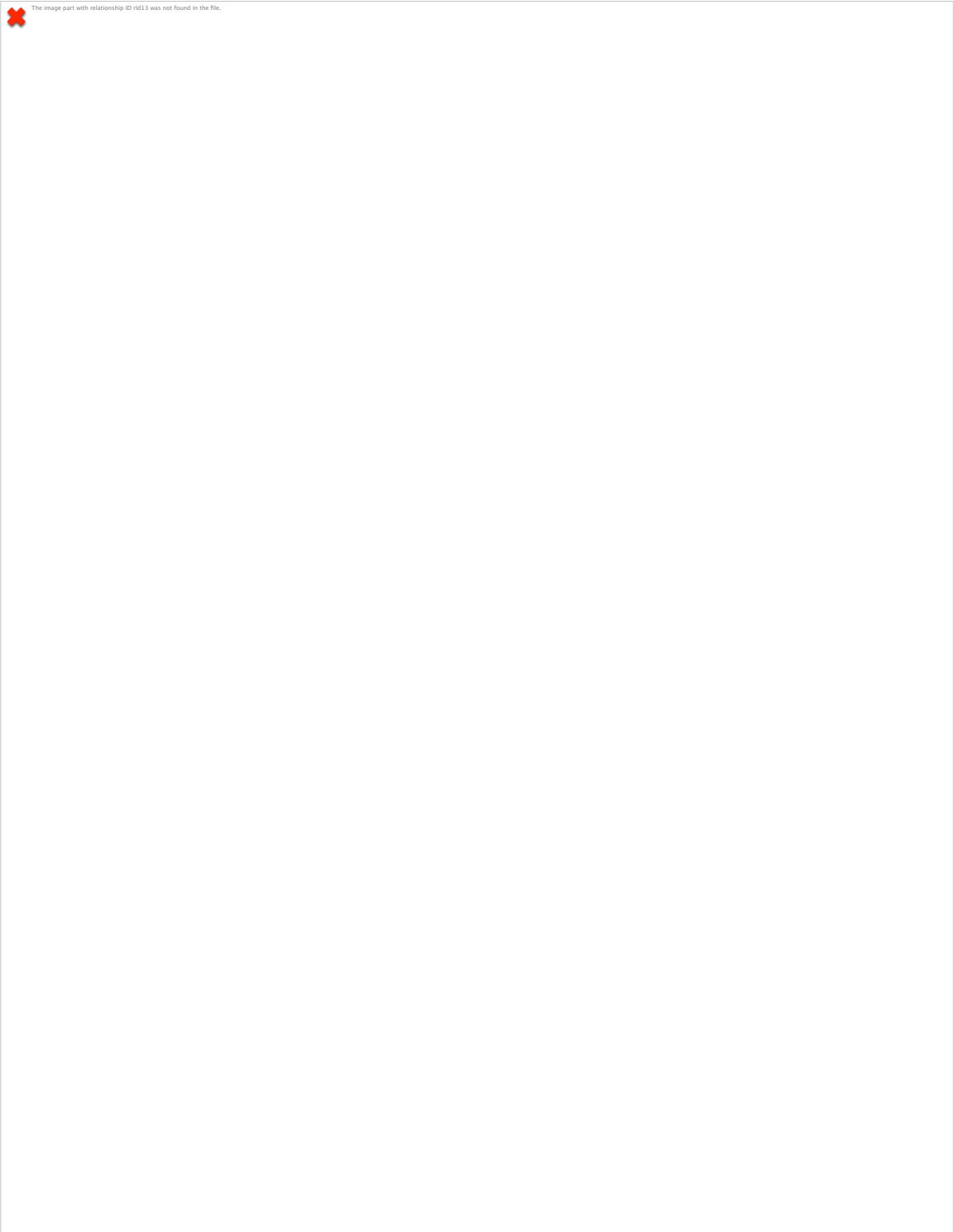
### Appendix A: Poster Invitation to Participate in Survey





## Appendix B: Participant Survey













**Appendix C: Interview Protocols****Interview Protocol 1: Students.**

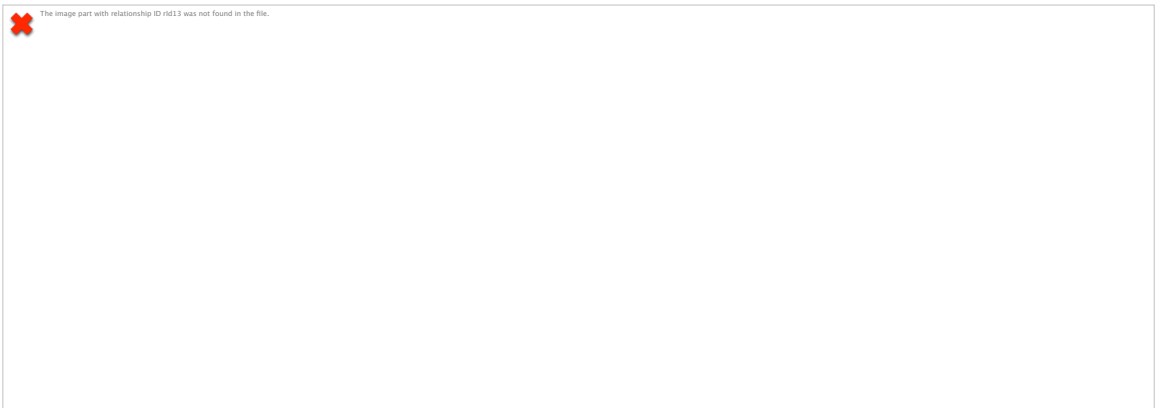
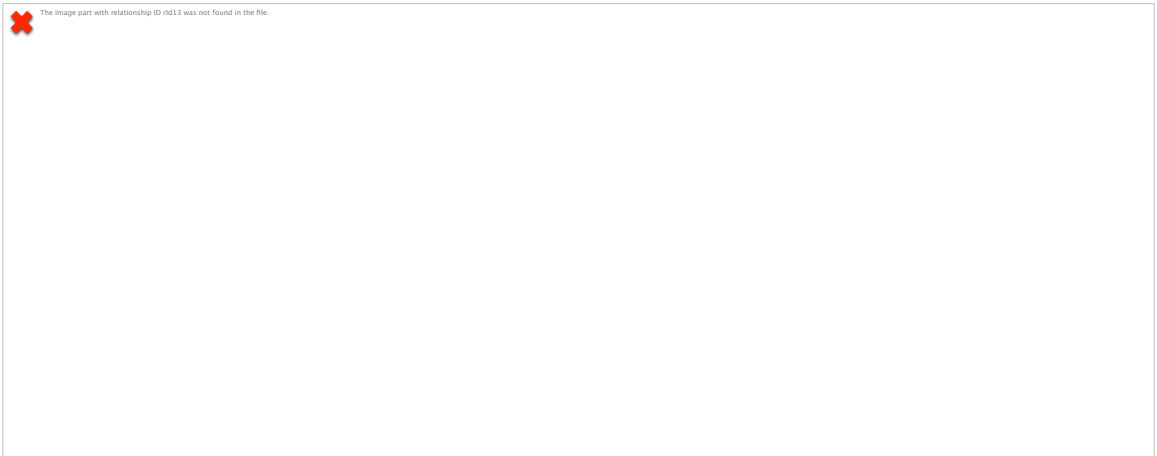
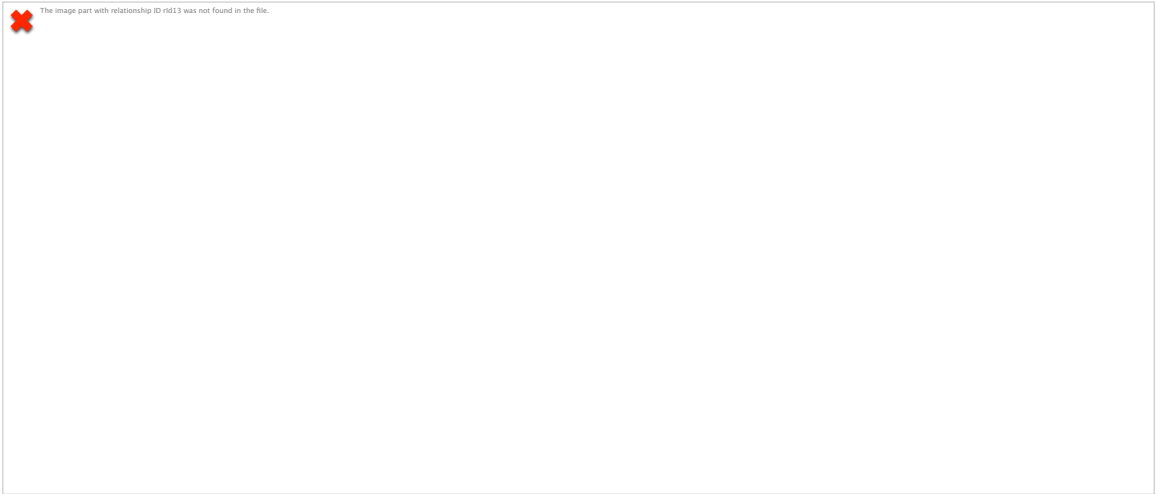
1. Describe your background.
2. Describe your previous experiences or perceptions of college education.
3. What led you to enroll in the Clemente program?
4. Describe your experiences in the program.
5. How has the Clemente program affected you?
6. What are the benefits of the program?
7. What are the best aspects of the program?
8. What would you say to a person who is interested in participating in the Clemente program?
9. What are your educational goals?
10. What are your career goals?
11. Has the Clemente program influenced your educational and/or career goals? If so how?

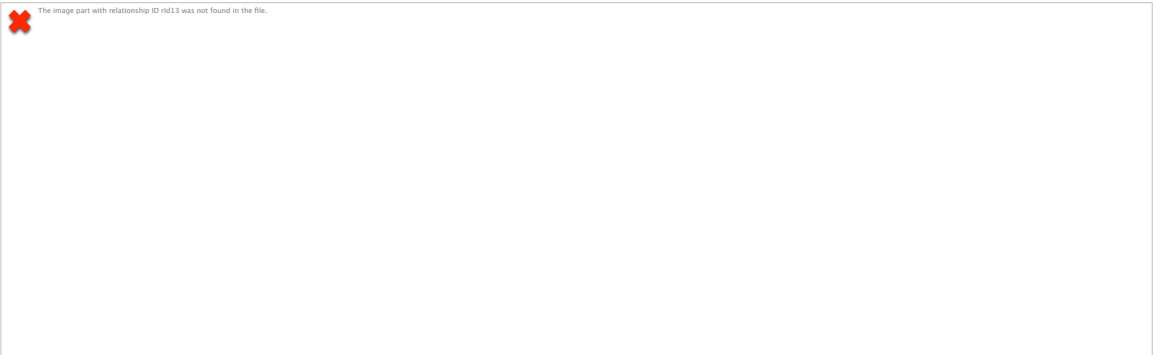
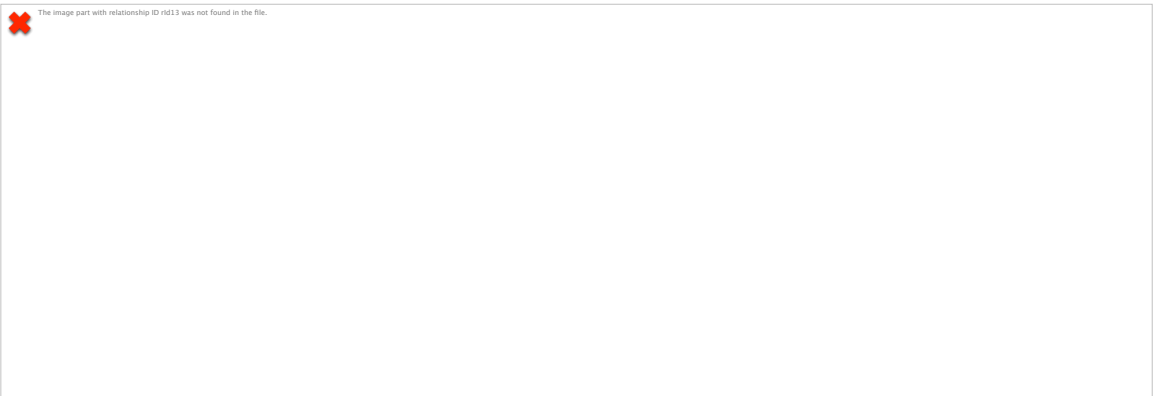
**Interview Protocol 2: Faculty and Staff.**

25. Describe your background.
26. Describe your affiliation with the Clemente program.
27. How did you become interested in this program?
28. What is your perception of the impact the program has had on the students?
29. What are the benefits of the Clemente program?
30. What are the best aspects of the program?
31. What supports are available to Clemente students?

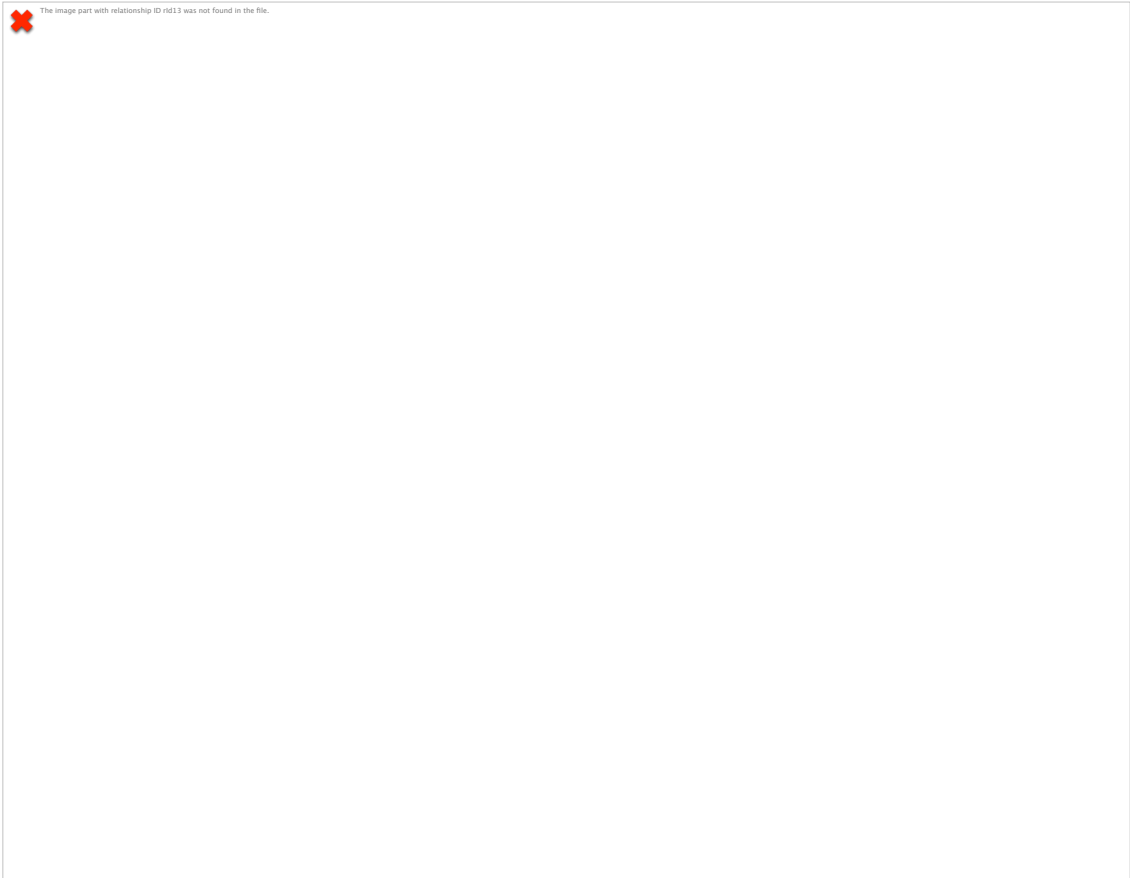
32. Has the program impacted college access for economically-disadvantaged individuals? If so, how?
33. What are the most successful elements of the Clemente program?
34. What changes or enhancements do you anticipate making to the program in the future?
35. How could other colleges or universities in the country adopt this program?
36. What is your role Trident Technical College? What are your responsibilities?
37. How long have you worked at the institution? How long have you worked with the Clemente program?
38. Will you continue to support the program? Why or why not?

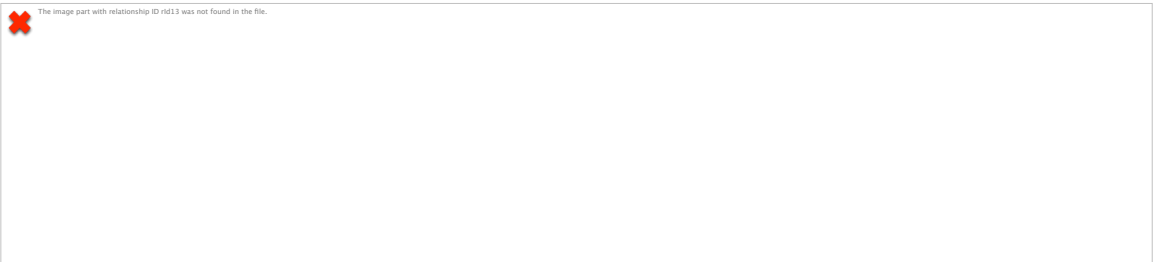
## Appendix D: Trident Technical College IRB Approval





## Appendix E: University of Nebraska – Lincoln, IRB Approval





## Appendix F: Informed Consent

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**Appendix G: Request for Participation**

Date: September 2012

Subject: Invitation to Participate in Study

Dear Clemente Program Participants, Graduates, and Supporting Faculty and Staff:

As a doctoral student at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, I am conducting a study of the Clemente Program and its impact on college access. Because of your affiliation with the Clemente Program, you have been identified as a potential participant in this study.

The information you provide concerning your experience with Clemente will be a benefit to institutions of higher education. **You are invited to participate in an interview at a time and place convenient for you.** The interview will take approximately one hour.

If you would be willing to participate in an interview, please contact me at

[mariane.doyle@gmail.com](mailto:mariane.doyle@gmail.com).

A summary of the results will be mailed to you upon completion of the study. You may contact my research supervisor, Dr. Marilyn Grady, at (402) 472-0974, at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln should you have any concerns about my study.

Thank you for your consideration of this invitation.

Respectfully,

Mariane A. Doyle, M.A.

661.575.1030 (office)

562.650.8180 (cell)

[mariane.doyle@gmail.com](mailto:mariane.doyle@gmail.com)