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Adult Undergraduates: Exploring Factors Essential to Success and Persistence toward Educational Goals

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This work and its defense approved by:

Committee Chair: Glenn Markle, EdD

_____________________________
Adult Undergraduates:
Exploring Factors Essential to Success and Persistence
toward Educational Goals

A dissertation submitted to the
Graduate School
of the University of Cincinnati
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education

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by

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Abstract

This qualitative study explored the lives and experiences of 45 adult undergraduates and the factors they identify as essential for success and persistence toward educational goals. What we learn from the adult students, roughly 26–60 years of age, is why they chose to add college to their already full lives, what they have experienced in college, and most importantly, why and how they succeed and persist.

Among the factors identified as important or essential are support, personal motivation and determination, paying for college, and success in learning.

The study was purposefully designed for maximum variation in adult learners, institutional types and geographic locations. Study participants are diverse in age and generation, cultural and ethnic backgrounds, family and household composition, employment, and community commitments. Two-year and four-year public and private colleges and universities in urban, suburban and rural settings in two mid-western states served as study sites.

Information was gathered using a survey instrument, individual interviews, focus groups and follow-up activities. New questions specifically developed for this study investigate life commitments in the areas of family/household composition and community involvement. The family/household composition questions included extended family as well as family members with health, mental health concerns, or disabilities.

The process of identifying and documenting individual characteristics, life experiences, classroom interactions and encounters with campus and academic services was guided using a systems theory framework. Inductive and narrative analysis methodologies were used to identify and present the stories and experiences of adult students. Inductive analysis identified relevant themes among the participants. Narrative analysis used the words, emotions, and tonal
inflections of adults to ensure that participant voices were evident in the written narrative (Denzin, 1989; Patton, 2002).

The results of this study will be of interest to colleges and universities currently serving or choosing to plan for adult undergraduate populations. College personnel may include faculty, advisors, support staff, faculty and staff development educators, program planners or administrators. These results may also be of interest to adult educators and practitioners working with adult learners in community programs and college readiness seminars.
Acknowledgements

This study is about success, therefore it is fitting that I thank those who have assisted in my success with this research and my doctoral studies. I begin with the forty-five adult students who gave of themselves by sharing life stories and college experiences. I will not forget the time we spent talking, laughing, crying, and sharing about success and struggles as they progressed toward their educational goals. What they have to say fills the pages of this dissertation. I hope that I have honored and respected their thoughts, words, and contributions about adult undergraduates and success. My own response to the question, “Without ___ I would not be here or could not continue” is that without each of them I would not be here.

Long before this dissertation, before the beginning of doctoral studies, there were three wonderful women with whom I had the privilege to work. They taught me about life and family commitments and higher education opportunities they never had the chance to consider.

I would like to express my appreciation to the faculty and staff at each of the participating colleges and universities for their time, assistance, support, and guidance in making this research study possible.

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Chapter 1 Introduction

The presence of adults, ages 25 and older, in educational endeavors is not new. Many adults have engaged in, and continue to engage in, learning activities both informally and formally throughout their lifetime. Adults have been present specifically in undergraduate higher education for more than six decades. Between 1980 and 2006, adult undergraduate enrollments ranged from 37.4% to 42.8%. In 2007, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported that adults represented 30.9% of total enrollment in undergraduate colleges and universities nationwide (2008).

This study is about adults roughly ages 26 to 60 who chose to add undergraduate education to their lives. They are women and men, spouses and life partners, mothers and fathers, members of extended families, employees, friends, and are oft-times active in their communities. They attend two-year and four-year colleges and universities in urban, suburban, and rural communities. Among the factors that make adult students unique is that they have completed the developmental journey from adolescence to adulthood and have learned to negotiate and manage their lives.

Adults choose to attend college later in their lives due to economic need, job and career changes, and quality-of-life issues. Once enrolled in college, adults interact with faculty and fellow students. On campus, adults encounter and sometimes utilize programs and services as they negotiate college systems and structure.

In this study, we learn from the adult participants why they came to college, what their experiences have been, and most importantly, why and how they successfully progressed from one term to the next in pursuit of their educational goals.
Using an informational survey, individual interviews, focus groups, and follow-up reflections, this qualitative study explored success and persistence from the perspective of adult students. A systems theory framework guided the process of identifying and documenting individual characteristics, life experiences, classroom interactions and encounters with campus and academic services. Throughout the study, adult students emphasized the factors they identify as most important for success and persistence in college.

Why Study Adult Undergraduates?

My interest in adult undergraduates is the result of a 20-year career in family social work with an emphasis on quality of life issues; experiences with adult co-workers for whom college was neither a goal nor a possibility; teaching adult students at a two-year branch campus of a mid-western university; and a serendipitous encounter with a professor at Ohio University and subsequent discussion of welfare-to-work programs and the cultural and societal conditions influencing engagement in higher education (A. Howley, Ohio University, personal communication, April 11, 2002).

Research in the field of adult education and higher education is plentiful. However, a limited amount of study exists exclusively about adult undergraduates. Consider the following. In the larger fields of adult education and higher education, adult undergraduates are only one area of emphasis. Earlier research involving adult students often compared them to traditional-age (18-22 years) college students. In addition, when these comparisons were made, adults were included in the broader classification of nontraditional students (18 and older).

While a number of adult student characteristics are similar to those of nontraditional students, there are significant differences that provide evidence for adult students to be classified...
as a distinct population. Among the reasons relevant to this research are that adults engage, persist, and attain educational goals with their own unique approach.

Therefore, adult undergraduates are the only population chosen for this study. Furthermore, because this study is about factors essential for success and persistence, the participants are successful adult undergraduates.

The goals for this study are to (a) extend existing research, (b) introduce new information, and (c) add to the body of knowledge about adult undergraduates and what makes it possible for them to succeed and persist toward educational goals.
Chapter 2 Review of the Literature

Learning about and beginning to understand the complexities of adult students and the field of adult education led to a broad review of the literature. It began with the historical antecedents of adult education and its development from a field of practice to a discipline for university study. The focus then shifted to the subject of adult undergraduates and further narrowed to three specific aspects: (a) the adult undergraduate, (b) the learning experience, and (c) supporting and planning for adults in higher education. Finally, the review concludes with a discussion of the implications of the research and the need for future inquiry. Hereafter the terms adult, adult undergraduate, adult student, and adult learner are used interchangeably.

Adult Education, an Overview

Historical Antecedents

The presence of adults in educational endeavors is not a new phenomenon. Many adults have engaged in, and continue to engage in, learning activities both informally and formally, most often with a goal of enhancing their quality of life.

For example, the settlement houses of the late 1800s provided new immigrants to America a place to learn to speak English, receive job training, and gain the knowledge they needed to assimilate and become citizens in their newly adopted country (Minahan, 1987).

The settlement houses were the forerunners to community/neighborhood centers. Present-day neighborhood/community centers continue to provide adults, including our newest immigrants, educational programming with a goal of improving the quality of life for themselves and their families. Programs such as basic education, GED, English as a Second Language (ESL), job training and college readiness skills are among the course offerings (Minahan, 1987).
In the 1920s, providers of adult education programs became aware of the need to formalize and professionalize the field of adult education. The organization became the American Association for Adult Education (AAAE) and later the American Association for Adult and Continuing Education (AAACE). AAAE began by defining the field as one of institutions and programs with the need for academic study to understand adult learners and adult education in ways that would inform practice. By the 1950s a shift in identity away from a role as social change agents to one of academic study occurred. Interestingly, in more recent years (1990s) the themes of social change would reemerge influenced by sociocultural theory, an understanding of the importance of contexts of learning for adults, and participatory action research methodology (Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

Beginning in the 1960s and continuing to the present, the emergence of a common body of knowledge, conceptual frameworks, theory, and formalized research highlight adult education’s progress as a discipline. Practice principles and techniques have become the subject of formal research studies. Practitioners are reviewing theoretical and empirical knowledge as they seek to make connections between theory and practice in meaningful ways. Additionally, adults engaged in educational programs are increasingly viewed as a distinct population, one worthy of study.¹ (Wilson & Hayes, 2000; Rose, 1992, 1997, 2000; St. Clair, 2004).

Today, the discipline of adult education remains broad and diverse. Programs provide adult learners a continuum of educational opportunities from informal and formal community-based education through undergraduate and graduate university study to lifelong learning. An array of special interest groups, within the discipline of adult education and education in general, exist to meet the needs of specific segments of the adult population. Among these special interest groups are those who study adult undergraduates (B. Townsend, American
Adults in Undergraduate Colleges and Universities

Who are the adult undergraduates attending colleges and universities and how did they get there? The enactment of the GI bill in 1944 and the creation of student financial aid programs through the Higher Education Act in 1965 provided returning veterans and other adults the opportunity and financial means to attend college. Because of these legislative acts, college campuses across the U.S. began to see adult students in their classrooms (Kasworm, Sandmann, & Sissel, 2000). Shifts in the economy, technological advances, job requirements, career changes, and other quality-of-life issues have continued to influence adults and encourage them to seek out higher education opportunities.

From 1980 to 2006, the average percentage of adult undergraduates, 25 years of age and older, ranged from a low of 37.4% to a high of 42.8% of total enrollment. The most recent data from 2007, indicate an average of 30.9% of total enrollment at colleges and universities is comprised of adult undergraduates. However, when a distinction is made between full-time and part-time enrollment at two-year and four-year institutions, the numbers are dramatically different, as shown in Table 1. Adult learners attending college part-time represent 56% to 60% of enrollment, with the greatest number attending four-year institutions (NCES, 2008; Chronicle, 2009).

Table 1: Adult Student Enrollment 25 Years and Older, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Two-Year Full-Time</th>
<th>Two-Year Part-Time</th>
<th>Four-Year Full-Time</th>
<th>Four-Year Part-Time</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>22.1%</td>
<td>56.2%</td>
<td>15.1%</td>
<td>60.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: NCES Digest of Education Statistics, Table 193 (2008)
Institutional Considerations

Institutional responses to adult students have varied. At a number of colleges and universities, programs, services, instructional methods and expectations are the same for all students. Other institutions began to recognize the unique differences among the needs, life experiences, and educational goals of adult learners and traditional-age students. Further, current shifts in the economy, fewer dollars for higher education nationally, and competition for students have influenced institutions. The result—college administrators began to explore and research these critical questions:

- Are adult and traditional-age students distinct populations?
- Should special programs and services be developed and implemented for adult learners?
- How can institutions best meet the needs of adult and traditional-age students given current economic conditions and trends?

The Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) published a report outlining specific guiding principles for institutions choosing to embrace and plan for adult students. Among the key principles are reaching out to adults, recognizing their needs and goals, providing effective learning environments, and supportive services (CAEL, 2000).

This brings up several questions. What are the needs and goals of adult learners? What are effective learning environments? What supportive services are essential? What helps adult students progress toward their educational and life goals? How will answers to these questions inform higher education’s institutional policies, planning, and practices?

During the past 25 years, much has been written on the subject of adult learners. Cross (1981) and Merriam and Caffarella (1999) are among those who offered comprehensive works, gathering together existing theories and research on adult development, adult education trends,
characteristics and needs of adult learners, examined critical questions, and provided thinking points for future study. These works serve the discipline as foundational materials for practitioners, researchers, policy makers, and others.

**Adult Undergraduates**

Defining and understanding adult undergraduates is far more complex than simply grouping together individuals of a certain age who happen to be engaged in undergraduate education. There is substantial diversity among adult learners in terms of individual characteristics, needs, motivations, and social and psychological factors that to make assumptions of homogeneity is misguided (Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990). Examination of the following factors will assist in understanding adult undergraduates: (a) demographic characteristics, (b) individual motivations and goals, and (c) balancing commitments and responsibilities.

**Demographic Characteristics**

*Age.* Studies identifying age as a factor included students ranging from 24–55 years old (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Gibson & Graff, 1992; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; NCES, 2003; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Slotnick, Pelton, Fuller, & Tabor, 1993). The use of chronological age ranges as an all-encompassing expression lumps adults into one homogenous group ignoring sex, ethnicity, culture, and a myriad of other factors. Adult students are varied. The current age profile of adult undergraduates reports the following: 25–29 years (35.5%), 30–39 (34.3%), 40–49 years (19.4%), and 50 and older (10.7%). These age differences can translate into generational differences in terms of life experience, family structure, employment, financial considerations, and educational expectations. Consideration of these factors in addition to age may yield more substantive information about the adult undergraduate

Sex. Seven studies mention sex as a factor. Two focus on women (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home, 1998). One specifically explores the experiences of African American women (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996), and a fourth reported that 60% of the respondents were female (Gibson & Graff, 1992). Women comprise the majority of adult learners entering college and increasingly have multiple roles and responsibilities (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). Sex and race issues simultaneously affect women of color (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996).

Another study examined the college experiences of adult men. Widoff (1999) notes that much of the research conducted concerns adult learners in general, and women specifically, but little research exists that has examined the experiences of adult male students in undergraduate colleges. These research findings did not suggest any areas of need unique to male students, but noted that multiple roles and responsibilities affected men and women alike. Researching these factors significantly affects our understanding of and planning for the successful college experiences of adults.

Ethnicity and culture. Research on adult learners involves participants from multiple ethnic groups (census categories). Included among them, in the United States, are African American (Black), Hispanic, White, and Immigrants to the U.S. from other countries. In addition, one study involved populations in countries outside the United States (Kember, 1999). The dynamics of culture, race, minority and immigrant status add an additional layer to the lives of adult learners and influence their participation and access to higher education. This influence is typically unconscious and not discussed in direct terms. As noted by Johnson-Bailey & Cervero (1996), “culture will always be apparent when subjects are allowed to frame their own
stories” (p. 153). Culture and race factors noted in the literature are: (a) limited education in family or cultural group influencing beliefs about college education (Kaplan & Saltiel 1997, Kasworm, 2002), (b) experiences of racism, sexism (gender subordination), class (social), and color (referring to shades of blackness) in the classroom as well as interactions with peers and faculty (Davis, et al., 2004; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996), and (c) the need for meaningful connections between what is learned in the classroom and cultural history (Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000).

The tenets of sociocultural theory provide insight into the effects of ethnicity and culture for adult students. The roles our own culture or the culture of the dominant society imposes upon the individual shape attitudes, beliefs, ambitions, and actions. For adults considering undergraduate education, social and cultural factors may positively influence their choice if the influences in their lives are supportive and their experiences and beliefs about education are positive (Kasworm, 2002). Conversely, the motivation of a minority adult to participate in education may be negatively affected if family and community beliefs about education are in conflict with the goals of the adult student (Ross-Gordon, 1990; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000).

Additional Factors. Other factors associated with adult undergraduates include: (a) marital status—single, married, divorced, or separated; (b) children—very young or adult children living in the household and/or the need for childcare; (c) other family and household responsibilities; (d) employment—full-time, part-time, or no employment; (e) economic factors such as the need to self-fund education, receive funding from an employer, or the need for financial assistance; (f) community commitments; (g) college enrollment status—full-time, part-time, community college, other two-year college, four-year college or university, or distance
education program; (h) prior education—high school graduate or GED; and (i) years between last school attendance and current college enrollment (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Choy, 2002; Gibson & Graff, 1992; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Kember, 1999; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Slotnick, et al., 1993; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990; Widoff, 1999).

Each of the factors discussed above has the potential to influence an adult’s ability and opportunity to engage and progress in higher education. In a report on nontraditional students, NCES, defined many of these adult characteristics as risk factors. The more risk factors present in an individual’s life the greater the likelihood they will not stay in school or progress toward their educational goal (Choy, 2002).

Individual Motivations and Goals

The NCES report presents one perspective pertaining to an adult’s ability to engage and persist in higher education (Choy, 2002). Other research examining individual motivations, coping strategies, and educational goals offers an alternative view. There are adults who are successful despite having multifaceted lives and commitments as well as adults who are less successful, struggle, or withdraw.

Adult students enter college having completed their developmental journey from adolescence to adulthood. They bring with them life experiences, an ability to negotiate the world outside of school, and clear goals for attending college. Adults enrolling in college may be preparing for a first job or career that requires a college degree, often never having had the opportunity for college in younger years, or they may be seeking enhanced skills for job/career advancement. They may be changing careers for personal growth or because of job loss. Additionally, many adults seek higher education because they have a desire to improve the quality of life for their family or children, or to become a positive role model in their community
Indicators of Success. Along with clearly stated educational goals, successful adult learners bring with them a strong sense of personal motivation, high levels of self-efficacy and positive self-esteem. Although some adult students may express fear and apprehension about entering college, and wonder if, after many years away from formal education, they possess the necessary skills and abilities, their motivation and persistence results in success (Bash, 2003, 2005). Two studies in distance education settings (Gibson, 1996; Gibson & Graff, 1992) found that personal motivation, expectation to complete, and positive self-concept were indicators of success in learning and progress toward educational goals. For some adult students, success in learning fosters a sense of achievement and celebrating those achievements enhances their self-esteem further motivating them to continue with their studies (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Widoff, 1999).

Adults who Struggle. Factors affecting less successful or struggling adult learners included (a) a sense of social isolation or exclusion, (b) perceiving themselves or believing that others perceive them as less capable, (c) a sense of being overwhelmed by competing responsibilities, and (d) feeling forced to enroll in undergraduate studies (Bash, 2003; Home, 1998; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996).

Perception emerged as both a positive and a negative factor in several studies. For example, Home (1998) analyzed the extent to which perceived demands influenced success or posed challenges for adult women. She identified three factors: (a) role conflict—arising from simultaneous, incompatible demands; (b) role overload—insufficient time to meet all demands;
and (c) role contagion—preoccupation with one role, while performing another. Findings indicated that individual perception of role demands was the best predictor of success or challenge. In a related study, multiple roles were viewed as multiple opportunities to experience success (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002). A third study examining strategies used by part-time adult students to balance family, work, and school noted that successful students attributed their achievement to personal perseverance, while students with fewer conflicting demands withdrew or dropped out, attributing their lack of success to external demands resulting in insufficient time (Kember, 1999). In this study, Kember found that “success seems to be a function of whether the student is able to employ accommodation mechanisms” (p. 120). What are these accommodation mechanisms? Do adult students employ them on their own or with the help of others? What is the effect on achieving educational goals? The discussion that follows concerning balancing commitments and responsibilities offers some answers.

In the research by Gibson (1996) and Gibson & Graff (1992), mentioned above, the social learning theory principles of self-efficacy and outcome expectancy provide a basis for understanding success and persistence. Attribution theory, as well as internal and external sources of motivation, explain how perception contributes to success or failure. Internally motivated adults attribute personal perseverance to successful outcomes (Kember, 1999). Conversely, adults who struggle refer to external demands or forces as the cause (Home, 1998).

Balancing Commitments and Responsibilities

Establishing Priorities. A first step in developing effective strategies for balancing life, work, and school is the capability to identify and prioritize commitments. Adult students may think all will work out fine only to discover they have taken on more than they can handle (Home, 1998). The studies examining strategies for balancing commitments include those that
provide a list of factors and those that describe how adult students actually accomplish the task (Gibson & Graff, 1992; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kember, 1999; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Widoff, 1999). Both provide valuable information for adult learners and those who plan for adult learners. However, the studies that connect these factors to educational achievement and progress are most relevant.

Time Management. In addition to setting priorities, time management, negotiation, sacrifice, and developing support systems are critical tasks. While each may be a separate task or skill, in fact they need to occur in partnership with one another. For example, structuring time to attend classes may require negotiating with employers and co-workers for flexible hours, work release time, or a redistribution of workload. Making time to study, or conduct research, often necessitates changes in childcare arrangements, or reassignment of household chores. Personal time and social connections with friends may be sacrificed or limited to scheduled events because of academic demands (Gibson & Graff, 1992; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kember, 1999; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Widoff, 1999).

Support. Establishing personal support systems with family, friends, employers, co-workers, even classmates can help. Having a number of people to connect with from different aspects of life can be vital. For instance, in families and communities where cultural beliefs about education are in conflict with the goals of the adult student, emotional support in the form of acceptance and encouragement from extended family, or friends who believe in the goal of education, may make the difference between striving for success and giving up (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood 2000).

Instrumental or tangible support in the form of financial assistance, childcare, and employer offered resources (i.e. access to computers or copiers at work) are crucial. So too are
study groups and study skill workshops (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Home, 1998; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Widoff, 1999). While emotional and instrumental support are both helpful to adult learners, it is the quality of the support, not quantity, which makes the difference and affects academic performance (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002).

Emotional and instrumental supports are two of the four categories defined in social support theory (House, 1981). Emotional support refers to the expression of empathy, love, caring and trust among those with shared life experiences. Instrumental support, illustrated in the examples above, is tangible sources of “aid or services that directly assist a person in need” (p. 10). The two remaining categories are informational and appraisal support. Informational support includes advice or information that a person can use. Appraisal support through feedback is useful for self-evaluation. Both informational and appraisal support are relevant for adult students when they enter and begin to negotiate the college structures and the learning environment.

**Adult Learning Experience**

Research identifies the classroom as a “focal point for learning” (p. 3) for adult students (Donaldson, Graham, Martindill, & Bradley, 2000). It is in the classroom where (a) the adult learner, (b) the teaching and learning process, and (c) interaction among students and between students and faculty come together. Moreover, when this occurs in positive and effective ways it can influence student learning, academic achievement, and success in progressing toward educational goals.
The Adult Learner

Andragogy. In 1970, Malcolm Knowles introduced the conceptual framework known as andragogy identifying six key assumptions about adult students and their readiness to engage in learning. The antecedents of andragogy are found in the work of Carl Rogers, founder of the humanist approach to psychology, with an emphasis on the individual’s development as a whole person, motivation, and becoming autonomous in his or her engagement in learning. From Bruner’s constructivist theory, adults use their past and current knowledge and experiences to integrate new ideas and concepts. The influences of Bandura’s social learning theory are apparent as Knowles elaborates on the continuum of learning from the need for teacher-directed experiences to self-directed learning (Knowles, Holton & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999).

What are the six key assumptions of andragogy and how do they relate to adult students’ engagement in the undergraduate classroom? Three assumptions, (a) self-concept, (b) motivation, and (c) readiness to learn, examine factors specific to the adult learner, influencing their decision to enroll in higher education. The remaining three, (d) the need to know, (e) orientation to learning, and (f) life experiences, are relevant to the learning process and planning for adult students in the undergraduate classroom. For a detailed explanation of the six assumptions, see Knowles, et al. (1998).

Since the introduction of andragogy, researchers in the field of adult education have built on, as well as, critiqued this foundation to further understanding of adult students and the learning process. Perhaps the most significant criticism is andragogy’s emphasis on the individual adult learner with no acknowledgement of the social, cultural, or historical contexts that shape and define the social structures and relationships in the learning transaction (Merriam,
When adult students enter the undergraduate classroom, they bring with them their personal biographies, life and prior learning experiences, attitudes, motivation, and orientation toward learning, including the contexts that have shaped their lives.

*Orientation toward Learning.* A number of studies examined orientation toward learning including factors such as learning styles, metacognition, self-reflection, and learning continuums.

Endorf and McNeff (1991) utilized focus groups and adult student self-reports to identify five learner types and provided recommendations for classroom instruction to address the various types. The five types are: (a) confident—goal-oriented and prepared to learn; (b) affective—enjoy being with others; (c) in transition—learning to connect life experiences to classroom learning; (d) integrated—personal life, career, and learning are integrated; and (e) risk takers—enjoy the process, comfortable with the unexpected. Kasworm (2003) investigated the various levels of learning and beliefs that adults employ to construct knowledge as they engage in the classroom. This study included the influences of classroom context, the adult learner’s view of knowledge, and the actions of the instructor. Kasworm identified five knowledge voices representing adult student beliefs that influence engagement in classroom learning. The knowledge voices are: (a) entry—beginning student, new to college, instructor dependent for learning; (b) outside—anchored in personal life and family, college necessary to achieving goals, fragmented connection to life outside college; (c) cynical—skeptical attitude, forced to comply to get the preferred job or promotion; (d) straddling—connections among academic and real-world knowledge, working across the two, valuing both worlds of knowing; and (e) inclusion—in-depth immersion in the academic world, integrating thought and action across life roles.

Students may remain in one learner type/voice throughout their education, or as other research
suggests, they may progress or receive guidance to progress along a continuum from point of entry to transformation.

One such continuum is characterized as moving from teacher-directed to self-directed learning. Adult students choosing to enter college bring a readiness and motivation to learn even if their learning skills and strategies are rusty. Their last memory of instruction may be high school or a GED classroom with formalized structure. Through practice, feedback, and support adult students can move toward becoming self-directed. Metacognitive activities such as identification of learning styles, study strategies, and self-reflection exercises assist adults in the process of learning how to learn. Further transformation may occur when the adult students are able to integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge, add to their repertoire of skills and strategies, and begin to change their frame of reference and understanding, thus transforming and redefining themselves and their learning (Daley, 2000; Eraut, 1994; Kasworm & Yao, 1992; Knowles et al., 1998; Kolb, 1984; Mezirow, 1981, 1994, 1997; Smith, 1991).

The Teaching and Learning Process

The adult student is one part of the learning process. The techniques used by instructors to engage, evaluate and guide the learning process both in terms of course content and pedagogy are a second aspect.

Conceptual Principles. Four significant conceptual principles provide the basis for effective teaching of adult learners. The first is the principle of active teaching and learning. (Bonwell & Eison, 19913, Robson, 2006). Second is the paradigm shift from sage on the stage, faculty-centered traditional lecture-style teaching and beliefs about learning, to guide on the side student-centered teaching, in higher education (Barr & Tag, 1995). Third is specific adult learning principles, such as (a) begin with the adult learner, (b) build on experience, (c) course
content must be of value and have usefulness, and (d) learner-centered encouraging participation and collaborative inquiry (Lawler & King, 2000). Fourth is teaching with a culturally relevant and context-based orientation (Davis, et al., 2004; Ross-Gordon, 1990; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000).

A small number of studies documented a relationship between teaching style, subject matter content, or the learning process and success in learning. Learning how to learn activities and assignments that promote reflection or introspection along with feedback enhanced student performance on tests, assignments, and in one practice piece with adult students at a community college, reading skills (Kasworm & Yao, 1992; Konicek, 1996). Culturally relevant content in course materials, reading, and lecture/discussion had a positive effect on success for minority students (Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000). Instructional methods that facilitate interactive learning and connect course concepts to work or life affected student engagement (Donaldson, et al., 2000; Slotnick, et al., 1993).

Studies primarily examining participation found that as student engagement increased so did academic success. Within the teaching and learning process, actions or behaviors by faculty enhanced or deterred participation. For instance, instructors with passion or enthusiasm for their subject encouraged student interest. Those who presented themselves as the authority in control of knowledge and the class instilled fear of criticism and reduced student engagement. (Donaldson, et al., 2000; Weaver & Qi, 2005). Interaction between faculty and students and among students also affects participation and success.
Interaction between Students and Faculty and among Students

Positive encounters, inside and outside the classroom, among students or between students and faculty facilitate the building of community, enhance learning and establish systems of support for adult learners.

Faculty and Students. Adult students state that the type of interaction, the quality of interaction and the perceived involvement and interest on the part of faculty is helpful. Peer–like communication patterns contributed to adult students feeling connected and respected while maintaining the role of student-as-learner and professor-as-the-source-of-knowledge (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992; Donaldson, et al., 2000). Faculty characterized as being friendly, open, and having a genuine concern for adult students, as a whole person, demonstrated these qualities through conversations beyond the course content. This occurred in both traditional classrooms and online distance education settings resulting in a learning environment that supported participation and success in learning (Aragon, 2003; Lundberg, 2003; Navarro & Shoemaker, 2000; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Tu & McIsaac, 2002; Woods & Ebersole, 2003). Conversely, interaction patterns described as condescending, impersonal, or bound by rigid rules decreased adult student engagement and did not promote success in learning (Davis et al. 2004; Lundberg, 2003).

Among Students. Positive interactions among students foster a sense of community and provide support for learning. Social contact before, after, and during class time, in both traditional classroom and online settings, allows students to discover shared characteristics, responsibilities, and goals. Research findings indicate that student satisfaction and the motivation that comes from learner-to-learner interactions, the formation of study groups, or time spent socializing about what they were learning influenced success and persistence toward their degree

Not all interactions among students were helpful. Several studies noted negative interaction patterns resulting in diminished participation and engagement. In one study involving mixed-age classrooms, perceived roles and subsequent behaviors caused conflict. Examples included older students being viewed as friends of the professor due to peer-like communication, adults perceived as knowing more about the subject matter, even if they did not, or adult students taking on a parent role or attitude toward younger students (Bishop-Clark & Lynch, 1992). Another study focused on the experiences of black adult students attending a predominately-white university. In this setting, black students reported being treated in a highly visible manner, such as being perceived as representing the entire black race, or as the object of condescension and sabotage. Alternatively, they reported being invisible; needing to initiate interaction and prove their worthiness as a fellow student or friend (Davis, et al., 2004). In Weaver & Qi (2005) student perceptions of classroom organization and the impact on participation found that peer pressure and approval/disapproval influenced the classroom’s emotional environment affecting participation.

**Learning Outcomes**

As previously stated, the adult undergraduate learning experience brings together the adult learner, the teaching and learning process, and interactions between faculty and students and among students, each potentially contributing to adult student success.

Among the studies and descriptive practice articles presented, some identified, discussed or implied the influence of these factors on academic achievement, while others noted a choice not to examine these influences, but rather made the recommendation for future inquiry.
Slotnick, et al., (1993) noted that much of “the adult learner literature was based on supposition, personal experiences, or generalizations that had not benefited from rigorous empirical investigation” (p. xiii–xiv).

**Academic Achievement.** A small number of studies specifically examined the relationship between any of these factors and academic achievement or progress toward educational goals. With the exception of two studies conducted in the 1990s, all others occurred in 2000 or later. This fact perhaps indicates a shift in the study of adult undergraduates away from merely documenting characteristics and experiences to one of evaluating what contributes to successful progress for adult learners. In Gibson & Graff (1992), individual adult learner characteristics of motivation and expectation to complete were significant factors in academic achievement. Building on the work of Donaldson & Graham’s “A Model of College Outcomes for Adults” (1999), Donaldson, et al., (2000) found that success in learning comes from a combination of factors including (a) the adult learner’s prior experience, motivation, and use of study strategies, (b) personal support systems, (c) the teaching and learning experience, as well as (d) faculty-student and student-student interactions. At the same time, Navarro and Shoemaker (2000) observed that interaction between faculty and students and among students influenced student satisfaction and that as satisfaction increased so did performance. Several years later, Lundberg (2003), investigating both traditional and nontraditional (adult) students, found that peer relationships and positive relationships with administrators contributed strongly to learning regardless of the age of the student.

Three studies specifically focused on minority African American students (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; and Davis, et al., 2004). In addition to factors affecting success for all adult learners, the students in these studies succeeded
due to personal strengths and perseverance despite the adverse experiences related to race and sex.

**Persistence.** In a related study, Wlodkowski, Maudlin, and Gahn (2001) examined factors associated with persistence and success for adult students enrolled in accelerated undergraduate degree programs. Findings indicated that adult learners with significant prior college experience, competent writing skills, and higher grades were more likely to be successful and persist. Motivational variables of social integration and interaction with faculty and fellow students were not significant. The researchers attribute this finding to the highly structured format and short five-week courses in the accelerated program, suggesting that social integration and relationship building require sufficient time to develop before becoming a factor.

**Supporting and Planning for Adult Students**

In addition to the adult undergraduate learning experience, programs and services outside the classroom, but on the university campus, may contribute to success in learning and progress toward educational goals. Administrative policies and planning, as well as staff and faculty development, may also make a significant difference for adult learners.

**Campus and Academic Services**

For purposes of this research, the terms campus and academic services are used specifically to distinguish them from student affairs literature, which primarily focuses on traditional-age college students. Campus services support adult students’ ability to negotiate the university structure and systems. These may include services such as admission, registration, financial aid, childcare, and parking. Academic services support adult students’ learning needs and educational goals. These may include advising, introductory/first year classes, study skill workshops, tutoring, library resources, and career development programs.
Few studies exist that involve adult students and campus and academic services. Most include these services as one of many factors affecting adult students. The studies describe what services adult students’ state they need or want and their attitudes toward or satisfaction with such services. Services mentioned by adults are: pre-admission, advising, orientation, registration, and financial aid. Satisfaction with these services vary from positive to negative based on availability, accessibility, and whether they are programmed specifically for adult students (Brown & Linnemann, 1995; Cook, & King, 2004; Heinrich & Gladstone, 1990; Ross-Gordon, 1998).

Campus and academic services reported as helpful and contributing to adult student success in navigating the college structure or enhancing learning and educational goal attainment are advising, counseling, study skills or learning strategy workshops, tutoring, and the library. Introductory/first-year classes are discussed in the literature as an effective strategy for assisting adult students’ transition into college (Bash, 2005). Degree mapping, clearly stated courses and course requirements, especially in accelerated or specialized adult programs, provides adult learners with reliable time estimates for degree completion (Pusser, et al., 2007; Warner, 2005; Wlodkowski, et al., 2001). Campus services noted as unhelpful or preventing participation include difficulty obtaining information about financial aid options and the related bureaucracy of receiving financial aid, parking issues, the lack of services oriented toward adult learners, and inconvenient hours of operation for services (Cook & King, 2004; Kasworm, et al., 2002; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000; Slotnick, et al., 1993; Widoff, 1999).

Advising. Advising is one of the few academic services studied as a separate research topic. Curry, Baldwin, and Sharpe (1998) investigated the relationship between advising and persistence in a distance education program. They found that students who frequently used
advising continued their program, and those who did not dropped out. Both full-time advisors and full-time program faculty provided advising for academic planning, class scheduling, and decisions about majors and degrees. Students and advisors became personally acquainted through in-person, telephone, and written communication. Interaction and relationship building between advisors and students is reported as important to students and may be the “first and only contact adult students have outside the classroom” (p. 48). These findings are similar to the importance of relationships and interactions between faculty and students, as mentioned in the adult undergraduate learning experience above.

Kasworm, et al. (2002) and Grunau (2005) discuss, at length, the importance of academic advising and make specific recommendations for quality advising with adult undergraduates. Grunau reports a significant correlation between quality advising, student satisfaction, and persistence to degree completion. The development of a positive relationship between the advisor and the adult student is at the foundation of quality advising. This includes mutual respect, shared responsibility, and ongoing and accessible contact. Adult students benefit most when advisors learn about and understand them beyond their role as student, are knowledgeable, and provide academic and institutional guidance as well as resources and contacts for follow-up when non-academic concerns arise.

In a related study Smith, Szelest, and Downey (2004) describe the development and implementation of an outcomes assessment program in academic advisement based on student learning outcomes rather than student satisfaction with academic advising. In this study, learning outcomes were defined as successfully navigating the college environment through the development of organizational and goal-planning skills. The authors propose that measuring outcomes, rather than satisfaction, is a better predictor of potential success in college.
Most of the research reviewed about campus and academic services for adult undergraduates was published from 1990 to 2000. This raises questions to consider. Does the lack of literature in this area possibly imply that the campus and academic service needs of adult learners are less important than that of traditional students? Have services been cut due to financial cutbacks? What more must be learned to effectively assist institutions that choose to embrace and plan for adult learners on their campuses?

Planning for Adult Undergraduates

When adults choose to enter college, they are seeking to change their lives. Their time is limited, the stakes are high, and their motivation is strong. In the past, adults had to adapt to the structure and standards of the institution. Today, adult undergraduates choose colleges and programs that will assist them in meeting their goals while fitting into their lives.

How might higher education respond? Current shifts in the economy, fewer dollars for higher education nationally, and competition for students are raising questions and influencing decisions about recruiting and planning for enrollment. Should colleges develop special or separate programs and services for adult students, or restructure existing services to meet the diverse needs and expectations of all students? Some colleges have chosen to maintain the same expectations for all students. If adult learners choose to attend such an institution, they have to adapt. Other institutions choosing to embrace and plan for adult learners may turn to the Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) for recommendations and guiding principles (CAEL, 2000). These principles and the related supporting literature establish a framework for (a) outreach and integration into the institution, (b) supportive services, and (c) preparation of faculty and staff with the goal of effectively meeting the needs of the adult undergraduate.
Outreach and Integration. Adult learners often follow a nonlinear path through their educational journey. They may begin at one college, stop or delay their program or degree due to life or work changes and then continue again at a different university. Sometimes adults may engage in a select set of courses to meet job or career advancement requirements and later return to college for further education or to complete a degree. From the perspective of adult students, they are continuing a forward progression toward an educational goal. From the perspective of the institution, these students might be classified as dropouts or not retained. Planning for adult learners requires a rethinking of traditional models of retention and outcomes, the adoption of policies that help to breakdown barriers creating an accessible environment, and/or the establishment of specific programs and services to assist in meeting the needs of adult undergraduates (CAEL, 2000; Hadfield, 2003; Kearney, Townsend, & Kearney, 1995; Robinson, 2004). A clearly articulated and communicated mission statement, set of policies, and procedures welcome the adult student into the institution (Mancuso, 2001; Watson, 2001).

Supportive Services. A set of administrative and student services available at the time of entry further facilitates successful integration into the college community. Among these are (a) specific points of entry into the institution regardless of degree program; (b) affordable and flexible financial arrangements; (c) extended hours for administrative, advising, and academic support offices; and (d) assessment of learner needs and capabilities. Additionally, mentoring or cohort programs, curricula, and classes such as distance learning, evening and weekend, accelerated, or off-campus centers may be a better fit to meet the needs of adults learners (Bash, 2003; CAEL, 2000; Daloz, 1999; Hadfield, 2003; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kasworm, et al., 2002; Mancuso, 2001; Polson, 1994; Watson, 2001).
Preparation of Faculty and Staff. The techniques used by instructors as they engage with students in the learning process require faculty to be masters of both subject content and teaching methodology. In higher education, faculty are content experts. However, it is also important they effectively transmit their knowledge and understanding of subject matter in ways that adult students can apply beyond the classroom. For this reason, faculty development programs emphasizing active teaching and learning, adult learning principles, reflective practice, and use of technology are highly recommended (Bonwell & Eison, 1991; CAEL, 2000; Hadfield, 2003; Lawler & King, 2000; Mancuso, 2001; Schön, 1987).

It is worth noting that when faculty engage in these learning activities, they are themselves adult learners, often sharing similar characteristics, needs, and learning preferences as the adult students in their classrooms. Therefore, faculty development programs not only introduce or enhance teaching skills, they also provide an opportunity for faculty to develop a greater awareness of the experiences of the adult students (Moffatt & Simon, 2006).

Staff development programs for administrators, program planners, and student support personnel are aimed at understanding the adult learner and enhancing their repertoire of skills for effectively planning for and assisting the adult student (CAEL, 2000). In academic advising departments, reevaluating and designing strategies intended to measure student outcomes, rather than student satisfaction, and creating best practice guidelines for effective work with adult students is occurring (Mancuso, 2001; Marques, 2005; Smith, et al., 2004).

The literature on planning and supporting adult students is principally descriptive and for the most part does not address student learning and outcomes. In her study using benchmarking methodology to identify best practices at selected adult-centered institutions, Mancuso (2001) offers the following concluding statements.
An important question not addressed in this study is what impact adult-centered practices have on such outcomes as student learning, student satisfaction, and student retention. The consistent response was that they were so immersed in their time-intensive practices of serving students that they had only begun to consider the need for such institutional and learner outcomes research. One exception, Sinclair Community College, a national role model for outcomes assessments, has demonstrated the positive impact of their practices on outcomes (p. 179).

It is clear that additional research is needed in assessing the outcomes of practices recommended as effective for adult learners.

Summary

Adult Education

A broad and chronological review of the literature on adult education provided an opportunity to examine the discipline from its early beginnings, through the various stages of development, growth, and change. Adult education progressed from a group of individuals teaching, to the formation of a professional organization with guidelines, to a discipline with a distinct population and the subject of academic study.

Research and development of conceptual frameworks/theory advanced as well. Early efforts involved observations and ideas generated through individual teaching experiences. Best practices published for broad distribution were based on observations and generalized concepts from multiple and diverse settings. Formalized research began with identifying, gathering, and reporting descriptive data about adult learners and educational experiences. During the past decade, professional journals in adult education, education, and the literature of other disciplines began publishing studies investigating the potential relationships and connections among the data (Rose, 1992, 1997, 2000).
Adult Undergraduates

A limited amount of research exists specifically on adult undergraduates in higher education. One reason for this occurrence may be the number of scholars in this specialty within the discipline of adult education (AAACE, 2006; AERA, 2006). Additionally, each scholar has his or her own main emphasis—adult characteristics, adult learning, classroom experiences, distance education, race and sex, campus and academic services, etc. Among the literature reviewed and cited for this study, fewer than half were specific to adult undergraduates and five significant researchers wrote 40% of those (J. Donaldson, personal communication, March 12, 2004).

Two important facts to consider are the status of research in adult education and the limited amount of scholarship about adult undergraduates. The first reminds us that until the mid to late 1990s, data collected about adult learners and their learning experiences have been limited to descriptive cataloging. The second fact is that individual scholars have contributed to the body of knowledge but only within their areas of emphasis. The findings from the studies reviewed provide insights for the specific aspects discussed: (a) the adult undergraduate, (b) the adult learning experience, and (c) supporting and planning for adult students.

Each of the studies that investigated potential relationships and connections among factors focused on two factors, the adult undergraduate and one other aspect. One study included individual life narratives that addressed the motivations and life circumstances that contributed to the decision to attend college as an adult. Several measured academic achievement or persistence. Only three studies included all of the factors and commented on what contributed to or hindered success. No studies included all three aspects and evaluated outcomes. Additionally, no studies examined these aspects in combination, assessing the interaction among the factors.
and the effect on adult students’ progress toward educational goals. Therefore, further research is necessary to gain a fuller understanding of adults and their college experiences.

In this study, adult students teach us about the factors that contribute to success and persistence. Responses to the guiding questions will add to the current body of knowledge in the fields of adult education and undergraduate education.

The guiding questions are:

- Who are the adults entering undergraduate education?
- What are the life circumstances that contribute to the decision to attend college in one’s adult years?
- How do adult undergraduates describe their experiences in the classroom?
- What are the experiences of adult undergraduates when they connect with campus and academic services?
- How will adult undergraduates complete the statement, “Without _____ I would not be here or could not continue?”
- What is the influence of individual and life circumstances, classroom experiences, and contact with campus and academic services, individually or in combination, on progress and persistence toward educational goals?
Chapter 3 Methods

This research used a qualitative approach to explore factors essential to adult undergraduates’ success and persistence toward educational goals.

Research Methods

Purposeful Design

The study utilized a multi-site, purposeful sampling design for maximum variation. This design was best suited for gathering in-depth information and insights imbedded in the individual and shared experiences of adult undergraduates (Patton, 2002).

Theoretical Frameworks

The theories and frameworks that inform adult undergraduate research may be particular to the adult learner, the learning process, or the collegiate environment. Or they may be integrated frameworks that help to explain multiple aspects.

Systems theory and the ecological perspective provided a holistic framework for documenting important aspects of adult students’ lives and college experiences.

Adult undergraduates have multifaceted and often complex lives. The conceptual orientation of systems theory explains the behavior of people and societies by identifying the component parts of the system and the reciprocal relationships that function together to maintain system balance (Barker, 1987). The ecological perspective focuses on the Person-In-Environment (PIE) emphasizing the contexts in which people live and interact (Bigner, 2002). This combined framework involves (a) learning about adult students on an individual basis; (b) identifying the system parts; (c) identifying the contexts in which the parts are situated; and (d) focusing on what is most important.
Sociocultural theory is an integrated framework that involves the adult learner, the learning process, and the collegiate environment. When adults enter college, the contexts of their lives will influence their comfort in this new setting and influence their learning, interactions, and engagement. This has implications for the individual within the social situation of the collegiate environment, and in determining how individuals learn, succeed, and persist toward educational goals (Alfred, 2002; Guy, 1999).

Methodological Frameworks

This study was from the perspective of the adult undergraduates. The adults were the teachers and the researcher their student. Denzin (1989) wrote about listening to, documenting, attempting to understand, and interpreting the lives of others. “The lived experiences of interacting individuals…and the meanings of these experiences are best given by those who experience them” (p. 25). Therefore, inductive and narrative analysis methodologies were used to identify and present the stories and experiences of adult students in a manner that best represented what they had to share.

Inductive analysis identified relevant themes among the participants. Narrative analysis used the words, emotions, tonal inflections, pauses, and speech patterns of adults to ensure that participant voices were evident in the written narrative (Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Denzin, 1989; Patton, 2002; Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

Generalizability

This study involved 45 participants from four different college and university settings in two mid-western states. The information gathered is specific to these settings at the time the study was conducted. This study may be of interest to other similar institutions seeking to plan for and serve the needs of adult learners.
Research Process

Presentation of the research process begins with an introduction to the colleges and universities that served as study sites. This is followed by an explanation of the procedures used for initial contact, entrée, and recruitment planning at each institution as well as consideration of the theoretical frameworks that provided guidance. Discussion of participant recruitment presents the researcher’s experiences of success and difficulty when making contact and connecting with adult students, faculty, administrators, and staff. Participant selection follows with an explanation of how adults were invited into the study. A review of the study procedures includes the format and structure for the survey, interviews, follow-up activities, and focus group sessions. Discussion of the research process concludes with an explanation of the data analysis procedures and a profile of the study participants.

Study Sites

Four colleges and universities in two mid-western states agreed to serve as study sites. The institutions represent urban, suburban, and rural geographic locations. One institution was the site for the pilot study in 2006. The remaining three were involved in this dissertation study. The bulk of the discussion that follows relates specifically to the three dissertation sites.

Each institution is listed by pseudonym and Carnegie classification (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 2007). General information is presented here. See Appendix A for detailed profiles including statistical data from offices of institutional research and campus and academic services available to, or specifically for, adult students from site visit interviews. The four sites are the Research University, the Four-Year University, the Private College, and the Community College.
The Research University. The Research University is a large public four-year research university with very high research activity. The University has multiple campuses located in urban, suburban, and semi-rural communities. The urban central campus served as the site for the 2006 pilot study.

At the time of the pilot study, degree seeking undergraduate student enrollment was approximately 17,700 on the urban central campus. Adult undergraduates ages 25 and older numbered approximately 3,000 or 17% of the undergraduate enrollment. Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval for this study was granted in 2005 and updated in 2007.

The Four-Year University. The Four-Year University is a large, public four-year master’s university with very high undergraduate enrollment. The Four-Year University offers adult students several options for enrollment: an adult only program or traditional enrollment.

The adult only program is located at an alternative site away from the main campus. The adult only program offers liberal arts associate’s and bachelor’s degrees as well as specific bachelor of arts programs in an accelerated format.

Traditional enrollment in the four-year university is through admissions and general advising or admissions and departmental advising with classes offered during the day and evening. The main campus and two satellite campuses offer classes as well. One is located in a rural community.

Undergraduate enrollment at the Four-Year University main campus and adult only program was approximately 11,500 degree seeking students in the fall of 2007 with adults 25 years and older comprising 2,780 or 24% of the undergraduate enrollment. IRB requirements were completed and permission was granted to conduct research in 2007. Obtaining IRB
approval at the Four-Year University required a separate application and was in addition to the IRB process at the researcher’s home institution.

*The Private College.* The Private College is a medium size private, not-for-profit master’s college with very high undergraduate enrollment. The Private College offers both traditional and adult accelerated program enrollment for adult students, although there is more emphasis on the accelerated program. Accelerated courses are offered during evening hours only. Traditional courses are offered during both daytime and evening hours.

The undergraduate Private College enrollment in 2007 was approximately 1,740 with adult enrollment approximately 440 or 25%. The Private College and the researcher’s home institution shared IRB approval.

*The Community College.* The Community College is a medium size public two-year rural associate’s degree institution. The Community College has four campuses located in four rural counties serving Appalachian and non-Appalachian students. Three campuses were selected as study sites. One site has a predominantly Appalachian population, one a predominantly non-Appalachian population and one that is split 50/50.

In 2007, the total enrollment at the Community College was 2,422 with adults age 25 and older totaling 1,059 or 43% of total enrollment. The Community College accepted IRB approval from the researcher’s home institution.

**Gaining Entrée**

Qualitative texts discuss entrée and recruitment as essential steps in the research process. However, the literature is missing a focus on recruitment techniques and examples of experiences recruiting study participants. This study involved a multi-site plan for maximum variation in both institutional settings and potential adult student participants. While this
methodology was the best choice for in-depth information about adult students and their experiences, the challenge became how to effectively meet, connect with, and invite adult students into the study.

The theoretical traditions of systems theory (Barker, 1987) and sociocultural theory (Alfred, 2002) served as initial frameworks to gain an understanding of each institution’s mission, philosophy, attitudes, and actions with and on behalf of adult learners (CAEL, 2000). When campus visits and the process of recruitment began to occur, an understanding of culture theory related to organizations (Patton, 2002) and diverse populations became increasingly important (Eide & Allen, 2005).

*First Steps.* At the researcher’s home institution, the researcher was both a doctoral student and part-time faculty member. The dual roles afforded an opportunity to develop a variety of relationships, which helped in making personal and professional contacts, obtaining information, and enacting a participant recruitment plan.

The other participating institutions required the following procedures. First, liaison relationships needed to be established. Because of a prior research project, the researcher was able to make initial contact with colleagues and arrange for an introduction to the appropriate individual or individuals to gain permission to include the institution in the study. This occurred at the Private College and the Community College.

At the Four-Year University, the researcher made contact with the adult only program coordinator and scheduled a meeting. The outcome of this meeting was a tentative first step in what would become a challenging and lengthy process. The adult program coordinator provided an initial recommendation of whom to contact to begin the research permission process. Persistence on the part of the researcher, a serendipitous encounter with the director of first-year
programs, and a kind administrative assistant eventually led to key administrative personnel, the IRB coordinator, and permission to conduct research. The adult program coordinator and the director of first-year programs became the official internal liaisons throughout the study process.

Establishing positive liaison relationships was essential to negotiating the organizational culture of the individual institutions. Writing about organizational ethnography, Patton (2002) quotes from Goodenough that culture is the collection of behavior patterns and beliefs that constitute “standards for deciding what is, what can be, how one feels, what to do, and how to go about doing it.” The liaison relationships and subsequent learning about the cultures of the institutions resulted in exceptional success at two institutions and significant difficulty at the third.

Planning for Recruitment. Two additional tasks occurred prior to recruitment. The first was a face-to-face meeting with the campus liaison. During this meeting, a plan was developed that best met the needs of the institution and the adult students. The second task involved a campus visit including meeting with faculty and staff who work directly with or on behalf of adult students and a tour of the campus itself. This process helped to familiarize the researcher with the programs and services available for adults and facilitated a climate of acceptance for both the researcher and the research study.

Recruitment: Discussion and Outcomes

Contact & Connect

The choice of a multi-site research design with maximum variation among participants and institutional settings afforded the researcher the opportunity to learn about success factors from a variety of adult students.
Contact. The plan for initial contact included the dissemination of an informational flyer and a survey. The flyer provided information about the study. The survey was used to select potential participants for individual interviews and focus groups and for use in developing a profile of adult students in the geographic local. See Appendix B for copies of the recruitment flyer and survey tool.

Specific procedures were developed with each institution’s liaison. Although there was some variation, the general parameters included the following methods for contacting adult students: (a) informational flyers for faculty and key staff; (b) the researcher present onsite in a designated location on predetermined dates and times; (c) secondary distribution of information and surveys through faculty and campus services; and (d) researcher presentations in individual classes.

Connect. As the process of recruitment unfolded, ongoing contact, serendipitous encounters with faculty, staff, and students and unanticipated events contributed to the emergence of an evolving process for contacting and, more importantly, connecting with adult students. The changes that occurred affected the researcher’s ability to not only make contact, but also connect with adult students on a personal level. Successful and difficult outcomes were the result. Two examples illustrate these changes.

The original plan involved the researcher positioned at a table in a central location with information flyers and a sign-up sheet. An electronic or postal mailing of the survey would follow. On the first night of recruitment, the thought occurred to the researcher, “If I am going to be here anyway, why not simply make the survey available.” The recruitment table was stocked with information flyers, the sign-up sheet, and a supply of surveys with pre-addressed stamped envelopes distributed face-to-face by the researcher.
This low-tech and informal approach proved to be successful especially at the community college where the researcher’s presence and conversational interactions with faculty, students, and staff occurred spontaneously. The result—adult students shared their stories and experiences and faculty invited the researcher to present the study information to their classes.

Additionally, at the four-year university, a faculty member involved with both the adult only program and the main campus offered to distribute information and survey materials to adults in her daytime classes. This secondary form of connecting was extended to include other main campus faculty. The combined efforts of the professor and the main campus liaison were responsible for creating this opportunity. During the interviews and focus groups, several students recruited through this secondary method noted that the professor sharing the study information strongly influenced their decision to complete the survey and accept an invitation to become a participant.

_Difficulty Leads to Greater Understanding._ The contact and connect phase occurred from mid-fall through early spring of the study year. Unanticipated life events, the evolving process, and miscommunication led to difficult circumstances at one of the institutions. The unanticipated life events caused a delay in recruitment. By the time recruitment could be rescheduled, the process had evolved at other settings to include increased and less formal interaction with faculty and staff. A meeting was held with the liaison, the changes discussed, and a decision made that some of the _new_ features of the process would be acceptable. Unfortunately, these new features were not acceptable to key administration officials. This did not become apparent until the researcher inadvertently violated the institution’s culture boundaries. While recruitment was allowed to continue, an aura of uncomfortable tension permeated the experience.
Cultural Context. The explanation of cultural contexts, establishing trust and knowing and being known as described in Eide and Allen (2005), offered the researcher insight for understanding the successful and difficult events that transpired. The unstated rules of a cultural community, in this case colleges and universities, are known by the members, but often not understood by outsiders. Eide and Allen point to two types of communities, low-context and high-context. In the low-context communities, information, needs, and expectations are communicated explicitly. In high-context communities, the focus is on the needs and concerns of the group or social unit.

The institutions that directly communicated information about programs and services and expressed a willingness to assist in the research process fit the low-context profile. This openness allowed for an exchange of ideas and subsequent flexibility in contacting adult students.

The institutions that fit the high-context profile are communities that are more insular. Asking questions to develop a greater understanding of the cultural climate and ensuring that all key individuals are invited or included in the research planning could improve outcomes. In addition, a formalized process to introduce the researcher and the study could be facilitated by the internal liaison. At one high-context college, this process occurred resulting in the development of trust and the researcher becoming known. For example, one internal liaison walked the researcher around making introductions that allowed for informal sharing and conversation to occur. At the institution where difficulty occurred, this process did not happen.

Choosing Participants

Connect, Select, Invite

Connect. The process of connecting with adult students began at the information table. The researcher was present at each college for three to four days during both daytime and
evening hours when adult students would likely be present. Informal interaction and conversation occurred with adult students who stopped by the table to inquire about what was going on. Those interested in the study received an informational flyer and survey form. Names and contact information were collected on a sign-in sheet. Faculty and staff interacted with the researcher during these times.

Being present in the setting over a series of days created an opportunity for the researcher to become trusted and known by the students, faculty and staff. For example, one adult student came by the table every day to engage in conversation. However, it was not until the researcher was invited by the student’s professor to speak in class that she decided to complete a survey form. When asked about her decision the student replied, “talking to you was one thing, but when my professor introduced you, then I decided you could be trusted.”

This method of engaging with students, faculty, and staff was labor intensive and required many hours at each setting. The process was well worth the time and materials invested. The researcher, faculty, advisors, and campus service programs distributed 522 surveys. One hundred thirty-nine (26.6%) survey forms were returned via postal mail or e-mail. Half were from two of the four-year institutions and half from the community college. The pilot study participants completed the survey during field-testing of the instrument. Their responses were added to those from the other three institutions for a grand total of 145 completed surveys. See Table 2.
Table 2 Survey Distribution and Return by Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Surveys Distributed</th>
<th>Surveys Returned</th>
<th>Percentage Returned</th>
<th>&quot;Survey Only&quot; or No Contact</th>
<th>Percentage Returned</th>
<th>Potential Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year University</td>
<td>140</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>32.9%</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.0%</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>133</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>249</td>
<td>68</td>
<td>27.3%</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>522</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>26.6%</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research University</td>
<td>Pilot Study a</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grand Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>145</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a Pilot study participants not included in survey distribution and return calculations.

*Select.* The information that follows about the participant selection process includes only the dissertation study surveys.

Prior to the study, a selection criterion was established based on age and number of classes completed. The minimum age requirement was 25 years. The minimum number of courses successfully completed was six. The rationale for six courses was two-fold. Completion of six classes would place the adult student in the second semester or quarter in the academic year even if enrollment were part-time. The second reason was that adult students would be able to recall the admission process and be enrolled at the institution long enough to speak about experiences in the learning environment and/or with campus and academic services. There were no maximum limits on age or classes completed.

The first step in the selection process involved inputting individual responses into spreadsheet files by institution, campus, or program. During the input process 39 of the 139 surveys (28.1%) without contact information or identified, as “survey only” were placed in a separate pile for use in an adult student demographic profile.

The remaining 100 survey responses (71.9%) were then sorted by age and number of courses completed using the spreadsheet sorting tool. Eighty-four (60.4%) of these survey
responses meeting the minimum age and course criteria became a subset of the 100 survey responses.

Three additional sorts were conducted with the subset for sex, life commitments, and highest level of education achieved prior to beginning classes at the current institution. Life commitments included marital status, household composition, employment, as well as community commitments. Age, sex, and number of life commitments were chosen to attain maximum variation among potential study participants. This information was used to select who would be invited to participate in interviews and focus groups.

The question about highest level of education resulted in the need to include an additional category for the 25 adults with associate’s or bachelor’s degrees. Following review and consultation, a new subset was created sorting out adults with a bachelor’s degree, but retaining those with associate degree responses. These adults would be considered on a case-by-case basis for invitation to participate in an individual interview or focus group. Ultimately, the group from which potential participants were selected was 82 adult students (59%) of the original 139. See Table 3.

Table 3 Participant Selection Process Calculation by Institution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Potential Participants</th>
<th>Do Not Meet Age or Class Criteria</th>
<th>Exceed Education Criteria</th>
<th>Eligible</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year University</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>40</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The selection process next involved identifying men and women at each college, campus or program representing various age categories, life commitments, and levels of prior education.
*Invite.* Adult students in the final subset were invited to participate in an individual interview or a focus group session. Invitations were made via e-mail or telephone contact. Focus group arrangements were made via e-mail exchange and phone contact between the participants and the researcher. Each individual interview and focus group was scheduled for a date, time, and location that best met the needs and convenience of the adult students.

Initially 50 adult students (36%) of the 82 representing the three dissertation study sites accepted invitations to participate in either an interview or focus group. Due to life circumstances, a number of adults were later unable to participate. The final study group was composed of 39 adults, from the three dissertation study sites, plus the six pilot study adults for a grand total of 45 participants (31%) with 29 (20%) interviewed on an individual basis and 20 (13.8%) participating in focus groups. Four of the pilot study participants were involved in both individual interviews and a focus group. See Table 4.

Table 4 *Study Population by Institution*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name of Institution</th>
<th>Invitations Accepted</th>
<th>Unable to Participate</th>
<th>Final Study</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Research University</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four-Year University</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private College</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Community College</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

^a_Four pilot study participants were involved in both an interview and focus group._
Gathering Information

Survey

The survey was specifically designed for this study with the assistance and permission of ACT, Inc. and uses fixed choice and open-ended questions (R. McClanahan, ACT, personal communications August 10, 2005 and July 3, 2007). The survey had a consent form attached to meet the institutional requirements for human subjects research. Survey responses served two purposes: participant selection and to compare adult students in this study with adult undergraduate characteristics and statistics nationally (ACT, 2009; Chronicle, 2009; NCES, 2008). See Appendix C for a copy of the survey.

The following information was collected with the survey.

- age, sex, ethnicity as reported on census forms
- marital status, household, family composition
- employment
- community commitments
- reasons for enrolling in college
- choice of college
- enrollment status—full or part-time, number of courses, and quarters/semesters completed
- years between last school or formal education experience
- highest level of education
- knowledge and use of campus services
- section for additional comments

Interviews: A Conversational Partnership

In Qualitative Interviewing: the Art of Hearing Data, authors Rubin and Rubin (2005) describe a conversational partnership as one that “emphasizes the active role of the interviewee in shaping the discussion and guiding what paths the research should take” (p. 14). The interview
itself is an extended conversation between the participant and the researcher with the questions and topics geared to the individual.

*Extended Conversation.* Twenty-nine adult students participated in individual conversational interviews of one to two hours in length. The conversation topics were introduced by the researcher with the order, length of time spent on each topic, and information shared directed by the adult participant. A married couple shared one interview. See Appendix D for a list of guiding interview questions.

For the convenience and comfort of the adults, times and locations varied. The majority of the interviews occurred at the colleges in conference rooms, library study spaces, and small offices. Several interviews were at community libraries.

Conversation topics included: (a) current life commitments, (b) the decision to attend college, (c) early education and family life, (d) experiences in college from point of entry until the present, (e) support systems, and (f) factors that contribute to success and persistence.

*Audio, Notes, and Handouts.* Each interview was recorded using a digital recorder and later transferred to a computer for transcription. The researcher took notes that were added to the audio transcript. During several interviews, the participant’s survey and handouts about teaching practices and faculty-student interaction were used to assist the discussion.

*Interview Follow-up Activities*

At the end of each interview, the researcher asked adult students about their interest in completing follow-up activities. The first activity, titled “A Day in the Life”, is a diary. The second, “Experiences in the Classroom”, is a handout about instructional techniques, classroom interaction with faculty and peers, and self-definitions of success in learning. See Appendix E.
A Day in the Life. The researcher described the day in the life diary during the interview. Selected participants received the instructions and questions electronically. The following excerpt is an example of what the researcher said at the end of an interview and the instructions that accompanied the electronic version.

In some studies, the researcher asks for permission to observe the participant by following them around for a day. For this study, it is not practical and can be invasive. Could you imagine me showing up at your house in the morning and trotting along behind you as you live your life for a day?

The Day in the Life activity is designed to provide a snapshot of your daily routine including being an adult student. During the next few weeks, please keep track of your daily routines. At the end of that time, please identify what you would consider a typical day and an atypical day. Then answer the following questions and return them via e-mail, e-mail attachment or postal mail.

1. Details of your typical and atypical days.
2. In narrative form, describe your typical/atypical day. What caused you to decide it was a typical/atypical day?
3. Did you attend classes, work on Blackboard, complete assignments, or do any other college related activities on your typical/atypical day?
4. Finally, reflect on your experiences. Describe the effect on your ability to engage in your college program including whether the experiences of these days contributed to or hindered your successful progress toward your educational goals.

Ten adult students completed and returned the day in the life diary. Two participants interviewed late in the study shared their typical and atypical days and comments. These adult students represent 41.4% of the individual interview participants.

Experiences in the Classroom. In the early interviews, evaluative questions about faculty interaction and teaching techniques were not discussed. Later these questions became part of the interview. The “Experiences in the Classroom” handout was sent to selected participants from
early interviews. Two were returned. See Appendix E for “Day in the Life” and “Experiences in the Classroom” follow-up reflection activities.

*Focus Groups*

The opportunity for adult students to discuss and share their undergraduate experiences was the impetus for the use of focus groups. Different from an individual interview, the focus group sessions had the potential to bring together adults unfamiliar with one another, yet enrolled in a similar college environment.

Focus group sessions involving adult students from three participating institutions were scheduled. At the fourth college an insufficient number of adults accepted invitations to be in the study. Six groups were scheduled. One was held during the pilot study. Two sessions occurred at the four-year university. One with adult only program students and the other composed of adults from the main campus. At the community college three groups were scheduled, one at each campus. Two groups met. The third focus group session was cancelled due to family, work, and life commitments that occurred on the same day as the session.

The uniqueness of this last group brings clearly into focus the multi-faceted, and often complex, lives of adult students and is worth noting. Focus group arrangements via e-mail and phone contact took longer to make for this group. On the day the group was finally scheduled to meet, the researcher received three phone calls within two hours of time. The first call to cancel came from a group member who had an urgent work commitment. The second call involved an elderly parent who had to be admitted to the hospital. The third was from a very tired adult whose sister had given birth at 3:00 am. The family was still at the hospital. At that point, the researcher contacted the fourth member and cancelled the session. It was not possible for the group to reschedule.
Refreshments First. In an effort to create a comfortable and engaging environment, the researcher provided refreshments appropriate to the time of day the group met. Morning snacks, a deli lunch, or an evening meal set the tone for relaxed interaction before the session began.

Attendees were able to share a meal, exchange greetings, and become acquainted with one another. In some cultures, “breaking bread” facilitates the development of trust and builds a sense of community among the members. The result was a smooth transition from informal interaction to directed discussion.

Observer. In addition to the group members and the researcher, a colleague of the researcher served as an observer/note taker at each of the focus group sessions. Patton (2002) writes, “The combination of moderating and interviewing is sufficiently complex that it is recommended that teams of two conduct the groups (p. 386). The colleague observed interactions among the group members and/or the researcher, took notes, engaged in conversation where needed, and assisted with debriefing following the session. Following the first session, a number of changes were made in the format and flow of the discussion that greatly improved subsequent sessions.

Newsprint, Handouts, and a Recorder. Four sheets of newsprint, one with the session outline and three with discussion topic headings were on the walls prior to the beginning of each focus group. Several handouts were used as discussion prompts and to make it possible for participants to share thoughts on paper they might not be comfortable sharing aloud with the group. A digital recorder equipped with a group microphone was used. Later, the audio files were transcribed.

Discussion Starters. A specific topic format was used to explore (a) classroom learning, (b) faculty and peer interactions, (c) campus and academic services, and (d) support systems. As
with the interviews, the order, time spent, and information discussed were directed by the participants. See Appendix F for focus group guiding questions and handouts.

**Analysis Procedures**

This study was conducted in two phases. The pilot study, with IRB approval, was conducted at the researcher’s institution in 2006. The full dissertation study, with ongoing IRB approval commenced in the fall of 2007. Initial contact and visits with the participating institutions occurred six months earlier at the time the dissertation proposal was finalized.

The participant contact process began in October 2007 with interviews, focus groups, and follow-up activities continuing through September 2008. Transcription and analysis began in the fall of 2008 and continued through the fall of 2009.

**Types of Data**

Extensive and multiple forms of data were collected and analyzed for this study.

*National Data.* Statistical data from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and ACT, Inc. were obtained to consider if total survey and study participants in this geographic region were similar to or different from adult students nationally.

NCES data was obtained from the Digest of Education Statistics (2008) Tables 191 and 193, which provide statistics for sex, age, undergraduate enrollment at two and four-year institutions, as well as full or part-time attendance.

ACT, Inc. provided normative reports. The Adult Learner Needs Assessment includes data about adult students age 26 and older collected from July 1996 through June 2007. The Entering Student Survey data covers July 2004 through June 2008 and includes information about adults but begins at age 23 and older. A custom version of the Student Opinion Survey,
with data collected from August 2004 through July 2008, was purchased for this study in 2009. The data in the custom version was limited to adults 26 years and older.

The data from ACT, Inc. and the manner in which it is collected is similar to the method used for data collection in this study. Therefore, a greater emphasis is placed on the comparisons made using the ACT data. Quoting from ACT, Inc.,

The data are not based on a random or pre-selected sample of students or colleges. ACT did not attempt to alter the sample to provide nationally “representative” data…The survey instruments were administered in different ways to different groups of students at the various institutions represented in the reports. Consequently, the response rates obtained by the institutions using the survey vary widely. The effects of these various administration modes on the normative data are unknown.

Institutional. Data collected at the four research sites included student demographic statistics, a list of campus and academic services available to or specifically developed for adult learners, and a campus map.

Demographic statistics were used to compare survey respondents with the total adult student college population. Campus and academic services were part of the survey and used in both the interview and focus group discussions of programs that helped or hindered success and persistence. The campus map and subsequent tours provided the researcher with a familiarity of each college’s physical environment and added a level of understanding about the setting where adult students attend and engage in their undergraduate education. See institutional profiles in Appendix A.

Survey. A survey designed with the assistance of ACT, Inc. with fixed-choice and open-ended questions was used to collect background and educational data about adult students as well as knowledge and use of campus services. Specifically three ACT assessments: the Adult Learner Needs Assessment, the Entering Student Survey, and the Student Opinion Survey, were
used to develop the study survey instrument. Normative reports were then used during the analysis phase to compare the study population with adult student statistics presented in the ACT reports.

*Interview and Focus Group Audio Files and Transcripts.* Each interview or focus group session was recorded using a digital recorder. The recording was then transferred to a computer file. Transcription was completed exclusively by the researcher. The transcripts included direct quotes, summaries, commentary as well as emotions, speech patterns and tonal inflections.

*Notes, Newsprint, Handouts and Electronic Communication.* Notes, newsprint responses, completed handouts, follow-up activities, and reflections were transcribed, saved, or scanned and saved into computer files.

**Coding of Transcripts**

The process of coding and sorting the transcript materials was developed by the researcher as a visual and lower technological approach. This process was time-consuming but worked best to fit the researcher’s schedule and desired attention to detail and depth of understanding of participant insights. Other methods of data coding and analysis are available and may be a “better fit” for researchers conducting similar studies. The steps that follow describe this process. A short example is included with each step. A visual sample is located in Appendix G

*Step 1—Open Coding.* Interview and focus group transcripts, handouts, notes, and reflective follow-up activities were holistically reviewed and open-coded using computer highlighting. Individual highlight colors were preselected to represent each of the research questions. For example, all comments about early education and family life were highlighted with the color pink regardless of where the statements occurred in the transcribed materials.
Step 2—Comments Added. During a second review, comments were added to the highlighted materials utilizing the word processing program comment tool. These comments identified subtopics and examples of specific factors relevant to each research question.

Step 3—Sort by Research Question. The individual documents were then sorted according to research question with each of the highlighted sections placed together. From the example above, all pink highlighted sections would be together on the same page or pages along with the comment balloons.

Step 4—Combine all Materials by Research Question. The next step was to combine all interview and focus group materials into newly named documents for each research question. Continuing with the example above, the research question about early education and family life would become a single document and include all statements and comments from all transcribed materials highlighted in pink.

Analysis of Combined Documents

The combined documents were inductively analyzed to identify relevant themes, patterns, and interrelationships that emerged from the participants’ statements.

Refine by themes and subcategories. Further refinement of the combined documents was completed to sort and organize the participant statements by themes and subcategories. These statements became the quotes from which examples were drawn for presentation in the data narrative.

Frequency Tables. Frequency tables by question were created with a spreadsheet program to document participant statements from most to least. Data from these tables are used in the data narrative to provide a visual summary of important themes and subcategories.
In addition to the processes described above, the transcribed interviews and focus group sessions were analyzed using narrative analysis to document the emotions, tonal inflections, pauses and speech patterns to ensure that participant voices were evident in the data narrative (Denzin, 1989; Johnson-Bailey & Cervero, 1996; Patton, 2002; Witherell & Noddings, 1991).

**Participant Summary Reviews**

Review of the transcript summaries by study participants is recommended in qualitative research to enhance trustworthiness. Four adult students from the pilot study and nine from the dissertation study received summaries from interviews and focus groups by postal mail or e-mail. Each participant was asked to comment on the accuracy of the summary and make corrections as needed. The four pilot study participants and five of the dissertation study participants responded indicating that the summaries were an accurate representation of what was discussed. One of the five dissertation study participants called the researcher, choosing to make personal contact. The remaining four did not respond.

**Participant Profiles**

Tables 5 and 6 present a brief profile of the 45 study participants. Table 5 compares participants with NCES and ACT data by sex and age. Age data is aggregated by NCES and this study beginning at 25 years. ACT data aggregates age beginning at 26 years. Table 6 lists the study participants by pseudonym, sex, age, and college.
Table 5 *Participants by Sex and Age*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Students</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>National Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ACT a</td>
<td>NCES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>64.4%</td>
<td>70.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>29.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
<td>99.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>21.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td>40.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>28.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 +</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>9.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>99.9%</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a ACT age 26–29
Sources: NCES Tables 191 and 193 (2008); ACT Adult Learner Needs Assessment (2009a)

Adult students selected for this study are similar to adults nationally and those surveyed by ACT based on sex and ages 25–49. The study group differs from NCES and ACT for ages 25–29 and 50 and older.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>College</th>
<th>Pseudonym</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>College</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Andrew</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Pam</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Four-Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Beth</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Richard</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Four-Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gena</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Tory</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50+</td>
<td>Four-Year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leslie</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>Research</td>
<td>Brenda</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>50+</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Paul</td>
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<td>40–49</td>
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</tr>
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<td>Grayson</td>
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<td>Male</td>
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<td>50+</td>
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<td>Four-Year</td>
<td>Theresa</td>
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<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louis</td>
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<td>40–49</td>
<td>Four-Year</td>
<td>Tina</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>Community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mora</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>Four-Year</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Chapter 4 Data Narrative

The purpose of this study was to explore factors essential to adult undergraduates’ success and persistence toward educational goals.

Research Questions

The questions that guided this research are repeated here. An additional question is added about entry into college because the importance of the admission process emerged as significant. The final research question will be addressed in Chapter 5 Interpretation.

- Who are the adults entering undergraduate education?
- What are the life circumstances that contribute to the decision to attend college in one’s adult years?
- What do adults encounter when they enter college?
- How do adult undergraduates describe their experiences in the classroom?
- What are the experiences of adult undergraduates when they connect with campus and academic services?
- How will adult undergraduates complete the statement, “Without _____ I would not be here or could not continue?”
- What is the influence of individual and life circumstances, classroom experiences, and contact with campus and academic services, individually or in combination, on progress and persistence toward educational goals?
This data display provides a graphic representation of the factors adult students identify as important to success and persistence toward educational goals. The narrative that begins on the following page gives evidence of these factors.

**Figure 1.** Data Display
What factors do adult undergraduates identify as contributing to their success and making it possible for them to progress and persist toward their educational goals?

One hundred forty-five adults from four different colleges and universities in two mid-western states completed an informational survey. Forty-five of these adults, roughly age’s 26–60, accepted invitations to engage with the researcher in this study. All had demonstrated success in their college programs. Many had struggled. A number of participants graduated before the study concluded.

This narrative is about these adults and what the researcher learned when they became the teachers. Each of the adults shared their time and talked about why they came to college as an adult, what their experiences were, and how they were successful. The researcher listened and learned so that she might begin to understand and present what those who read this research need to know about adult undergraduates, success, and persistence.

The guiding questions provide the organizational structure for the narrative. For each of the guiding questions, the factors are presented using three formats. First and foremost, the study participants share comments and insights in their own words. Individual comments chosen as examples represent the views and experiences of multiple study participants. Next are two subdivisions of narrative explanation. The first explains factors that contribute to success, shared or interpreted, from participant statements. The second, titled “What Matters Most to Success,” consists of the factors participants clearly state are essential to success and persistence. “What Matters Most” appears at the end of each guiding question discussion. Finally, quantified data will appear in tables and graphs within the narrative to visually document factors. Quantified data represents survey and interview/focus group responses as well as institutional and national
data. National data from NCES and ACT, Inc. is used to determine if the adults in this study were similar to or different from adult undergraduates nationally.

Adult Undergraduates: Current Lives

The participants in this study are women and men, spouses and life partners, mothers and fathers, members of extended families, employees, friends, and oft-times active in their communities. And, in addition to already full lives, they are undergraduate college students. While the role of college student is presented last on this list, study participants clearly stated that it is by no means last among the commitments in their lives.

Factors about adults explored in this section include (a) responsibilities and commitments, (b) college, why now, and (c) what matters most to success.

Responsibilities and Commitments

Each interview and focus group participant was asked, “What’s on your list of commitments”? Gavin and Tina share answers that demonstrate the continuum of responses that exist for adult students.

“Work and school,” responds Gavin, who is single and enrolled in an adult only evening program.

One of my biggest concerns when I started was my work schedule. My work schedule is crazy. I am a trainer and I basically work whatever my company needs me to work. My boss has been very helpful, when I have class somebody covers for me.

Having few commitments works great for Gavin, but he is acutely aware that his experiences are not the same as many of his classmates. “I feel like a dilettante, I meet people that are going to school because they have to. Sometimes it just does not seem fair…it is harder for them to go…married, with jobs and kids.”
Tina lives a very different life. When we met, Tina was getting ready to graduate with an associate’s degree from the community college. She began by saying that she has been married for 14 years and has three children. Her husband and children are first on her list of commitments.

When I started school, I had three boys at home, three, six, and eight. Two in school, one at home. My husband worked nights and would stay up when I went to class. I arranged my schedule around his work schedule.

Throughout the interview, Tina added other commitments in a voice that sounded like someone reciting a grocery list. Summarized here they include:

- College
- Kids’ schools, sports, and other activities
- Household chores are a family effort
- Adult time alone for Tina and husband
- Sundays off—that is family time!

Then she adds,

There is my husband’s grandmother. She is 81. I have almost full care of her. She lives on her own and is self-sufficient. I go once a week, do her medicines, make sure she has her food, see if she needs anything.

“Another commitment, how do you do it?”

Tina off-handedly says, “I forget my commitments I just do them.”

Later, Tina expresses in a voice with strong and tear filled emotion that school will be done in a few weeks. Life has not been easy. Her husband has been working two jobs to keep the family going until graduation.

He works his main job and he works for another guy a couple of nights a week and on weekends. He has been working two jobs off and on for the last year and a half. His main job, the overtime got cut. He was getting 10–20 hours of overtime every two weeks. It is now down to six hours a month. I don’t want to have to depend on a second job or his overtime. I don’t want him working 60/70/80 hours a week. He had to go out and get something else to keep us going. It will all be worth it in the end. I begin my first job in July.
Quantified Data

The data in Table 7 represents the quantification of life commitments and responsibilities. Alongside survey responses from the 45 study participants are the number of comments made during interviews and focus groups about life commitments.

A comparison of the adult students in this study with adult students surveyed by ACT suggests the study group is similar in marital status, employment, and college enrollment, but different with regard to dependent children. Comparison with NCES college enrollment figures shows the study participants are different. The similarities with ACT and differences with NCES are attributed to the manner in which data are collected. See Chapter 3, Data Analysis, for a detailed explanation of ACT data collection procedures.

New questions developed for this study include responsibility for extended family as well as family members with health, mental health concerns, or disabilities. In addition, survey participants answered an open-ended question about community commitments. Results indicate that nearly half of the participants (46.7%) have responsibility for extended family or family members with health, mental health concerns, or disabilities. Thirty of the 45 participants (66.7%) are involved in their community.
Table 7 Demographics, Commitments and Risk Factors

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Adult Students (N = 45)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>National Percentages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Marital Status</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Single * if dependents</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Married/Partnered</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>60.0%</td>
<td>54.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separated, Divorced, Widowed* if dependents</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td>20.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household A</strong> *</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediate Family and Family Time</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Household responsibility</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td>55.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Household B</strong> *  b</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extended Family or others</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with Disabilities</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Employment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-Time *</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>43.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-Time</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>29.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Employed</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td>26.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Community</strong> * b</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>One</td>
<td>17</td>
<td></td>
<td>37.8%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Three or more</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td>33.3%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Church, Coach, Volunteer</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self Time</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>College Enrollment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>71.1%</td>
<td>71.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part-time *</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>28.9%</td>
<td>27.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College high priority</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Risk Factors of Nontraditional Students—NCES (2002) See Notes 2
b New data collected for this study
Sources: Percentages for national data from NCES Tables 191 and 193 (2008) and ACT Adult Learner Needs Assessment (2009a) or Custom Student Opinion Survey (2009)
While some participants have few commitments, far more have multifaceted, complex lives. Multiple commitments are risk factors. See Notes 2. The more risk factors, the greater the potential of not progressing or completing educational goals. Table 8 shows the seven risk factors by number of participants. Figure 2 is a graphical display of the number of risk factors of the study participants. Each of the participants begins with two risk factors: 1– not entering college immediately following high school and 2 – being financially independent from parents for financial aid reasons. For this study, the number of participants for factor 3– dependents, includes adult students with responsibility for dependent children as well as extended family and/or family members with health, mental health concerns, or disabilities. Community commitments are not considered as risk factor in the NCES report and therefore are not included. Further discussion of risk factors is included in Chapter 5 Interpretation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Risk Factors (N=45)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 – delayed enrollment</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 – financially independent</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 – dependents</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 – single parent</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 – work full-time</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 – enrolled part-time</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 – GED</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
To appreciate the lives of adults, it is necessary to look beyond the numbers. Life commitments and responsibilities are more than numbers on a table or bars on a graph. They are the daily actions of adults who have chosen to add college to their lives, complete with struggles, successes, emotions, and dedication.

**Turning Points: College, Why Now?**

What influences the decision to attend college? There are times when the opportunity arises for introspection or the need occurs to make life adjustments. Defined by this researcher as “Turning Points,” these may be specific definable moments or the result of long-term circumstances. The outcome is a decision to make a life change, in this case to enroll in college and seek a degree.

The examples that follow demonstrate introspection, adjustment, and the decision to make a life change resulting from (a) life events, (b) employment changes, and (c) the need for
job survival. Twenty-three participants spoke about life events. Twenty-four discussed employment related factors.

Life Events. Brenda shares a specific life event that influenced her thinking about college. Brenda graduated from high school and chose to begin working at a time when it was possible to earn a sustainable living with a high school degree. Years later, when her husband died from cancer, Brenda faced a decision.

The last company I worked for was for 22 years. They downsized, so I was without a job. Well then, my husband was diagnosed with the cancer from Agent Orange. After he died, I realized, “You are on your own, and there is only one paycheck and that is yours.” I knew I had to go [back] into the work force. I was hearing from different people without a college education, “You’re going to get nowhere.” They sent me the information saying if you would like to go back to school, the government will pay for four years of college.

Employment Opportunities. The need for sustainable employment is a deciding factor when considering college. The employment experiences of Robb offer a compelling example of a life affected by culture and economics.

I am from Appalachia and consider myself Appalachian, but I am intelligent and consider myself to be halfway cultured and I have seen a lot of the world. I was the most poor kid in high school. I couldn’t afford to go to college. In our family, college was for rich people. You get a job or you go into the military. I had all these big dreams of places I wanted to see. For me the military was going to be my chance to do it.

While in the service, Robb had the opportunity to travel extensively in Central America and Europe. When he came home, Robb did many odd jobs and then at the urging of his sister became a travel agent.

September 11th ended my career. I worked for [the travel agency] for 10 years and had just gotten a promotion when I got laid off. Since that time, I have had 11 jobs. I have only left one and that was the [most recent] job that I had to take the job that I have now. The rest of them, they all left me. They either ceased to exist, laid off, gone overseas, or brought in foreign labor. That is why I decided to go to school.
Job Survival. The decision to enroll in college makes it possible for Robb to expand his opportunities. For others, college is a matter of survival, financially and physically. Experiences and circumstances in the lives of Tory and Alan provide insight.

“Mine is survival,” adds Tory during the focus group discussion. “I have been where I am at for 15 years. They are restructuring, but because I did not have a degree, I no longer qualify. I need a bachelor’s degree to keep my job.”

No longer able to work physical labor jobs, Alan chose college. Alan talked about the accident, “when I slipped under that concrete mixer, at my age it is time to start using my head. I have to have something in my portfolio that can support us. If you get an education, it gives you more options.

Employment to meet the needs of self or others is an important factor. Role modeling the importance of education and personal satisfaction also influence decisions to enroll in college.

Turning points represent a significant number of participant responses as deciding factors to enroll in college. Table 9 includes participant comments, survey results and ACT data.
Table 9 *Reasons for Enrolling in College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Enrolling (N=45)</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Survey&lt;sup&gt;a&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>ACT&lt;sup&gt;a,b&lt;/sup&gt;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Life Event</td>
<td>23</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>62.2%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for first job or career</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job requirements</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td>4.4%</td>
<td>38.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Advancement</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>56.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Career Opportunities</td>
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<td></td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>36.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Satisfaction</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>53.3%</td>
<td>61.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain Degree</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>66.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain Degree Only Choice Selected</td>
<td>7</td>
<td></td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Needs of Others</td>
<td>15</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meet Family Needs</td>
<td>14</td>
<td></td>
<td>31.1%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>11</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.4%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
<td></td>
<td>20.0%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>a</sup> Multiple reasons for enrolling in college could be selected

<sup>b</sup> Major level of importance

Source: ACT, Inc. Adult Learners Needs Assessment (2009a)

The survey question about reasons for enrolling in college offered respondents nine choice categories. Four of the choices were about employment, two were related to meeting the needs of others, and two concern personal goals. “Other” was included as an open-ended choice with space for written comments. The ACT survey presented respondents with 10 choice categories related to employment and personal self-enrichment. Additionally, the ACT survey asked for major and minor reasons for enrolling in college. The study survey asked for response(s) that *best* describe reasons for enrolling. Therefore, ACT responses identified as a major reason for enrolling were used in these calculations.

Meeting the needs of others was specifically added as a category for this study as it relates to adult students’ responsibilities and commitments.
A comparison of the data suggests that the study population shared similar reasons for enrolling in college in the areas of personal satisfaction, desire to obtain a college degree, and expanding career opportunities.

Because respondents were able to select multiple reasons for enrolling in college, it is useful to examine how many choices each of the 45 participants selected. Table 10 shows the reasons for enrolling in college by number of participants. Figure 3 graphically illustrates the number of reasons for enrolling by participant.

Table 10 *Reasons for Enrolling by Number of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Enrolling (N=45)</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prepare for first job or career</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Job requirements</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Advancement</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expand Career Opportunities</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Obtain Degree</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Satisfaction</td>
<td>24</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet Needs of Others</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Meet Family Needs</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Role Model</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>9</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Throughout the interviews and focus group sessions, participants discussed life commitments, responsibilities, and decisions to enroll in college. Once enrolled, what matters most to success is the ability to “fit college in.”

How do you “fit it all in”? Participants state that it comes from (a) personal motivation and determination, (b) literally figuring out how to add college into a daily routine, and most importantly, (c) support.

**Personal motivation and determination**

Twenty-four adult students commented about personal motivation and determination as success factors. Two examples from Beth and Carla and one from focus group participants illustrate these factors.
Beth enrolled in college with specific goals in mind. In the interview, which occurred near the end of her first term, Beth talked about her initial experiences and motivation to persist.

I am here because I want to be here. I just had a really good term. I was pretty excited about that. I have done so good, it is a real motivator, that I say, now I want to go back and do really good again. I know it is not going to remain that way. Things are a lot harder the further along you get, but it is just kind of like a real incentive that I did so well my first term.

Carla has specific goals in mind as well and is determined to complete her studies. Recently diagnosed with a serious medical condition, Carla vividly describes life with “one more thing thrown at her” as she tries to finish school.

Sometimes I feel like I am at the bottom of a well and I am sliding up the mud trying to get out. I do it, I still have that pessimistic thing, [but] I am still waking up everyday, I am still going, getting there, it is still getting done. Right now, I am trying hard to be focused on getting done and completing school. But, it is so hard. I keep telling myself I can fix it all when I am a college graduate.

Similar conversations occurred in focus group sessions, regardless of college or program.

“I am going to keep going until I get a degree or fall over” (Howard, 50+, adult only program, four-year college).

“I think that it is different for nontraditional students, we’ll pretty much do anything now because we are so motivated to get the degree, no matter what” (Linda, 30s full-time day student, four-year college).

“I think it is the drive you have in yourself, how determined you are. I don’t care who helps you or how much help you get. If it is not in you, it’s not going to get done. With me, I start, I finish” (Shelly, 30s, part-time, community college).

Personal motivation and determination make it possible for adults to get up every morning and do what it takes, day in and day out until the goal is realized.
Fitting College In

Twenty-five participants discussed prioritizing, balancing life and college, and creating schedules and calendars as factors that contribute to “fitting college in.” The following participant comments suggest how.

“When I have downtime at work, I am able to work on my homework, check e-mail, and get on Blackboard” (Helen)

“I do homework after the kids go to bed. With two kids and everything else going on, okay its 11:00, I can finally get online” (Penny).

“I wake up at 4:30 every morning and run three miles on the treadmill every day for my health. Even though I am getting up extra early, I have more energy” (Pam).

However, balancing and prioritizing does not come easy, the determination to attend and complete college often requires enormous sacrifice. The experiences and decisions of Amanda and Richard demonstrate sacrifice.

In a quiet, halting, and tired voice Amanda shares,

The hardest thing for me besides working all day long and then taking these classes [at night], its not just [the classes], you’ve got all the homework to do in-between. With my daughter being [involved with sports], I think I don’t like to miss her games. I feel like our home is just a stopping ground and where we sleep because we are never home the rest of the time. As far as balancing, it is hard. I am stressed out a lot. Things get pushed to the side and unfortunately it’s usually her and that bothers me a lot.

During the focus group discussion, concerning daytime and evening course schedules Richard talks about his job and the changes he had to make to attend college.

This is actually the first semester taking classes during the day, begins Richard, I had to arrange with my employer to take a second-shift job. I used to have a cushy job at a desk. Now I get to stay on my feet all night and lug [boxes]. As a nontraditional student, I came in taking night and weekend classes. The degree was not really offered at night.
Day in the Life. What does “fitting college in” look like? Ten interview participants completed a day in the life diary including examples of typical and atypical days along with a narrative reflection about their ability to be successful in college on their typical and atypical days. In addition, two adults shared comments about their typical and atypical days during their interview. An excerpt from Edward’s day in the life diary appears in Figure 4.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Thursday Typical</th>
<th>Friday Atypical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Up at 5:00 am and in the shower</td>
<td><em>Woke up at 4:00 — decided to work on simulation homework</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pack lunch and head to work at 6:15</td>
<td>Take shower at 5:30 am</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrive at work at about 6:45</td>
<td>Pack lunch and head to work at 6:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Take lunch at 11:30—Check e-mail and Blackboard for any messages for classes</em></td>
<td><em>Arrive at work at about 7:05</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Study for exam</em></td>
<td><em>Take lunch at 11:30—Check e-mail and Blackboard for any messages for classes</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leave work 3:30 pm</td>
<td><em>Send e-mail to BIS300 professor—confused about homework</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arrive home about 4:00</td>
<td>Problems at work don’t leave until 4:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kiss wife and ask how her day went</td>
<td>Get ticket on way home for not moving over to the center lane when emergency vehicle had car pulled over</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spend some time talking to wife and checking out the mail</td>
<td>Arrive home about 5:30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Study for exam from 4:45 to 5:30.</em></td>
<td>Kiss wife and ask how her day went, she could tell my day was not going good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Leave for school at 5:30</em></td>
<td>Spend some time talking to wife and checking out the mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Get home from school at about 9:00</em></td>
<td>Have dinner with wife and daughter at about 5:45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Get ready for bed</td>
<td><em>Read MKT305 chapter 6</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Watch TV with wife and daughter</td>
<td><em>Study for quiz in BIS330 chapters 5–9</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Go to bed about 10:00</td>
<td><em>Take online quiz</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Get ready for bed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>To tired to do anything—in bed about 10:00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Whether it is a typical or an atypical day, college-related activities have to be done. [When] things go as planned, I accomplish the activities needed and usually feel very satisfied with my accomplishments. One of my atypical days, I went fishing. Just the time off from college activities was great. Just to sit back, relax, and have no college worries on my mind refreshes me to work harder when I get back to my typical routine. The frustrating atypical days hinder your ability.

*Figure 4. Day in the Life*
Support

Developing a routine that works does not happen overnight. It takes patience, practice, and refinement. Sometimes it does not work, but eventually successful adults manage to negotiate the process. However, adults do not do it alone. Support is essential. This is strongly evidenced by the fact that among the 45 study participants over 130 comments were made about various forms of support. The examples offered here by Paul, Anne, Gena, and Tina are about support from family, friends and employers.

Support can come from family explains Paul and Anne. “My sister, who is my best friend in the world, encouraged me” says Paul. Laughing now, he adds, “she has always been after me to go back to school telling me I could do it. You are going to finish. PUSH! PUSH! PUSH!”

Anne is married with five children. She talked about when she and her husband were both laid-off from high paying careers. Anne had tried college at 18, but stopped to start their family.

My husband told me to go back. I always said that if I won the lottery I was going to go back to college and get my degree. He said go back to school. How are we going to pay the bills? Just go back to school I’ll worry about it. I came back to school.

Friends provide support for Gena.

I have two friends and my faith that are my support. One friend, she always encourages me that I can and do my best, you know all that type of stuff. She is a really great encourager. Then I have another friend, she encourages me a lot, too, about school and saying positive things in that area.

Employers, or sometimes spouses’ employers, can make the difference. Tina recalls, “My husband was able to flex his work schedule in order to pick up the children after school by going in earlier and coming home earlier, so it did not interfere with my schedule.”
Employer flexibility is an important point. Not just for the student, but in this case the spouse’s employer worked with them. “He has been there long enough to have ‘earned’ this arrangement.” Study participants’ clearly state that success is only possible with support.

Earlier Life and Education

In the preceding section, we encounter adults for one moment in their lives, when they are actively engaged with family, jobs, community commitments, and college. However, this moment is but a snap shot. Who we are is the accumulation of all the moments and experiences that have come before.

What were the experiences of adults in their growing-up years, in their families and in their schooling? What occurred during the time between high school, or last formal education, and current college enrollment? How did these experiences affect the participants and the decisions they made about a college education? What might be learned from their answers that would contribute to understanding success and persistence?

The factors about adult students considered in this section are (a) growing up and early education; (b) college after high school, no and why or yes, but…; and (c) what might matter to success. The quantified data presented identifies the reasons participants chose not to attend college after high school, their highest level of education completed, and the number of years between their last formal education and the current college enrollment.

Growing Up and Early Education

Growing up, what did you learn from your family or others about education? What was school like? What were you like in school? All 29 interview participants discussed their early life and education. Twenty-one commented on early academic experiences and family or societal influences. The experiences of Joyce, Leslie, Brad, and Dale are offered as examples.
Joyce grew up in a small mid-western farming community. The K-12 school she attended had two classes for each grade.

I was valedictorian of my class. I enjoyed school. You get more individual attention when you have small classes, but you have limited curriculum. I wish they had had a better system as far as helping you go from high school to college. They should have probably worked to get me a scholarship. Especially since I was valedictorian of the class. But, they didn’t really do anything to help you. Some of the teachers said that I should go on in school, but they never told you these are the steps you do.

Joyce and her husband recently enrolled at the community college. Joyce completed pre-college courses to prepare for college level work. Her goal is to earn a two-year degree and obtain employment to supplement their retirement income.

After high school in a North American country outside the United States, Leslie chose employment over college. Speaking in animated tones, punctuated by laughter, Leslie begins,

My father was a professor, my mother was a professor. We were interested in a lot of things because they encouraged it. We were reading from “this high” (gesture referring to very small), I mean cloth books in the crib. They encouraged us to explore and try things. My father always said, there is a lot to be learned in school, but your education really begins when you leave school. When I decided I wasn’t going [to college], it was sort of outside the norm. I was always a rebel, so my parents weren’t really surprised. In my home country, we did 13 years of school. So at that point, in time I had enough. I wanted a break. In [my country] there is not a big emphasis placed on a degree.

Leslie entered the business world. She is very successful. “I seem to have a knack for troubleshooting. I can take a business that is in trouble and turn it around.” She ended up in the U.S.A. due to a job transfer. When it was time for the next move, Leslie assessed her options, and decided a change was needed. Leslie had strong connections to the community.

I discussed it with my partner; I discussed it with my family, and my friends. I’ve always talked about going to school. Everyone said, “You’re not sure you like what you’re doing, or what you’ve been doing, here’s your time, go now.”

Leslie is enrolled at the university, fully engaged and enjoying the experience.
Brad spoke in a slowly controlled voice describing his life—abusive home, love of learning, but not school, military enlistment, and drug addiction.

I love knowledge…liked learning, but I did not have a good home life and did not have a very good school life. School became, during class it was good, but it became a place where I got beat up a lot. It became a very violent place for me. I skipped a lot and when I could get a GED, I did.

The love of learning was a success factor for Brad during his military service and later as a business owner. “When I wanted to learn something new, I just went and got a book.” Nevertheless, the drug addiction persisted. The death of his daughter and then his wife pushed him to seek recovery for his addiction. “I’ve been forced to ask the question, ‘What are you going to do?’ I had to change careers. Vocational rehab tested me, it turned out I was a good candidate for [college].”

Although none of the three attended college until later in life, academic ability and the love of learning were success factors for Joyce, Leslie, and Brad. What about adults who struggled in school or had learning disabilities? While only a few adult students specifically mentioned learning disabilities, more talked about struggling in school due to non-academic factors.

Dale is concerned about providing for his family. Although never diagnosed, Dale thinks he may have a learning disability. He talked about struggling in elementary and high school.

I didn’t like school, I really didn’t. I actually did pretty poorly throughout my school life. I never really connected with any of the teachers or anything for the most part. I had some good teachers who tried to reach me and help me out. I was in a lot of extra program classes because I was behind. I do believe I had some learning disabilities. I don’t think that anybody really knew. My mom, she helped me a lot with my homework most of the time. For the most part I learned how to deal with life more than I learned about math, writing, and reading.

The early struggles made college that much harder.
I see that if I had applied myself in school, I could have done a lot better. There was a lot of stuff in college that I had to take that I didn’t think I would have to take. There is a lot more bookwork than I thought there would be. I was really looking for more of a hands-on training. I am a very visual person, I learn by watching people do it. I don’t learn by reading it.

Dale completed his associate’s degree prior to the end of the study. In an e-mail correspondence, as part of the follow-up activity, Dale expressed concerns about his degree and the future.

I was determined to finish what I started. I don’t know that my program has prepared me as much as I have prepared myself. What I need is to find someone to take me in with a lack of knowledge and a lack of experience and give me the hands-on.

The lives of Joyce, Leslie, Brad, and Dale are similar and unique to those of other adults. Each attended elementary and high school. The results were different. The life paths following high school were different as well. Yet each enrolled in college in his/her adult years and is progressing toward a degree. Did they think about college? Joyce did. What about other adults? What choices did they make?

College after High School?

Did you think about college after high school? Did you attend college after high school? What happened? Participants provided two different responses to these questions: (a) No and why and (b) Yes, but…

No and Why. Almost half (48.9%) of the interview and focus group participants were enrolled in college for the first time. Asked if they thought about college, the response was, “No.” Table 11 provides a brief summary of the reasons why. Then Louis and Beth share examples about family expectations and work without a college degree.
Table 11 *College Following High School*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No and Why</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No desire to attend college</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work or military, cultural or generational</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High school drop out or GED</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pregnant</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No money for college</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Around the table at the focus group session, each participant explained a little about their past, including decisions about a college education. Louis a freshman in his 40s, no longer able to work a physical labor job, has chosen college. As a young man, family expectations and needs dictated his choices.

When I was 18, I kind of lost my parents. When my father died, there was a need for me to go to work very early. I quit mid-term my senior year of high school. Walked across the street to the marine recruiter office and they were, “Okay, we’ll take you, but you are not 18 yet.” My brother had just come back from Vietnam. My mother wouldn’t let me. So I got a job and just worked.

Beth, now in her 30s and employed in the business department of a major company, was enrolled in college prep until the end of her sophomore year. Without enough money and no knowledge about the process of enrolling in college or the resources to make college work, she opted to complete the business track in high school.

When I was 18, my mom didn’t have the money to send me to school, and, I guess because she didn’t go to college herself, she was not aware that I could have gotten a grant or maybe even financial aid or something. She didn’t know, and I didn’t know, and my school did not explain all that much to me about it, so I never went.
Sustainable employment with a high school degree or a GED has changed. A college education is needed for many careers. A college education, adults hope, will provide more, better or different options.

Yes, but... Slightly more than half (51.1%) of the study participants enrolled in college immediately or within a year or two of graduating high school. The reasons given by the 23 adult participants for stopping or delaying their program or degree included marriage, pregnancy, family obligations, loss or lack of funds, difficulty balancing the demands of employment and college, and disillusionment with college. The comments selected from Andrew and Bridget are examples of family obligations and disillusionment with college. Andrew talks about his initial entry into college.

The first time I went into college, I was 22. It was more at the prompting of my parents. I was in a two-year program, but I did not go for the full two years. Unfortunately, my parents got sick so I had to quit school, and go and help them. When my father passed in ’96, I actually thought about going back then, but my mother was very distraught over the loss and everything, so there was a couple more years added in there, and then my oldest brother got sick and actually passed away when I reentered college.

Bridget was raised and still lives in a rural community. She is enrolled in the community college. Bridget enthusiastically accepted an invitation to participate in a focus group, but needed to bring her 18-month old daughter with her. Fully engaged in the conversation, yet keeping a watchful eye on her playing child, she shared her early experiences at a university.

When I was 18, I went to the university in the city. I went there for a year and a half. It was very big and scary. To me I was young, indecisive, didn’t know what I wanted to do so I just kind of drifted through classes and did not take it seriously. That is when I decided to join the military. I thought if I was going to grow up it would be the best way to become an adult.
It is important to note that poor academic ability was not mentioned as a factor for stopping college the first time participants enrolled. This will be further discussed in this chapter related to success in learning.

**Quantified Data**

Whether adults chose to enter the workforce or enroll in college for a brief time the highest level of education achieved and the number of years between that highest level and the current enrollment is useful to understanding their earlier lives. The data in Table 12 contains survey and ACT responses about the highest level of education completed and years between last formal education and current college enrollment.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Highest Level Education Completed</th>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>ACT b</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Complete High School</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>26.7%</td>
<td>12.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete High School Equivalent GED a</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>3.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complete Vocational Technology Education</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6.7%</td>
<td>4.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attended some college no degree</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>42.2%</td>
<td>30.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Completed degree (AA or BA)</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>11.8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Years Since Last Formal Education</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1–3 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>9.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4–6 years</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>5.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7–10 years</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>4.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11–19 years / Over 10 Years b</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>9.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20–29 years</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22.2%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30 and above</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>15.6%</td>
<td>NA</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* a Risk Factor  
  b ACT data category over 10 years  

Source: ACT Adult Learner Needs Assessment (2009a)

Substantial differences in high school and GED completion are apparent between the study participants and ACT survey respondents. Other factors suggest the populations are more
similar. Considering years between last formal education and current enrollment, study participants on average have been away longer than ACT survey respondents on all measures with the exception of 1-3 years.

What (Might) Matter to Success

Does an individual’s earlier life or education influence success or persistence in college? Experiences associated with (a) family beliefs and attitudes, (b) early learning, and (c) prior college enrollment were considered as possible influences.

Family Beliefs and Attitudes

What effect might family, cultural or social beliefs, and attitudes, about education have on how adults perceive college as an option? “The first time I went into college, it was more at the prompting of my parents,” shared Andrew. Beth explained, “I guess because she [mother] didn’t go to college herself… I never went.”

Early Learning

Are adults that experienced prior success in learning better prepared for the expectations required in college? Joyce said, “I was valedictorian of my class, and some of the teachers said that I should go on in school.” Brad expressed, “I love knowledge…liked learning. When I wanted to learn something new, I just went and got a book.”

What about adults who struggled or had learning disabilities? Do they know how to avail themselves of supportive services? Dale talked about “extra program classes because I was behind and good teachers who tried to reach me and help me out.”

Prior College

For adults who attended college and stopped, would prior enrollment be of assistance with navigating the current college environment? The study participants did not specifically state
a connection between their growing up years, early education, and the choice of college as an adult. However, comments about the importance of education, success in academics, or dipping into college even for a short period were mentioned. Could these earlier experiences contribute to future success?

When Adult Students Enter College

Once the decision to enroll in college is made, the next steps are to (a) choose an institution, (b) negotiate the admission process, and (c) connect with specific degree programs. The findings in this section consider what adults encounter and how these factors affect success and persistence. This discussion concludes with what matters most to success.

Colleges of Choice

What factors influence adults to choose a specific college or university? Mentioned most often are cost, location/size, entrance requirements, and programs of study/degree choices. See Table 13 and Figure 5 for a summary of information for choosing a specific college.

During the interviews and focus groups, the 45 participants discussed these factors. The comments that follow offer examples about location and cost.

Location, convenience and a comfortable place to begin are important to adults. For example, the adults attending the community college live in predominantly rural communities. Rosalie explains.

For people like me the community college is a good place to start. Being right in our backyard is a big part of it. It is a place people went. Every place else you have to drive a long distance, an hour or more.

Driving a long distance is a daily part of life in a rural community. To meet the needs of rural students, the community college has multiple campuses. “It is very convenient,” adds Penny, “We have a place in Chester; we have a place in Milton and South Hill.”
locations make it possible for students to attend the campus closest to where they live, most of the time.

Branch campuses at the four-year institutions also offer convenient places for adults to begin classes closer to home. Mora talks about beginning at a branch campus.

I wanted to start somewhere where they had everything I needed. The county campus was there. It was a real comfortable place to start. My first year I took my classes there. I did not think I could pull it off coming to the main campus. I am glad they had a small campus to start out.

Cost and the availability of degree programs also affect the choice of college. For Dale, multiple factors played a part in his selection.

When I first thought about going to school I was looking into a technical school, but the closest one to us was 45 minutes away and they only have a full-time program. With working and a family, it just wasn’t going to happen. Someone told me about the program at the community college. I saw they had an electronics program and I could attend part-time.

Finances is another reason I picked the community college over tech schools. Tech schools are more expensive than the community college, and also it was closer.

Adults choose colleges that are affordable, convenient, located close to their home community, and offer degrees that meet their needs. The data presented in Table 13 supports these factors. The study participants are similar to the ACT data on factors of financial aid, program/degree choices, and entrance requirements. There are however, significant differences in the importance of location and cost of attending college.
Table 13 *Choice of College*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Choice of College</th>
<th>Comments</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>ACT b, c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location/Size a</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>84.4%</td>
<td>40.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost of attending</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>57.8%</td>
<td>29.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Financial Aid</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>35.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programs/Degrees a</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>40.0%</td>
<td>42.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance Requirements</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>13.3%</td>
<td>13.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Size of campus</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td>17.8%</td>
<td>12.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Variety of courses or degrees</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>8.9%</td>
<td>23.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a* Categories combined for participant comments only  
*b* Choice category very important to decision  
*c* Percentages calculated based on number of respondents who were ≥ 26 in data set.  
Source: ACT Entering Student Survey (2009b)

Survey respondents were invited to select multiple reasons for choosing a specific college. Table 14 and the graph in Figure 5 illustrate these reasons.

Table 14 *Reasons for Selecting College by Number of Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons for Selecting a</th>
<th>Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Location/Size b</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Availability of Financial Aid</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
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<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entrance Requirements</td>
<td>6</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

*a* Eleven choices available, most frequent responses listed  
*b* Combined based on survey and participant comments
Analysis of transcripts suggests that factors such as admission and program policies affect adults’ successful entry and integration into the institution. In this section, factors associated with admission are presented.

*Admission*. The first step in the entry process is to apply for admission. Admission encompasses more than completing an application and registering for classes. For adults, meeting and connecting with personnel knowledgeable about their needs and circumstances is an essential part of the entry process. Issues concerning placement testing, orientation, credit transfer, or alternative assessment options need to be addressed as well. A smooth or difficult entry process can make the difference between beginning a college education and giving up.

The admission process varies widely within and across institutions. Each institution has its own admission criteria, programs, and personnel. The choice to plan for adults and/or the expertise of personnel affects both the process and the adults’ ability to successfully enroll and begin.
During interviews or focus group sessions, 34 of the study participants specifically discussed the admission process including placement testing, orientation, and alternative assessments. The examples that follow represent different types of admission experiences.

Becky was in high school when she had her child. She lived at home with her parents and began working. During the interview, Becky talked about herself and the four-year college.

I knew I could get a GED and that I would eventually go to college, but I needed to get a job and support myself and him and get things together. When I was 22 or 23, I tried to get into the four-year college. They said that I was going to have to take my parents income on my application, which would totally X-out my financial aid. The age of 25 is when they don’t count you as part of your parent’s income as far as financial aid is concerned. In a positive, matter-of-fact voice, Becky says, “Stuff happens for a reason, it was only a couple more years.”

Two years later Becky tried again at the same four-year college.

What was kind of hard about it is that you did not get a lot of help. I did not know about applying or have a counselor at [high] school to coach me on that. Everything was done over the phone. They would mail me something and I would have to fill it out and send in a fee and send it back. Then they would send me another letter telling more information.

Becky’s admission process was complicated by her lack of information and the lack of assistance she received.

Robb did not know much about college or the admission process. He did some research on his own and then received help from knowledgeable staff.

When you first start out as a nontraditional, it is very difficult to understand the way the system works. I took the time to do a lot of research on my own. I had a lot of help from people here at the community college. It was very confusing. The first thing I did was get a college catalog. When I first started reading it, I read it from front to back, being the typical manager. I was not going to get caught with any surprises. It was very difficult to understand at first. Am I going to be part-time, full-time, 3/4 time. How is that going to affect the loan? There was not a lot that would explain that. My wife and I made an appointment and went up to the South Hill campus about the admissions process. They made it really smooth after that. “We are going to have you take the placement test.”
Placement Testing. Adults entering college may be required to take entrance or placement tests as part of the admissions process. This is especially true for adults entering college for the first time or after many years away from an earlier college enrollment. See Table 12. What does placement testing mean for adults? Will, or how will, the results affect persistence and success? Robb’s experience with placement testing at the community college provides a good example when he speaks with frustration about “the stupid placement test.”

I almost did not come here when I saw the scores from the stupid placement test. Right now, I have a 3.75 GPA. [They need to] explain it to you. To me a placement test is pass or fail. They use it to figure out where to place you to start. I think you need to meet with someone instead of seeing the scores posted on the web or sent in the mail. If someone had said, “Hey, Robb, it looks like you need to do a little work in…but we are going to get you on track and get you moving.” Even though it is called a placement test, people get the [idea] that it is pass/fail. I know there were three people who never came here when they got their placement test scores. They thought they were failures. It was never explained to me until I talked to my advisor. It is not whether or not you are coming here; it is where we are going to start you.

Participants in the focus group, also from the community college, while discussing placement testing seemed to have experienced the process the way that Robb suggested it should be.

I had to take the entrance test to see what I knew and what I needed to learn. There was no pressure. If you did not do well, you could start with the basics. I had to take refresher courses. You just went in to that class to kind of strengthen your skills (focus group participants).

Additional Options. Orientation programs, alternative assessments, or credit transfer from prior college enrollment is available, in some form, at each of the participating institutions. Some adults opted out of orientation while others found it helpful to settling in. Alternative assessment options, such as “testing out” or life portfolios, may be useful for adults with extensive life experience. Transfer of past credits from other institutions or earlier college enrollments had mixed results. The opportunity to transfer credits eliminates the need for ACT, SAT, or Compass
testing. However, as Carolyn points out, the past GPA transfers with the credits. “I came in with credits from the past. I should have left them there. I have gotten straight A’s and I am just now getting my GPA up to a 3.3. Your grades follow you forever.”

Program Requirements

Adults enrolling in college enter with a specific degree in mind. Admission to the institution does not guarantee automatic acceptance into the degree program. In addition, the availability of desired degrees often dictates enrollment in adult only or traditional programs and class attendance during the day or evening.

Each of the institutions schedule classes during the day and in the evening. Twenty-six participants in individual interviews and focus group sessions spoke about day/evening classes, adult only programs, and program admission experiences.

Adult Programs. Two of the study institutions offer programs specifically for adults. The courses in the adult programs are only in the evening and have limited degree options. Paul and Gavin talked about the adult only programs.

Paul attended and received an associate’s degree from a non-accredited college. At the time, he did not know the program was non-accredited. “I did not find out until I graduated, and I decided I would go get my BA.” His choices were limited, start over as a first-time freshman at an accredited institution or enroll in an accredited institution that would accept some of his credits for transfer. “That is when they told me about the private college. They will take most of your credits.”

Paul decided to talk to an admissions advisor at the private college. During the study interview, he talked about this meeting.

I wanted to go into a specific degree program. They do not offer that program. My advisor wooed me into another program area. Then he talked to me about going
into the accelerated program. I did not have a clue about what that was at the time. I was thinking, oh okay. I did not know that most of those classes were at night. I was not interested in going to school at night. The program I am in does not have day classes. With a sigh of mild disgust, Paul goes on to add, so, I finally got over the initial shock that I had to go to night classes. It took some adjusting, it was okay.

Gavin tried to enroll at the four-year college and had difficulty. Two years later, when he learned about the adult program at the same college he was pleased with the outcome.

I tried to set up classes at the four-year college before, but as an adult one of the things you run into when you send in your application is, [they] don’t understand I’m an adult. I just want to take some classes. I don’t want to go through this whole like I’m a freshmen entering for the first time. They did not work with me. Two years later, I heard about the adult program and how it was geared toward adults and that is when I decided that I’ll check this out. The [entry process] went really smooth. It seemed like I filled out a few pieces of paper and I was in. I knew I was going into an adult program and that I would not have to jump through any of those hoops. They would understand I am an adult student.

Adult only programs with evening classes are an option, especially for those with full-time daytime employment and/or educational goals that match the degree options available.

Traditional day/evening programs and classes. The majority of study participants enrolled in degree programs open to all students at the institution. Classes are scheduled during the day, evening, or a combination of both. It is necessary for the student to become familiar with the program requirements and course offerings.

During a focus group, participants discussed their experiences attempting to connect with degree programs. The conversation in Figure 6 is the first of several dialogues among students presented in this format to illustrate connections adult students often make with one another when the opportunity presents itself.
Fran began by describing her conversation with the admission office. They understood she was an adult, but it was still difficult to obtain the information she needed.

(Fran) Coming to school, you just don’t know. I mean I didn’t know. I called and I got hooked up with the adult program people first. If you say you are nontraditional, that is where they send you. I told them, I can’t do evenings and weekends because of my kids. I want to go during the day and then I must have said something about [the degree] and they referred me to the advisor.

(Richard) It is really important to know someone. To come in off the street and want to go to college and find someone to help, I think would be almost impossible. [A friend] talked to his advisor. She got me scheduled into classes and helped me figure out that I could take this degree. Otherwise, it is hit or miss if you find someone who wants to help you.

(Anne) You were saying if you do not know somebody it is a maze and you hit all these blocks until you find somebody to help you figure it out.

(Richard) It is not just about admission, it is the programs, too. The biggest thing with me would be scheduling classes and finding what is available for me. As a, um, nontraditional student I came in taking night and weekend classes, but the degree was not offered at night.

(Researcher) did anyone approach, get rebuffed, go away, and then come back or did you just keep pursuing?

(Chorus of voices) We just kept pursuing!

Figure 6. Admission/Degree Process—Focus Group Conversation

What Matters Most to Success

Admission into college requires effort. The process may be smooth or difficult. Assistance from knowledgeable staff is helpful. Adults who investigate degree programs, policies, and requirements ahead of time are in a better position to take proactive actions.

What matters most to success and persistence is the successful completion of the entry process into both college and degree programs.
Adult Students in the College Classroom

At the point that adults enter the classroom they have rearranged their lives, navigated the admission process, and are ready to begin course work. Adults bring an accumulation of life and learning experiences as well as expectations and attitudes about themselves, the professors, and the classes. What happens in the classroom, in learning, and interaction with professors and classmates influences the ability to succeed and persist.

Throughout the interview and focus group sessions, participants talked about (a) what they bring to the learning environment from prior educational experiences and what their expectations are for college. Then they discussed (b) faculty, including interaction with students and instructional techniques. Next, adults shared thoughts about (c) learning and interacting with classmates. Finally, the participants expressed (d) what matters most to success.

*What Adults Bring to the Learning Environment*

*Thoughts about Prior Learning.* The comments from 24 of the study participants suggest a continuum of educational abilities. The following examples from Roland, Tina, Becky, and Dale illustrate some of the thoughts about earlier learning experiences.

Roland recalls his early education. “College prep wasn’t just high school. Every class I took, back then, [even] in grade school was pre-college prep classes so that you could be ready when you graduated high school. I did excellent, until 10th grade, straight A’s.”

Tina talks about her love for math. “In school, the challenge of math was my one thing I liked. The rest of the subjects were okay. Science was fun. I did not like English under any circumstance.”

Becky experienced difficulty reading. “In school and now, I struggle with reading. It is hard for me to comprehend what I read, even pleasure novels. I have to keep rereading stuff.”
Dale mentions hands-on learning. “If there is a teacher or trainer teaching somebody on the job, I watch what they do, and then I will mess around with it.”

However, it is also important to recognize the skills and strategies for coping with the everyday life and work demands that have developed with experience and maturity. For some adults, prior learning experiences are what they remember. For others, the abilities used now are more important. Together, they both influence expectations and attitudes as adults approach learning in college.

*Initial Expectations about Being an Adult Student.* Sixteen participants talked about their attitudes and expectations as they entered college.

Roland reflects about his past and the tasks ahead. “As an older adult, I appreciate education. I had my fun and realize this might be it for me. I better get what I can and take full advantage of it.”

Whitney enjoys college, especially during the evening classes. “Adults are serious about their education. They come into class; this is their time.”

Andrew attended college before, now he is back with a different mindset. “There is still a whole lot I don’t know versus what I do know. When I come it’s the anticipation of what am I going to learn today?”

Pam is determined, but has concerns. “I have dyscalculia, so being in accounting and a business degree…I am just finding that out now when I am going to be taking a statistics class.”

Karen is retired and taking classes for her own personal enrichment. The community college students range in age from high school to her age and older. “The first day walking in, I thought, my God, what am I doing here?”
College level learning may be challenging and adults may be wary about their ability, but the expectation is that the learning will be worth it.

*Faculty: Interaction and Instruction*

Interpersonal interaction with professors may help or hinder adults’ ability to progress and persist in college. Methods of instruction and presentation style may affect success in learning. All 45 participants commented on faculty-student interaction and instruction, whether it was during an interview, focus group conversation, written on the handouts, or as part of the follow-up activity.

*Attitudes about Faculty-Student Interaction.* “I think it would help for the instructors to acknowledge we are not kids. We have past issues that we are dealing with, we have jobs, we have children, we have lives,” begins Mora talking about how she feels when home, work, and school responsibilities clash. “I keep up pretty good, but there’s some things I just can’t do just because life gets in the way.”

Becky echoes this desire for professors to understand the complex lives of adults. Then, she goes on to explain how she evaluates what professors might be like.

To me it helps if a professor acts like they understand where you are coming from. The first day you can kind of feel out how the person is going to be. How willing they are going to be if you have a question. How they respond to questions. If they talk about themselves a little bit, smile, make eye contact. On the first day, it is kind of obvious. Opening up to you, realizing that you’re a grown person, too.

Professors that take the time to understand and are available to assist make a difference to adults. This is especially true for those who are balancing life obligations or have learning concerns. Twenty-nine of the study participants offered comments about faculty-student relationships. Several examples illustrate the importance of these relationships.
Some of the teachers here just blew me away. I absolutely love them. They would go above and beyond to help you. A lot of them are very understanding of the fact that we are adults with lives, and if you need some extra help, they will meet with you. (Rosalie)

The professors are really down to earth and connected with the students. They are available and open. (Gena)

They tell you to call them, e-mail them, or whatever, and that made it a lot more special for me knowing that they were going to be willing if I needed the help. (Brenda)

I even had one professor let me come in. We had to review artwork and it was only going to be set up on that Thursday. She met me up here late and let me in for 30 minutes to let me view the work and take notes for the paper. (Shelly)

However, not all professors are as helpful as adults would prefer. When that happens, successful adult students adapt. Rosalie shares her experience when she had to leave class early to pick up a sick child at school.

Take into consideration that most of us didn’t just get out of high school and don’t live with their parents. We have a lot of financial responsibilities and getting back and forth to school is not easy. The teachers that took that into consideration, I was very grateful for. The ones who said, well, tough luck, there is just nothing I can do about that. Things like that happen. The one teacher got really angry. I said, “my child is sick at school, I have to go get her.” Professor, “How are you going to learn if you are not here?” The professor made a comment about being a B student. I will accept a C if I have to. My one friend said, “C means pass, just keep remembering it.” I made a conscious decision about that, I had to.

Relationships with professors may be supportive and encouraging or difficult and discouraging. When positive, adults enjoy attending class and engage enthusiastically in learning. When negative, the learning environment is demotivating. However, because successful adults have high expectations and strong personal motivation, they come to class, adapt when necessary, and persist.

*Expectations about Faculty Instruction.* “Me being stubborn, all it does is make me want to try harder. But at the same time, it makes me want to cry,” says Bridget in a voice that shifts
from emphatic to quiet emotion as she talks about a lecturer who suggested that “Most of us would be failing nursing. I don’t like teachers who don’t encourage.” Then in a voice that once more becomes strongly insistent, Bridget continues.

You are here, you are basically the mentor for that subject of that class, at that time of the day. How do you want this subject that you are passionate enough to teach about look? Do you want it to be in my head that this is the worst subject in my life? God, let this class be over! Or do you want, Wow! I can’t wait to learn more about that, I can’t wait to discover that?

“The worst subject in my life” or “Wow! I can’t wait to learn.” The 45 participants discussed the myriad of styles and techniques faculty use. Table 15 contains those most frequently mentioned as helpful to learning.

### Table 15 Teaching Techniques that Help Learning

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<td>Ex: Prepared, Clear Guidelines, Step-by-Step, Focus on Content</td>
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<tr>
<td>Accessible outside of class</td>
<td>5</td>
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Relationships with Classmates

For most adults, the college classroom is comprised of a mixed population ranging in age from high school to older adults. The exceptions are the adult only programs. Participant attitudes vary when it comes to interacting and learning with classmates.

*Mixed Ages or Adult Peers.* Twenty participant comments suggest that either mixed ages or adult peers or both enrich the college experience in some way.

Fran specifically chose to attend the main campus. “The awesome thing I think about being here is learning from the younger students that I would not have had if I had gone to the adult only program.” It is the quality of the experience that she finds significant. Lynn enjoys the balance that a mixed population can offer.

I like working with people my same age. I like working with people who are younger, because it gave a broader view. I mean you could see what the younger people were thinking and where they are coming from. They could see where people my age, in their 40’s, were coming from, so you got like a well-rounded discussion.

Helen was at the main campus and is glad she switched to the adult only program.

As an adult student, I really like the adult only program, being with the same people all the time, my own age, and, getting to know, this is the group of people, we are going to graduate together. It is the same people. I like that. Out of all the experiences at the other colleges, I really like that.

*Learning Together.* Being in class with peers is more than just interaction. Group learning that takes place in pairs, small groups, or as a whole class can contribute to success and persistence. Fourteen adults expressed thoughts about positive learning experiences with classmates.

Ellen is enthusiastic about learning with others. “I had been out of school for so long that I welcomed the idea of studying and being with other students and the interaction would be really good for me.”
Paul says he does not like working in groups. However, “there are a few classmates. We are close, and if we work together, we work well together because we will pool our resources. They are no-nonsense people. We are there to work, and we want to learn.”

Dale quietly describes himself as shy, reserved, and most comfortable working as an individual. In a few classes, “I have been in groups. It was fun for me, to get involved like that and to actually work on something.”

**Supportive Relationships.** As previously stated, support is essential for success. Classmates that engage in supportive relationships offer each other a level of understanding that is unique to the learning process. Such relationships are above and beyond existing support systems outside of college. If an individual adult has few relationships or if the relationships discourage or hinder engagement in education, the support from classmates may be that essential support system. Seven participants specifically included classmates as an important part of their support system. Roland and Rosalie explain the reasons why.

Roland is single, has little contact with family, and few friends.

Having a phone list of my fellow students really helps, especially the older students. It really helps. I sometimes think we kept each other in college. It would have been so easy for us to give up. If I had not been talking to them we would have gave up, and we’re still in school.

In College, Rosalie developed two very close relationships with classmates. Just prior to graduation, she learned that both were moving away. In a voice mixed with excitement, laughter, and tears Rosalie recalls her time with classmates.

I took a lot of classes with the same girls all the way through. You start off in a class and you do not know anyone, and now you know about their kids, grandkids, husbands…and that is nice. At the end of two years, I now have two very close friends I never would have had. The two friends I met in school, they are probably the biggest ones other than my husband. They just moved away. That about killed me. Sophia has been my right-hand for the past year and a half.
What Matters Most to Success

The interpersonal interactions and instructional techniques by professors may contribute to achievement in learning. Relationships with classmates can be important for support. Adults state that what matters most is success in learning and the strategies needed to attain that success.

Strategies for Learning

Successful adults use specific techniques needed for each class. Long-term success and persistence require proactive planning and organization. If adults do not begin college with techniques and planning in place, they develop, practice, and refine them until the strategies became automatic. It is often through trial and error that these techniques are developed, but the process does occur. Thirty-one study participants described the methods that work best for them, how, and why.

Diverse Approaches Required. Understanding that different subjects or classes require diverse approaches to learning is essential to success. Each of the participants that commented suggested a method that is best for him/her. Robb explained it succinctly.

Depends on the subject. Some I learn with my hands, some things by repetition, some things I can just read it and retain it. With math, I have to do it by repetition; I have to hammer it over and over and over. If it is something like history or biology, I can read it and understand it.

Self-Assessment. Developing and refining what works best involves self-evaluation and a conscious decision to practice and apply the knowledge that comes from self-assessment. Joyce talks about finally figuring out what helps her in science class.

He gives lecture notes that’s partially filled out and then he puts it on the board and we fill out. I finally figured out it helps me if I can find the pictures he has up on the screen, if I can find it in the book and I can write down the page number or example number that seems to help a little bit.
A sense of pride is important to Cullen. It motivates him to put effort into all his course work. In this example, Cullen describes his approach to writing assignments.

Any class that involved writing assignments or term papers I enjoyed. The end product would be something I was really proud to turn in. I am not the kind to get it out of the way, get it done. It has to be good for me. I don’t know why, there is a standard. I can’t just turn this out and hit the word count and okay I am at ‘the’…lets wrap it up. To me I will spend days, usually not days, but maybe eight hours at the computer to get something that I feel is, something that flows with the assignment. I want to have something that the teachers could look at and say this guy took the assignment seriously.

*Being Proactive.* Proactive planning and organization are necessary for long-term success. Leslie and Shelly both proactively planned to enroll in their most challenging courses in the first few terms of college, but for very different reasons. Leslie is concerned about laying a foundation for future learning requirements.

I picked some of the ones I would have the hardest time with first. Stuff builds on top of each other and if you don’t learn it, it’s just going to start doubling as you continue to move on. If you do not have the basics and the groundwork, it’s going to affect you later on.

Shelly is a single parent, works full-time, and attends community college part-time. “had to take the entrance test to see what I knew and needed to learn. I did horribly in math, of course.” She decided to complete her math courses first. Asked what the experience was like, Shelly, with relieved laughter, replied, “Math was horrible. I did all my math first, and I am done with it”!

*Organization.* Whether organized to begin with or forced to become organized, the result is the same, adults adjust to ensure progressing toward and reaching their goals. Gavin, a self-described procrastinator, talked about becoming organized.

School has helped me to become more organized in my personal life. Because, now I can’t just come home at night and flip on the TV and sit there for hours. I have homework to do. So, that helps in the sense that I have to set aside time. I make deals with myself, if I read this chapter in my sociology book and get my assignment done, then I can watch a movie. I can’t do it before. It
has helped me start chunking my time where I say from this hour to this hour, I am going to do this. I have this hour to do this.

Beth is organized to begin with. She maintains a schedule that helps her manage work, school, family, and personal time. Beth explains, “I have to do things on my own time schedule to where it does not interfere with my son’s life and job.”

To avoid conflicts, Beth arranges her classes around the other parts of her life. For example, “looking for the classes that are most convenient and get me home as early as I can. I take classes before-hand or right after work that does not interfere with family.” Beth looks to the future as well. She began taking classes part-time.

Going on a part-time basis, two or three classes at a time will take longer. I have thought about how it is going to play into sequence classes. They are only offered like one quarter at a time. Still early in the process, I can’t really say yet.

Diverse approaches, self-assessment, proactive actions, and organization contribute to successful progress for adults. When success happens, it may be accompanied by a sigh of relief, a celebration, or fundamental changes in the way adults think about learning.

Success in Learning

I just caught the bug, says Rosalie. Catching the bug? Catching the bug means, I always enjoyed school. I enjoyed the class discussions. Getting my grades back. Once I got a taste of it and got back into learning…I have always loved to learn. One of my favorite things in the whole world is learning something that I didn’t know. I had forgotten that about myself completely until I took that first quarter. It all just began to build self-esteem that had crashed and burned eight years prior. All of a sudden, it was like, oh yeah. Once I got back into the learning mode, I just wanted to keep going and going.

How do you define success in learning? Thirty of the study participants initially responded, “Grades.” As the discussion around this topic continued, 17 of the 30, as well as seven of the other adult students, began to express thoughts about learning on a deeper level. Comments about the importance of education and the ability to apply learning beyond the
classroom were followed by how success in learning affects attitudes and self-esteem and fosters a love of learning for learning’s sake. This is true of adults who do well and those who struggle.

The following comments illustrate the importance of grades, as well as the deeper outcomes success in learning has for adults.

**Grades Matter.** Grades *are* a measure of achievement. They represent feedback that coursework meets the expected standards. Gena talked about grades and keeping up in school. “I’ve been getting A’s and B’s. If I were getting D’s and F’s, I would not be successful. It would have been a deterrent.”

Becky is relieved by the A she is earning in Math.

I was two steps behind in math. Really struggled with it. Gave up, quit going to class. Took it again, failed. Took it again. This time I have a 98 in it, so I am thinking I am finally getting the hang of it.

For adults receiving tuition reimbursement from an employer, grades as a measure of success have a very different meaning. In one focus group, the topic of grades came up during a discussion of employer reimbursement for college. Ellen began to say, “When your company is paying for it,” then Tory jumped in adding, “It is an incentive to keep your grades up.” Tory went on to share details with the group.

If it is an A, it is this much. If it is a B, it’s less. Anything below a C, I get nothing. Not only do you have the added stress of learning, you do put the pressure on yourself. Oh my God! I have to get an A so I can pay for the next class!

**Importance of Education.** When adults enter college, they already value what a higher education can provide. They are, however, at times uncertain about their ability to succeed academically. Grades are only one measure. Success, accompanied by the internal sense of awareness that what one is accomplishing is meaningful beyond the classroom—that is learning at a deeper level.
Alan’s experience exemplifies the transition from uncertain to meaningful learning. Alan and Carolyn are married and attending school at the same time. During the interview, they spoke to and for one another about college. See Figure 7.

(Alan) I was really scared to go to college.
(Carolyn) It took a lot of convincing from me to convince Alan he could.
(Alan) This is a lot different. I mean, I was thinking, “There’s all kinds of guys that I know that’s went through college and I am not on the same level.” I figured I would be a dummy.
(Carolyn) After Alan took the entrance test, saw “Well, I am not stupid,” and actually started attending classes and doing so well…he had to actually do it before he knew he could.
(Alan) I was real happy, but it scared me, because it was new territory for me.
(Carolyn) A lot of the classes that he thought he would do poorly in and was dreading, turned out to be the ones he did best in.
(Alan) Like nutrition, I went right through that, man. I thought, “This is neat. I’ve already covered most of the book.”
(Carolyn) We tell everyone we know we are going to school. A lot of people have chosen to go back to college as a direct influence of us going to college.
(Alan) I am real careful not to say, “Well it is hard.” It can be.
(Carolyn) We are careful to let them know it is work, that we take it seriously, and we value it.
(Alan) You are not going to make any better investment as far as I can see than in your own self.

Figure 7. Meaningful Learning

Changes the Way I Think About Learning. Beyond grades and meaningful learning, some adults discover that knowledge itself is more important than a college degree.

Understanding mathematics beyond simple arithmetic has always been difficult for Mora. At one point, she decided it was a waste of time and would never use it. During the interview, Mora talks about a transformation in her thinking.

I think one time I thought algebra is a waste of time, I am never going to use it, why should I do it. Now that I am looking into it and realizing what I am missing, and thinking that, yeah, even if I do not use the algebra, I will use the other ways of thinking and the other ways of learning, and maybe…I can apply it to something else.
Dale struggled throughout school and into the community college program. Although he completed his associate’s degree, Dale recognized that more learning and practice was ahead before he would be in a position to obtain employment with his degree. Despite all that, Dale shared that attending college and his persistence in learning have significantly affected his life in general.

School, in general, it has made me a smarter person, made me more aware of what is going on around me. Being in college has really opened my eyes to what is going on around me in the world. I look at things differently than I used to. I look at things more in a technical way, and I have more of a trouble-shooting path now to where when stuff is wrong. I can check this and then check that and I actually lay things out and plan them out better.

Discovering the value of knowledge has perhaps a more profound affect on success for adults who struggle. Comments from participants that do well academically also demonstrate this change in attitude and affect the desire to persist.

Gavin speaks with enthusiasm about the pure joy of learning along with potential opportunities.

Now that I’ve gotten back into school, I find myself learning for the pure joy of learning something. I really like it. I like learning. It is fascinating. For some in the adult program they are there because it is a means to an end.

Even when I finish the adult program, I am probably going to continue to take classes just because I enjoy it so much. It is just amazing to me. This is a good time to come because I think I have reached the point now that I do not regret anymore not having done it sooner. I am just kind of enjoying the ride.

It’s funny. My professors say all the time, “If you are interested in psychology or sociology come and see me. I would be happy to talk to you about pursuing a career in that path or getting you into more classes in that field,” and stuff like that. In a class with adult students it seems kind of odd, but on the other hand it opens up possibilities, because if she is saying that to the class, maybe there is a way that I, as a 41-year-old, could pursue something along those lines or just go to school for it. Like still, that doorway isn’t closed. I’ve come to kind of a Zen belief that it was the right time. As you said, things happen, when they are supposed to happen.
Achieving good grades, recognizing the value of education, or discovering that “knowledge for knowledge’s sake” is important affects the attitudes and motivation of adults. Combined with learning strategies, the result is success and persistence.

Campus & Academic Services

Personal motivation and diverse approaches to learning are among the factors that adults say contribute to success and persistence. The classroom is one place these factors are put to use, but not always. Determination to succeed will compel adults to seek assistance outside the classroom as well.

Campus and academic services are located within the institution, but outside the classroom. Academic services support student learning. Campus services assist students in negotiating the institutional structure.

Academic Services

The specific academic services accessed most by adults are advising and tutoring. Additionally, centralized and support services provide ongoing contact for information and guidance.

Advising

Advising functions exist at each of the participating institutions. General advising is for all students, regardless of major, or for students that have not declared a major. Departmental advising occurs with students within a specific degree program. Colleges and universities may have general, departmental, or both forms of advising available. Twenty-nine participants discussed advisors and advising. Most spoke in predominately positive terms mentioning guidance, availability, and support as helpful.
Guidance. Rosalie shared an example about guidance. “They have advisors over the programs themselves, and then they have advisors to help you pick your classes out or to help guide you along to see which program you want to go into.” Robb talked about his advisor and how hard his advisor works to help students succeed.

He is advising on classes and process. If he does not know, he will find out. They can keep you on track. They can keep you from getting sidetracked into an area that is going to be very expensive for you and bring you back to where you belong.

Availability. Rosalie explains, “They are available on quick notice, available by appointment.” Amanda talks about the adult program staff’s level of availability.

I have found that I can call them pretty much from the time I get here until the time they leave. I have even called and left messages before, and somebody called me back. Every time I have had to e-mail, they answer right away.

Support. Melanie mentioned her first experience with a staff member.

I came up here to talk to a person. I said, “I have no idea what I am doing. All I know is I want to go to school to be a nurse. I need some help.” I had a really good advisor. They sat down and went through the whole process with me.

Amanda shared, “Without my advisor to help me see the light at the end of the tunnel, I don’t know that I could keep going sometimes, because it is just really hard to keep going with so much on your plate.”

Shelly also had positive things to say about the support she received from her advisor.

Without him, I would be lost. Never did he ever make me feel like you can’t do this. Every now and then he would say, if you did not have that job, you would be done by now. Laughing. I just like him. This is a small college. People are more personable.

Tutoring

Assistance with math and writing are the reasons most frequently stated by adults for seeking tutoring services. Tutoring programs, individual guidance from professors, and work
with individuals outside the college are among the resources used. Seventeen participants talked about both helpful and unhelpful experiences with tutors and tutoring.

Helpful. Whitney went to the writing center. “I did use the writing center for a paper I wrote in my class. I needed to make sure I had everything in order because there was a lot to write about.”

Cullen’s professor helped him with math. “I took all my higher math from the same teacher and she tutored me every time.”

Shelly had to seek tutoring help outside of school. “The tutor I got was actually my neighbor, who was my high school algebra teacher, who had retired. [I could] come home and go to my next-door neighbor and have him help me out. He got me through math.”

Unhelpful. Before connecting with her former high school teacher, Shelly did try to arrange for tutoring at the community college. “I had to get a personal tutor. The tutoring they offered here was, once again, during the day. I couldn’t hook up with that. I mean they offered. It just did not work.”

Becky expressed frustration about the tutoring center on campus.

I did not like the tutoring office. They would teach me the same way these professors were teaching me. And I would say, “Hold on I do not understand how to do this,” and they would sigh and repeat the same thing they said before. “It is not that I did not hear you; I do not understand the way you are telling me. Try a different avenue because this is not working.” I quit going to tutoring, it was making me more frustrated.

Centralized and Support Services

Centralized services are generally located in one building, for walk-in, phone, or online contact. Support services are for students that are low-income, disabled, or first in their family to attend college.
Twenty-six participants discussed both centralized and support services. Adults utilized centralized services on their own. The colleges identify and invite eligible adults to support services. Brad offers a thorough summary of one support service program. His explanation provides insight about services that contribute to persistence.

I got a letter in the mail inviting me to sign-up for student support. The letter told me what the support program was. I filled out their application. I was accepted. I was told to go to an orientation briefing that lasted about three hours. I did, and when the semester started, there I was.

They advise more thoroughly than the initial advisor. It is a place to go and learn about how to be a student and, um, bring issues to. It is probably 60/40 between traditional and nontraditional students. It is a lot about first-year retention. They made it easy, easier. Univ. 101, as taught by [the program staff], is different than the standard University 101. They showed you how to navigate the university, its services. And, it is a place to go and just express your fears.

These are things that I would have had difficulty finding out how to go about this. It just made it a lot easier. Would I have done it on my own? Yeah, but it would have taken a lot more time and would have entailed a lot more frustration. This is a place you go to, one place with whatever issue. If they don’t know how to solve it, they find who can solve it and either bring them to you or you to them. I am treated more like, um, a peer. A peer who is a student who has not gone through the student process in order to be there. It is a different dynamic. Someone there will figure how to get you through this. The service is through to graduation.

Paying for College

How do adults pay for college? Funding sources include self-pay, financial assistance from the institution or other government agencies such as grants and student loans, and employer tuition reimbursement. Frequently multiple sources are needed or available.

Paying for college, including tuition, fees, and books/course materials, is a significant concern for adults. Financing college was mentioned in every interview and discussed at great length in the focus groups. The ability to pay for college significantly affects persistence and success.
Financial Aid

Obtaining Information. Financial assistance in the form of student loans, grants, and scholarships are available to qualified applicants. Many adults state that information regarding financial aid is confusing and disseminated inconsistently. Similar to issues with the admissions process, obtaining accurate information from financial aid officials varies widely within and across institutions.

Penny described a positive experience at the community college when she connected with an individual staff member.

She was real friendly. We talked a lot. She walked me through the whole process. I had all my tax papers with me. She helped me with my financial aid. She helped me with everything. That is what I wanted.

The community college is a small institution with fewer enrollments than the four-year college or university. This makes it possible for students to receive in-depth, one-on-one information and guidance. At the four-year institutions, with greater enrollment and multiple staff, adults encounter different circumstances.

In one focus group, participants described their attempts to secure financial aid for summer classes. This discussion occurred near the end of the session. Participants, now comfortable with one another, talked openly and interjected comments, often interrupting or adding to each other’s thoughts about the complicated process of obtaining financial aid. The discussion is presented in Figure 8.
(Linda, in a voice filled with resignation) They don’t really help you.

(Fran, Speaking in an energetic tone jumped in) You know what, I had a situation where I thought you could apply for a whole other financial aid for summer class. Because I took summer classes all the way through.

(Fran, with disappointed laughter) Then you get a hard lesson that, no that was your money.

(Anne) If you have financial aid for summer, you will get your letter. So I called them and they said, we don’t do that. We don’t do financial aid for the summer.

(Linda, sounding informative) They do have summer financial aid though.

(Speaking together, Fran and Anne interrupted Linda) I was told specifically…a couple of times…I was told no.

(Linda) You have to apply by February 1st.

(Multiple voices, in response to Linda, continuing to express) They do not offer it for summer.

(Linda, speaking slowly and sounding like she is thinking through what she will say next) I don’t think they give out more loans in the summer, but they give out more scholarships and grants.

(Fran, interjecting) But scholarships and loans are different.

(Linda, continuing to ponder) I think it also depends on when your status changes. Because my status changed from Freshman to Sophomore in the middle of the year. You automatically get more money available to you. So if you turn in the middle of the year, they can offer you more for summer.

Figure 8. Financial Aid Discussion—Focus Group

It is evident from this discussion that there is a lack of clear information about financial aid options and eligibility.

Eligibility. Securing accurate financial aid information is difficult. The application process and the rules and regulations are complex. Even when adults qualify for assistance, how the funds are dispersed can be confusing. Additionally, many adults believe that eligibility for funds is inequitable.
Paul had classes that continued over two terms with a grade assigned at the end of the second term. Financial aid regulations affected his funding.

I was doing my internship and taking the senior seminar. I did not get a grade because it continued beyond the semester. The director of student services put my financial aid on hold. I got my [tuition] aid at the end of the second semester when the classes were finished and I got my grades.

Melanie is a single parent, works full time, and is financing her education with student loans. In this example, the rules for distribution of funds apply.

The federal loans, you can only use them for three quarters out of the year, and yet, in this last year of nursing we were required to go through the summer. I am having to make payments for this quarter because I cannot borrow for this fourth quarter in the year. That has really put a strain because I am a single mom.

Kate does not qualify for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA), but does receive help from a federally funded county resource. “I don’t understand how they get their income qualifications to get financial aid. We are a family of four. My husband works construction, so four good months out of the year. We did not qualify for FAFSA.” Kate goes on to add that completing the FAFSA application is confusing. “I was trying to do it online. They were asking things about my parents’ divorce. I have not been counted as part of my parents since I have been in school. I was confused.”

Eligibility rules are confusing and qualification seems to be unpredictable. Some people qualify while others with similar circumstances do not.

Full-time employment prevents Shelly from qualifying for federal assistance even though she is a single parent. Tuition, books, course materials, and commuting costs are in addition to a house payment and supporting two teenagers.

I pay for everything. I got financial aid my first quarter, and now I make too much money. If I did not work I could have my college tuition paid, my books, I would get gas reimbursement, I would get a medical card and food stamps. But I have a house payment and….
Shelly continued adding an example about books.

I was in this one class this quarter and the teacher said, “I am sorry about the books being new. I know a lot of you have the old books, I know this book is expensive. Does anybody know?” I said, “I just paid $169 for this book.” Nobody else in there had a clue how much the book was, because nobody had to pay for it. I beg, borrow, and plead to get books. I even check them out of the library.

She thought about making a change, but…

I am telling you I have thought about it and thought about it. I have had a career for 16 years and I am thinking about quitting and going to part-time, just enough to make my house payment. It’s not right. I think there should be breaks for the single moms.

**Employer Programs**

A company could choose to offer employees tuition assistance to attend college. The eligibility policies may be flexible or include restrictions. The following participant statements provide examples.

The company where Edward works offers employees the opportunity to attend college. “They are paying for it. They pay half up front and the rest if I get a C. It includes books.”

Pam has earned access to tuition reimbursement from her employer, but accepting funding affects her degree choices.

Now that I have been working there for more than 10 years they do reimburse tuition up to 90%. It makes it a little easier for me to be able to afford to do it, but in order to get reimbursed you have to get a degree that pertains to your job.

Richard began taking college classes with the help of his employer, but later switched to student loans.

My employer pays for college. I started out letting them pay for college, but if they pay for classes you owe them a year. So I stopped letting them pay and took out some student loans to start paying for classes. I came to the conclusion that I was not going to progress in that company. I already owe them. I want an opportunity to go someplace else and do something.
Financial aid, employer assistance, or self-pay, confusing or otherwise, the primary concern for adults is to have access to sufficient funds to complete their college education. Successful adults will investigate and take advantage of all options available to progress toward their goal.

What Matters Most to Success

Even though other campus and academic services are utilized, what matters most to success are (a) specific academic services and (b) the ability to pay for college. This section concludes with summary Table 16 of campus and academic services used most often by the study participants and data from ACT, Inc.

Academic Services

Effective advising and access to centralized and support services are important to success. Adults indicate that the availability of these services during the first term or year is most helpful. The following examples are representative of the thoughts expressed by 36 of the study participants.

Fran says, “The first couple of semesters are scarier than anything, I thought. Then when you get past it you do not think anything of it.”

Kate talks about helpful staff. “Everybody in the nursing department that I would call, they explained everything. All the good things, all the bad things, how long it would take. What could hold you up.”

Focus group members agreed, “Centralized services are very helpful for first year students. Later it’s not as essential.”
Paying for College

Paying for college is crucial. Successful adults will use whatever resources are available. The comments offered by Tina, Roland, and Gena illustrate this point.

Tina graduated at the end of the term. She spoke, with tears and laughter, about paying for college.

Student loans don’t come due until the end of the year. I owe them my soul. We financed everything. We were just right above that line to get financial aid. It’s okay; it is well worth the investment. The most I received was a Pell grant for $700 for the year. That’s okay. That is $700 I did not have to pay out. That was my books that year.

Roland said that once the decision was made, he would find the money.

The government offered to pay for it. Having them pay for my education made it a lot easier. But I still would’ve went. It just…I would have had to beg, knock on doors, and get the money from whomever I could get it from.

Bridget works part-time, receives a Pell grant, and applies for scholarships. “There are lots of them. I just get in there and tell my story. I just received [an academic] scholarship to go to the nursing program. I have a 4.0; have had it since I began school.”

Gena has student loans that she will eventually have to pay back. Gena spoke about factors that help her succeed and progress, stressing the essential importance of funding.

I have a goal. If I did not have my friends, I would still go to school. If professors did not teach the way I could learn, it would be harder, but I could go to the tutors. I think the only thing that would really defer me is if there was not any financial aid. Then the door would be shut.

Table 16 includes the number of participant comments, survey responses, and ACT data about campus and academic services.
Table 16 *Campus and Academic Services*

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<th>Campus &amp; Academic Services</th>
<th>Comments</th>
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<th>Percentage</th>
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a Service Used

b Includes comments about financial aid and paying for college.

Source: c ACT Custom Student Opinion Survey age ≥ 26 (2009c)

Without _____, I Would Not Be Here or Could Not Continue

Throughout this study, participants shared information and stories about their lives and college, complete with struggles, achievements, and the ever-present sense of determination to move forward toward their goals.

At the end of every interview or focus group, participants were asked to summarize the most important factors that contribute to success and persistence. This was followed by the question, “Without _____, I would not be here or could not continue?” Each of the topics discussed in the narrative included a *What Matters Most* section. These are briefly summarized below.

*What specific factors contribute to your success?*

*Current Life.* What matters most to adults is fitting college into their daily lives. The ability to do so requires that two factors be present: (a) Personal motivation and determination
and (b) support from family, friends, employers, etc. Leslie thought about what it would mean to attempt college without support.

I might be able to accomplish it if I just had the drive, but… I think an adult student who is doing this without support at home or from people outside the university; it’s got to be tough. The people who are your friends and family you feel very comfortable with, you know most of the time you do not mind admitting, “I feel like such an idiot in this class” or “I lost this mark.” It makes it easier knowing I have people that I can talk to, and they will be there.

**Entering College.** Obtaining admission to college and degree programs is complicated especially for adults who lack knowledge or experience with the process. Two factors matter. The first is proactive actions by adults to ask questions and persist until they get answers. The second is knowledgeable staff with an understanding of the unique needs of adults. The experience of Robb, briefly repeated here, describes both factors.

When you first start out as a nontraditional, it is very difficult to understand the way the system works. I took the time to do a lot of research on my own. I made an appointment and went up to the South Hill campus about the admissions process. They made it really smooth after that.

**Adults in the College Classroom.** Adults enter the classroom with beliefs and attitudes about themselves as well as what they will experience in the learning environment. Whether they enter with confidence or apprehension, persistent adults develop or refine strategies that lead to academic success. Interaction, guidance, and support from professors and classmates are factors in this process. However, the effective learning strategies and subsequent academic achievements are what matters most to success and persistence.

**Campus and Academic Services.** Advising and support services are important to academics and negotiating the campus systems. These services matter most during the first year of college. The ability to pay for college is a crucial factor and directly affects persistence. As
Gena stated, “I think the only thing that would really defer me is if there was not any financial aid. Then the door would be shut.”

*Without ____*, *I would not be here or could not continue.*

A number of factors are important to success and persistence. However, the responses that complete the statement, “Without ____...,” must exist for adults to succeed and persist.

**Support.** Support is the single most important factor. Family, immediate or extended, are first on the list of those essential for support and encouragement. If family support is not possible, close friends, and sometimes classmates, fill the role of family. Employers, advisors, professors, and other professionals are, at times, a source of support by offering guidance. The following participant statements provide examples.

My sister and I feed off of each other. We get together and study a lot, which, I mean, it really helps to have somebody to study with. My husband is supportive, my family, everybody is very understanding and helpful. (Helen)

On days that I have clinicals, I have a friend that stops in the morning to pick them up for me and friends at school who are going through the same things. (Tina)

Most of the people that provide support are those that are professional people. It is not enough. I do not have anybody that I can sit and talk to, be close and open with. (Mora)

**Paying for College.** Self-pay; federal, state and private loans; grants and scholarships; and employer tuition programs are the financial sources used to pay for college. Successful adults will seek to obtain all funds available. What matters most for adults who need financial assistance is accurate information and guidance.

**Turning Points.** The need to make a life change results in the decision to attend college. It is this pivotal point that influences adults to enroll in college, affects their motivation, and stimulates personal drive and determination to persist and succeed.
How do you define success?

The primary focus of this study is factors that contribute to success and persistence in college. Adults first discussed and then listed the factors that contribute to completing a course, a term, or a college degree. Next, they shared the factors without which they would not be in college or could not continue. One important factor became apparent at this point—a factor that was almost missed by the researcher—how adults define success. It is not success in college, but success in life that influences why they are in college and why they succeed. These final participant statements provide insight.

For me success would be doing, working at a job that I absolutely love going to everyday and it would not necessarily matter how much money I made. Of course, I want to be able to live comfortably, but that does not mean lavish, but living comfortably and enjoy what I am doing. (Paul)

In family conversations, it has given me; I can’t really say a sense of identity, just kind of a purpose. Now that I have taken my classes, I know most of what they talk about now. Not that I am smarter or that I am smarter than I was before I started, I feel a little more self-confidence to be able to hold a conversation and know what I am talking about. (Karen)

For me personally, it is the happiness and health of the people that I am responsible for. If my kids are happy and my kids are very well taken care of then that is a huge success for me. The fact that my husband and I have a really good relationship. Those are my big successes. I am doing this because I want to provide better for them, but I am also doing it because it is so important to me for me. (Rosalie)
Chapter 5 Interpretation

The purpose of this study was to explore factors essential to adult students’ success and persistence toward educational goals. To complete this exploration the study participants engaged in conversation with the researcher and each other about various aspects of their life and college experiences. In this chapter the answers to two crucial questions are discussed: (a) what are the factors adult students state are essential to success and persistence and (b) what is the influence of individual and life circumstances, classroom experiences, and contact with campus and academic services, individually or in combination, on progress and persistence toward educational goals?

Interpretations are presented beginning with the factors adult students state are essential, including connections to prior research and theoretical orientations along with interpretations and recommendations. These are followed by a discussion of the influence of these factors individually or in combination. Next is a brief discussion of important insights that became evident during analysis and interpretation. Last are suggestions for future inquiry.

Factors Essential to Success and Persistence

The participants in this study identified four factors as essential for success and persistence: (a) support, (b) personal motivation and determination, (c) paying for college, and (d) success in learning. These factors are the same regardless of age, sex, life experience or institutional setting. Furthermore, the participants explained why and how these factors are important, not just that they exist as part of the life of adult students, and what they encounter in college.
It is significant that all of the participants identified the same factors and then explained why and how they are important. The following brief discussion of prior research offers some explanation.

**Prior Research**

**The Factors Are The Same.** Earlier research indicates that substantial diversity exists among adult students in terms of age, sex, individual characteristics, needs, and motivations that to consider adults a homogenous population is misguided (Kasworm, et al., 2002; Valentine and Darkenwald, 1990; Wagschal, 1997).

It is important to consider multiple characteristics when attempting to understand the complex lives of adult students. The implications of the prior research influenced methodological decisions for this study. The study utilized a multi-site and purposeful sampling design for maximum variation. These choices allowed for the inclusion of colleges and universities with different types of educational structures, as well as variety, in geographical locations. The participant selection plan resulted in study participants representing diverse characteristics in sex, age/generational categories, and life experiences.

Among the 45 participants, the men and women, roughly age 26–60 years, represented four different generations and a wide variety of life experiences. The institutional settings varied as well including two- and four-year colleges and universities located in urban, suburban, and rural communities.

**Why and How Important.** Explaining why and how the factors are essential is significant because until the mid to late 1990s, data collected about adult learners and their learning experiences primarily presented descriptive characteristics with little research examining the effect of these factors on success and persistence.
It is important that the adults in this study represent diverse characteristics, and, equally important, that the factors essential for success are the same regardless of those diverse characteristics. These results raise questions regarding how best to assist adult students at undergraduate institutions. Further discussion of the implications of this phenomenon will be addressed following interpretation of the factors.

Support

Support is identified as the primary factor essential for adult students to be successful and persist. Support from a variety of individuals and sources are evident in the lives of the study participants. Emotional support, tangible support, or support in the form of information or guidance, each contributes to one or several aspects of the adult students’ life (a) at home, (b) in the community, or (c) in undergraduate settings.

Prior Research and Theory

Research. The results of this study are consistent with prior research that suggests a connection between support from a variety of sources and adult student success (Carney-Crompton & Tan, 2002; Donaldson, et al., 2000; Ross-Gordon & Brown-Haywood, 2000).

Theory. Sociocultural (Alfred, 2002; Guy, 1999) and social support theories (House, 1981) lend insight into why support exists and how it is helpful.

The social interactions that occur within cultural and family settings are based on shared values, attitudes, and beliefs. The expectation and practice of supportive actions are consistent with these structures if, in this case, education is positively valued.

According to social support theory, emotional, instrumental (tangible), informational, and appraisal (guidance/feedback) forms of support reduce stress or buffer the impact of stressors on the individual (House, 1981, p. 10).
The Importance of Support

Support at Home. Study results suggest that emotional and tangible support and encouragement from family is crucial in making the decision to enroll in undergraduate education and to fit college into daily life. In addition, support needs to be available over the long-term.

Support in the Community. Friends in the community offer emotional and tangible support. Tangible support may be, childcare or transportation. Employer support could be tangible, such as tuition reimbursement or flexibility in work hours. Flexibility allows adult students to attend college classes or make time for study.

Support at College. Support from classmates offers a level of understanding that is unique to the experience of being in the learning setting. Support from classmates may be emotional, tangible, or in the form of information. For example, sharing course materials or working in study groups are forms of tangible and informational support.

Faculty and program staff are viewed by study participants as potential providers of support through information and guidance. In addition, advisors and adult students may develop mentor/mentee relationships at which point support may go beyond information and guidance to include emotional support at well.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications. House (1981) writes about support in ubiquitous terms implying a “you know it when you see it” stance. It is, however, informative to note that researchers who have examined various aspects of support explain how it is needed, offered, and the outcome for the recipient when it occurs. Specific and general forms of support at the right time can make a positive difference for adult students.
For adult undergraduates, establishing systems of support with family, friends, employers, and possibly classmates, faculty, or advisors is integral to fitting college into daily life and reducing the stresses associated with balancing academic demands and personal responsibilities. However, family and cultural beliefs may influence how comfortable adults are inviting new individuals (i.e. faculty or classmates) into their support system. This has implications for how adult students interact, engage, learn, succeed, and persist toward educational goals.

Shifting attention to the institution, it is useful to examine the roles faculty, advisors, administrative, and program staff have in providing support for adult students. The concept of support could be used as a starting point or lens for engaging and interacting with adult students.

For example, consider the professor who is both a content expert and utilizes a student-centered teaching style. This professor may view his/her role as a form of informational support. (S)he has the information and shares it in a manner that supports student learning. A second example might be an orientation program staffed by mentors/advisors and current adult students that goes beyond an introduction to the institution to include a seminar discussion about factors and strategies that contribute to success.

Recommendations. Institutions that choose to embrace and plan for adult students could establish specific services that provide outreach and assistance at the point of entry. A number of study participants were enrolled at colleges and universities with such services in place, but, the expertise of the personnel varied, resulting in adult students feeling more or less supported during the entry process.

Professional development is recommended to prepare staff and faculty to enhance their understanding of adult students and the importance of support to success and persistence.
It is also recommended that institutions planning for adult students consider creating opportunities for informal interaction among students and less formal interaction between students, faculty, and advisors. The establishment of an adult-centered orientation or introduction-to-college seminar is recommended as well. Both could enhance the level of comfort and understanding between and among adult students, faculty, and staff; foster positive interaction; and contribute to success and persistence.

Additionally, practitioners working with adult learners in community settings may want to consider including a discussion of support with their students.

*Personal Motivation and Determination*

The adult students in this study entered college with the presence of two or more risk factors that could have potentially hindered their success and persistence. It did not. Many struggled, but all demonstrated success in their college programs. See Table 8.

The study participants state that in addition to support, personal motivation and determination are essential for success.

Personal motivation and determination are what makes it possible for adults to get up every morning and do what is necessary day after day, until they accomplish the goals they have set for themselves. Adults may be motivated to add college to their lives to fulfill internal needs or the motivation may be the result of external circumstances. Regardless of the source of motivation, once the decision to enter college is made, successful adult students demonstrate high levels of self-efficacy; engage in proactive actions; develop and refine strategies for life and learning; and persistently ask questions to obtain vital information and services.
Prior Research and Theory

Research. The results from this study present motivation and determination from the perspective of the adult students related to fitting college into daily life, and the actions necessary at the point of entry into the institution, during the learning process, or when seeking campus and academic services.

Prior research relevant to personal motivation and determination is limited to studies focused on academic success and persistence. These include studies that investigated self-efficacy and the expectation to complete (Gibson & Graff, 1992; Home, 1998), the effect of success in learning on motivation to persist (Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997), and studies related to the use of effective strategies for learning (Donaldson, et al., 2000; Slotnick, et al., 1993; Smith, 1991).

Descriptive literature offers information about reasons why adults choose a college education (Graham & Donaldson, 1999; Widoff, 1999) or services recommended for successfully integrating and assisting adult students in the college community (Bash, 2005; Pusser, et al., 2007). Among the services mentioned, only academic advising addressed outcomes, although it was based on the actions of advising staff and not the adult students (Curry, et al., 1998; Smith, et al., 2004).

There is a need for further research on the effects of motivation and determination on success and persistence and the actions of adult students associated with the decision to enroll in college, the entry process, and the use of campus and academic services.

Theory. Social learning, attribution, experiential, and systems theories contribute to understanding the motivations and determined actions of adult students (Barker, 1987; Gibson & Graff, 1992; Kember, 1999; Kolb, 1984).
The social learning theory principle of self-efficacy and the perception of capability translates into an "I can do" attitude influencing the motivation of adult students.

When success occurs, the reactions of adult students are consistent with the tenets of attribution theory regarding how individuals interpret events and how it affects their thinking and subsequent actions. Successful adult students attributed their achievement to personal perseverance. Furthermore, when these students struggled or their actions did not result in the desired outcomes, they did not blame others, but rather sought alternative solutions until a better result was achieved.

The procedures associated with seeking alternative solutions or developing and refining strategies demonstrate the model of experiential learning developed by Kolb (1984). This concept is characterized by two elements, the act of learning by doing and reflecting on the experience. Kolb developed a learning cycle that involves (a) participation in the learning experience, (b) observation and reflection through self-assessment and obtaining feedback from others, and (c) examination of what was learned and integration for future use. Successful adult students used this process albeit unconsciously when they developed, practiced, and refined strategies. The learning cycle in Figure 9 illustrates this model.
Systems theory offers a useful perspective for interpreting the actions of successful adult students and the theories associated with motivation and determination. One key aspect of systems theory is the *ripple effect*. The ripple effect is a principle that states that change in one part of a system will reverberate throughout that system and into related systems. When a ripple occurs in one part of the system, other parts of the system are affected as the interpretations that follow demonstrate.

*The Importance of Motivation and Determination*

*High Levels of Self-Efficacy.* The "I can do," determined attitude was evident when participants discussed fitting college into daily life and during the learning process.

For example, completing the day in the life diary was both an illuminating and validating experience. Seeing on paper the number of daily commitments was at first overwhelming, punctuated by comments such as, “I did not realize how much I was doing.” Conversely, when participants reflected on how well organized they had become they experienced a sense of accomplishment. Additionally, they recognized the positive changes for their families because of
the routine and structure. Moreover, the sense of accomplishment that came from organizing daily life motivated the adult students to apply similar processes to classroom learning, which in turn resulted in success in learning.

*Engage in Proactive Actions.* When adults choose to enter college, they are seeking to change their lives. Their time is limited, their motivation is strong and they have specific goals in mind. For these reasons, successful adult students will proactively investigate their options to select a college, program, professor, or campus/academic service that meets their needs. Successful outcomes in any one of these areas further motivates adult students to employ similar actions throughout their education and in their personal life. The comments in the data narrative made by study participants provide a myriad of examples demonstrating connections with motivation, determination, and actions.

*Develop and Refine Strategies.* Successful adults develop and refine strategies for use in classroom learning and life. As stated above, the "I can do," determined attitude contributes to motivating adult students to take actions that contribute to their success. These actions, put into practice, become concrete strategies. Examples might include scheduling classes to fit around work or family commitments, working in study groups, and creating time to relax. Whether consciously or unconsciously, the process described in the Kolb model exemplifies the process adults figure out on their own or with the help of others. The success associated with figuring it out further enhances a sense of accomplishment and the desire to continue to apply such strategies in college and life.

*Persistently Ask Questions.* When proactive actions are not enough, successful adults will persistently ask questions to seek the answers they need. For instance, the determination to obtain information was apparent in comments made by focus group participants discussing their
attempts to connect with degree programs. When asked by the researcher, “Did anyone approach, get rebuffed, go away and then come back, or did you just keep pursuing?” A loud emphatic chorus of voices said, “We just kept pursuing!” See Figure 6. The drive for answers to important questions motivates successful adults to use this strategy in the classroom and with campus and academic services.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications. When adult students enter college they may be personally motivated and determined to succeed. However, they may or may not possess a strong sense of self-efficacy, or an understanding of the proactive actions and questions to ask, or even the strategies necessary for organizing their daily lives and classroom learning.

From this discussion of personal motivation and determination, one might wonder if the adult students in this study developed and refined these attitudes and actions on their own. Based on their comments and insights, they did not. With time, patience, practice, and the guidance of others, the adult students in this study learned to make good choices and to act on those decisions. One example explained above in connection to attribution theory is repeated here. Successful adult students attributed their achievement to personal perseverance. Furthermore, when these students struggled or their actions did not result in the desired outcomes, they did not blame others, but rather sought alternative solutions until a better result was achieved. The alternative solutions might involve advisors, professors, classmates, family, or friends.

Making good choices and taking action is, as systems theory suggests, a ripple, a ripple that affects subsequent actions and outcomes that can lead to success and persistence.

Recommendations. Guidance and assistance during the first term or year of college is identified by adult students as crucial to successfully negotiating the entry process, enrolling in
degree programs, and beginning classes. Access to ongoing assistance is helpful, although adults suggest that once they are familiar with whom to ask or have established relationships with key individuals they will seek those specific persons out when needed.

It is therefore recommended that the individuals who provide such guidance and assistance at the point of entry and throughout the first year be knowledgeable and understand the unique and often complicated circumstances in the lives of adult students.

It takes time, patience, and practice for adults to develop successful strategies. It is recommended that personnel offering guidance and assistance dedicate sufficient time and patience as well.

*Paying for College*

Gena said, “I have a goal. I think the only thing that would really defer me is if there was not any financial aid. Then the door would be shut.” The ability to pay for college is crucial to persistence. Funding for college makes the difference between attending and walking away from the educational goal. Potential funding sources include self-pay, financial assistance from the institution or other government agencies, in the form of loans and scholarships, and employer tuition reimbursement. Successful adult students will pursue whatever resources are available. The challenge is to obtain accurate and consistent information and the guidance necessary to understand the intricacies associated with applying for funding.

*Prior Research and Theory*

*Research.* Financial aid or funding a college education is discussed in descriptive research literature. It is listed among the factors associated with being an adult undergraduate (Choy, 2002; Slotnick, et al., 1993; Valentine & Darkenwald, 1990).
Descriptive studies that examined financial aid identified it as a campus service. Adult students completing satisfaction surveys evaluated financial aid on the basis of availability, accessibility, or whether it was specifically for adults. However, the results of satisfaction surveys do not evaluate the effect on success or persistence. (Brown & Linnemann, 1995; Cook & King, 2004).

Two areas of research are consistent with the results of this study. The first is financial assistance as a form of support. Carney-Crompton & Tan (2002) identified financial assistance as instrumental (tangible) support. The second is a body of research that recommends, the availability of affordable and flexible financial arrangements to assist adult students in paying for college (Bash, 2003; CAEL, 2000; Kaplan & Saltiel, 1997; Kasworm, et al., 2002; Mancuso, 2001; Watson, 2001).

This second area of research states that attempts to obtain accurate financial aid information hinders persistence. Specifically, the financial aid personnel are noted as unhelpful due to the difficulty obtaining information about financial aid options and the related bureaucracy of receiving assistance (Cook & King, 2004; Kasworm, et al., 2002).

Theory. The theoretical orientations of social support, sociocultural theory, and social learning theory are relevant to paying for college and the decisions and actions of adult students.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications. The implications of having access to, understanding, and obtaining the financial means to pay for a college education should be obvious. Without the financial means, the opportunity does not exist.

The decisions and actions of motivated and determined adult students will empower them to persist in asking questions and seeking alternative solutions to obtain funding. However, the
support and actions of family, employers, perhaps the community, and personnel in financial aid offices is essential as well.

**Recommendations.** Successful adults can and will consult with family when they begin to make preparations for enrolling in college. It is recommended that they also review tuition options with employers or spouses’ employers. Additionally, public services such as community action agencies could be consulted if they are available. The decision to discuss finances with a public agency would have to be acceptable within the family and cultural community.

Adult students enter college often with many years between their last formal educational experience and the current enrollment. Most have never attended college before. They are financially independent from their parents and may be the first in their family to enroll in college. The recommendation for colleges and universities is to ensure the presence of highly trained personnel with an accurate and thorough understanding of financial options and the unique needs and circumstances of adult undergraduates.

**Success in Learning**

Study participants define (a) success in learning as academic achievement and (b) the effective strategies developed and used to attain that success. Professors, classmates, and academic services contribute through supportive interaction and guidance. Success is validated through standardized measures and personal recognition of the benefits of learning.

**Prior Research and Theory**

**Research.** The results of this study are consistent with the prior research that documented factors involving adult learners, the learning process, and interaction between and among adult students, classmates, and professors.

Theory. Experiential learning, social learning and attribution theories contribute to understanding the development of learning strategies and academic achievement.

The Importance of Success in Learning

Adult Students. Academic achievement begins with an understanding of ability and expectations. Adult undergraduates may be ready for the rigors of college-level learning or need refresher or preparation courses. The adult students in this study represented both. The adults who needed refresher or preparation courses completed them with the guidance and support of professors, tutors, classmates, someone in their community, or a combination.

Role of Professors. The interactions and teaching techniques employed by professors may support or hinder student learning. The study participants encountered professors whose actions encouraged and expanded their learning. There were also professors whose actions and teaching techniques presented barriers to learning.

The adults in courses with faculty that encouraged their learning engaged enthusiastically in the classroom and the course content, even when it was difficult. Adults enrolled in classes with barriers to learning sought assistance from alternative sources and made choices, when they could, in selecting different professors in the future.
Student Actions. Successful adult students developed effective strategies and utilized alternative resources to attain academic achievement. The outcome of these efforts was success and persistence.

Implications and Recommendations

Implications. Although successful adult students attribute their accomplishments to personal motivation and determination, these factors alone are not sufficient to achieve academic success and persist toward educational goals. Successful adult students learn to develop effective strategies through self-evaluation and in partnership with others.

Recommendations. It is in partnership with others that the contribution of faculty and program staff would be helpful to adult students. For example, embedding effective techniques for learning course materials as part of the course content is one strategy a professor might use to collaborate with adult students. A second example would be a series of study skills workshops or seminars offered by learning centers before or in between classes.

Implications of the Four Factors

Support and personal motivation and determination lay the foundation for success. These factors help adults arrange their lives and navigate college structures. Paying for college and success in learning are the key to persistence. Funding ensures that a college education is possible. Success in learning demonstrates to adult students and the institution that they are progressing in their education pursuits. Together, these four factors are essential for success and persistence toward educational goals.

A point to consider is whether the four factors must be present simultaneously for success and persistence to occur. This point is discussed next.
Influence of Factors Individually or In Combination

Theoretical Considerations

This discussion relates to the systems theory framework and the concept that explains the behavior of people by identifying the component parts of the system and the reciprocal relationships that occur (Barker, 1987). What was unknown at the beginning of the study was whether all of the component parts of the system (including the adult student, life commitments, college learning, campus/academic services and the factors essential for success) needed to be simultaneously present and engaged in reciprocal relationships for success and persistence to be achieved.

Outcomes

By using the system theory framework as a guide for inquiry, it was learned that each of the component parts of the system may or may not exist when adults choose to add college to their lives. In addition, those factors that are present may only be needed some of the time. The examples that follow illustrate the component parts of the system that are (a) essential throughout college, (b) important or essential at specific points in the process, and (c) needed on an occasional basis.

Essential Throughout. As previously stated, support is essential for success and persistence. The individuals in the adult students’ support network are necessary for providing emotional and instrumental support. Such support is needed prior to and throughout the college experience. If the adult student does not have a support system, one may be formed from new relationships. Successful adults will form a support system if one is not already in place.

Important at Specific Points. Interaction with personnel concerning admissions, placement testing, registration for classes or acceptance into degree programs is necessary when
adults enter college. Completion of this process is essential to successfully beginning college. However, once this process is complete, the adult student does not require ongoing contact with personnel unless there is a change in concentration or major.

*Needed Occasionally.* Tutoring is an example of a relationship that may be needed occasionally by adult students to be successful.

**Implications and Recommendations**

Analysis suggests that the individual elements are important, but the need for simultaneous interaction among the components is not. The implication therefore is that the systems framework is a useful tool for identifying the key elements of the adult students’ life, college structures, and success factors. It is recommended that institutions plan for and educate personnel about the needs of adult students, the factors important and essential for success and persistence, and the component parts of the system that contribute.

**Insights Important to Consider**

During the analysis and interpretation of this study, three additional insights about adult students’ success and persistence in college emerged that are important to consider (a) diverse adult students and a single set of factors, (b) risk factors and success, and (c) success in life.

**Diverse Adult Students and a Single Set of Factors**

As stated at the beginning of the chapter, the adults in this study represent diverse characteristics, geographic locations, and institutional settings. The essential factors identified for success and persistence are the same regardless of these diverse factors. The results of this study showed that in this region, at this time, the needs of these adult students are similar.
It might therefore be tempting to consider adult students as a single population when planning programs and services. However, this is far from the case. Discounting or negating the importance of diverse characteristics, needs, and concerns of adult students is not recommended.

Reviewers of this study are reminded that qualitative research is difficult to replicate, even if a similar methodology is used. Caution is therefore recommended when considering the generalizability of the results. Administrators, program planners, practitioners, and researchers considering research about adult undergraduates may find different results within their own institutions and communities.

*Risk Factors and Success*

In 2002, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) published a report on nontraditional undergraduates identifying seven risk factors that could hinder persistence in college (Choy). See Notes 2. In preparation for this study a survey was developed with the assistance of ACT, Inc. utilizing questions from their surveys that included demographic questions about adults in college (ACT, Inc., 2009a, 2009b, 2009c).

When the survey was designed, personal life circumstances influenced the researcher to develop new questions regarding family and household composition to include aging or dependent parents and persons with disabilities. An additional question was developed concerning community commitments. At that time, standardized surveys only asked about marital status and dependent children. No questions are asked about community commitments. Additionally, no research was available addressing these concerns. See Appendix C for a copy of the survey instrument.

The responsibilities of adult undergraduates may include aging parents or extended family members as well as dependent children. Additionally, the adults or members of their
families, may have disabilities or physical or mental health concerns. Along with family and household responsibilities, adult students are often active in their communities.

Study results indicated that nearly half of the participants (46.7%) have responsibility for extended family or family members with disabilities or physical or mental health concerns. Thirty of the 45 participants (66.7%) are involved in their community.

For adult students adding college to their daily lives, the presence of family and community obligations adds another layer of stress. It is worth noting that the lives of adult students are more similar to the lives of college personnel than not. It is therefore recommended that faculty, advisors, program planners, and administrators consider the presence of these additional obligations and their potential impact on adult students.

**Success in Life**

The focus of this study was about success in college, but what these adult students had to say about success depended on how the question was asked. In the last interview, the question was phrased, “Tell me how you define success.” This single answer put support, personal motivation and determination, success and persistence keenly into perspective. It is not success in college, but the desire for success in life that compels adults to enroll in college and succeed.

The implications of this statement are significant. As we have learned from the adults in this study, college is *only one* part their lives. The role of college student does not define them. If asked, adults will identify themselves as spouse or life partner, parent, member of extended family, friend, employee, or participant in their community. It is to this full life that adults add college. Adults are not “here just for a degree,” it is a means to an end. They attend college to make a life or improve the life they have for themselves or for themselves and others.
It is therefore strongly recommended that administrators, program planners, faculty and support staff be mindful of success in life as a driving force behind college enrollment, success, and persistence. Furthermore, college personnel are urged to take proactive and ongoing actions with this concept in mind when planning for and interacting with adult students. Actions such as support in all forms through a welcoming and understanding attitude, accurate and timely information, and engaging instructional experiences that expand learning and can be applied to future careers and life in general.

**Suggestions for Future Inquiry**

The educational journeys of the adult students presented in this study support prior research and contribute new knowledge, understanding, and insights that will be useful in assisting adults contemplating undergraduate education. The results of this study may also be of interest to practitioners working with adult learners in community settings, institutions choosing to plan for adult undergraduate populations, and researchers.

Questions that remain suggest the need for further inquiry about adult students, their lives, and experiences in college. Inquiry such as:

- Adults emphasized the importance of personal motivation and determination. There is a need for further research on the effects of motivation and determination and the subsequent actions of adult students related to success and persistence in college.
- The demographic data collected in this study about family and household composition, persons with disabilities, and community commitments needs to be included in future research. Further use of these survey questions will add additional data and insights about the responsibilities of adult students.
- Professional development staff might benefit from incorporating the study results and recommendations into teaching seminars for faculty and support staff.
• Program staff and community practitioners responsible for adult-specific orientation and college readiness seminars may want to include the results of this study in their curriculum and evaluate the outcomes.
Notes

1 The development of adult education as a discipline presented here highlights significant events, shifts and changes that occurred from 1920–2000. This process did not take place smoothly or with full acceptance of the changes along the way. As with other disciplines, adult education has had its struggles among members and with other disciplines to establish and sustain itself. However, it is important to know our roots, where we have come from, and where we may yet go.

2 The risk factors identified in the NCES report include: (a) Delays enrollment (does not enter postsecondary education in the same calendar year that he or she finished high school, (b) part-time enrollment in college, (c) full-time employment, (d) financially independent for financial aid purposes, (e) dependents other than a spouse, (f) single parent, (g) completed GED, other high school certificate, or did not complete high school (Choy, 2002).

3 Bonwell and Eison’s work is cited as a seminal source for active teaching and learning based on the following communication from Dr. Bonwell.

Don't feel badly if you cannot pinpoint the origins of the term "active learning."

I can't either. When Eison and I wrote the first book using that phrase in the title, we were aware of blue ribbon commissions and educational reformers calling for the use of AL [active learning] in the classroom. The use of the term exploded after our 1991 book. With the publication of our book (and its implications), the editor of ERIC wrote an essay in the ERIC newsletter (1992 I think) stating that "active learning" would henceforth be a descriptor in the database” (C. Bonwell, personal communication, August 24, 2006).
For purposes of the literature review, empirical research includes qualitative, quantitative, and mixed-methods studies.

Introductory/first year classes, also known as Freshmen Seminar, First Year Experience (FYE), University 101, or college success seminar. These courses are designed to assist incoming students with skills and knowledge useful for transitioning from high school or the work world into the college academic environment.

This study does not indicate age of participants. Study participants are identified as freshmen. Focus groups were conducted by advisors and dormitory resident advisors. However, successfully navigating college systems and services is of importance to adult students as well as traditional students.

The ACT percentages are approximate due to the calculation procedure used. The Entering College Student Survey reports adult age ranges for students beginning at 23–25 years. The other ACT reports aggregated data for adult students beginning at 26 years. While the age report documents each of the age ranges to 62 years and older, the reports for individual survey questions only used age 23 and older. Therefore, to calculate the statistics for reasons for choosing a college, the percentage of students age 23–25 years was subtracted.
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Appendix A Institutional Profiles

Research University

The Research University is a large public four-year research university with very high research activity. The urban central campus served as the site for a pilot study conducted in 2006.

Table A1 contains programs and services stated by study participants as used most frequently. Table A2 presents institutional census data.

Table A1 *Research University 2005–2006 Programs and Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Services</th>
<th>Open to Adult Students</th>
<th>Specific For Adult Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Adult Learning Center</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Voluntary for most degree programs</td>
<td>Mandatory for some students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Some colleges/departments have advising staff for adult students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Veterans Upward Bound</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Researcher Review of Institutional Programs and Services
Table A2 Research University Census Data for Adult Students and Study Participants

The Research University 2005–2006 Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Urban Central Campus</th>
<th>Total Adult Undergraduates</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>19,512</td>
<td>3,603</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Sex**

<table>
<thead>
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<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>9,823</td>
<td>50.3%</td>
<td>2,185</td>
<td>60.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>9,689</td>
<td>49.7%</td>
<td>1,418</td>
<td>39.4%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Age**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>15,909</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 25</td>
<td>3,603</td>
<td>18.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td>NA</td>
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</tr>
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</table>

**Ethnicity**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, AL Native</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>0.3%</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific</td>
<td>Islander</td>
<td>545</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>2,722</td>
<td>14.0%</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>18.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>310</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
<td>102</td>
<td>2.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>14,696</td>
<td>75.3%</td>
<td>2,409</td>
<td>66.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>1.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>918</td>
<td>4.7%</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>6.0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Enrollment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Enrollment</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>16,098</td>
<td>82.5%</td>
<td>1,338</td>
<td>37.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>3,414</td>
<td>17.5%</td>
<td>2,265</td>
<td>62.9%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Study participants represent percentage of the 201 adult undergraduates eligible for pilot study, not total adult undergraduate population.

Source: Office of Institutional Research Autumn Enrollment 2005–2006 Academic Year Pilot Study
Four-Year University

The Four-Year University is a large public four-year master’s university with very high undergraduate enrollment. The Four-Year University offers adult students several options for enrollment, the adult only program and general admission of adult students at the main campus.

Table A3 contains programs and services stated by study participants as used most frequently. Table A4 presents institutional census data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Services</th>
<th>Open to Adult Students</th>
<th>Specific For Adult Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Educational Outreach Center for Adult Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>General Admission two counselors for adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes Adult Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No on Main Campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Voluntary for most students]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>[Mandatory for Student Support Services]</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Campus Services**

- Financial Aid: Yes, No
- Registration: Yes, No
- Technology Services: Yes, No

**Academic Services**

- Advising: Yes, Adult Program has specific advisor
- Academic Advising Resource Center has designated advisors for adults

- Library: Yes, No
- Support Services: Yes, K-TAP for low income first generation adults
- Tutoring: Yes, No

Source: Interviews with program staff adult only and main campus
Table A4 *Four-Year University Census Data for Adult Students and Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Four-Year University 2007–2008 Academic Year</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total Degree Seeking Undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>11,840</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>6,787</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>5,042</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>8,833</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 25</td>
<td>3,007</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, AL Native</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Islander</td>
<td>123</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>10,285</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed/More than 1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>9,520</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>2,320</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of Institutional Data Autumn Enrollment 2007–2008 Academic Year
Private College

The Private College is a medium private, not-for-profit master’s college with very high undergraduate enrollment. The Private College offers both traditional and adult accelerated program enrollment for adult students, although there is more emphasis on the accelerated program.

Table A5 contains programs and services stated by study participants as used most frequently. Table A6 presents institutional census data.

Table A5 *Private College 2007–2008 Programs and Services*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Services</th>
<th>Open to Adult Students</th>
<th>Specific For Adult Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Admission counselor for nontraditional students includes adults</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Evening/Accelerated program recommended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Recommended but not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Voluntary not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Not specific—advising by faculty in department/major</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Central advising for adults with undeclared majors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, limited use by adults</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interview with Program Staff
Table A6 Private College Census Data for Adult Students and Study Participants

Private College 2007–2008 Academic Year

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Undergraduates</th>
<th>Total Undergraduate Enrollment</th>
<th>Degree seeking Adult Undergrads</th>
<th>Study Population</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Percent ≥ 25</td>
<td>Population Percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>1,938</td>
<td>441</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td>22.8%</td>
<td>0.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,317</td>
<td>397</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68.0%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>621</td>
<td>92</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32.0%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>1,307</td>
<td>67.4%</td>
<td>[48]</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–29</td>
<td>139</td>
<td>118</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>7.2%</td>
<td>26.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30–39</td>
<td>215</td>
<td>157</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>11.1%</td>
<td>35.6%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40–49</td>
<td>170</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.8%</td>
<td>21.5%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50 and over</td>
<td>101</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5.2%</td>
<td>15.9%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian,</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AL Native</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.4%</td>
<td>0.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hawaiian</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.6%</td>
<td>0.8%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>165</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8.5%</td>
<td>19.2%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>0.9%</td>
<td>1.2%</td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>1,632</td>
<td>353</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84.2%</td>
<td>72.2%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>151</td>
<td>30.9%</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>69.1%</td>
<td>66.7%</td>
<td>33.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>338</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Office of Institutional and Market Research Autumn Enrollment 2007–2008 Academic Year
The Community College

The Community College is a medium public two-year, rural, associate degree institution. The Community College has four campuses located in four rural counties serving Appalachian and non-Appalachian students.

Table A7 contains programs and services stated by study participants as used most frequently. Table A8 presents institutional census data.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Programs and Services</th>
<th>Open to Adult Students</th>
<th>Specific For Adult Students</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orientation</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First Year Experience</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Voluntary not required</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Financial Aid</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Registration</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Technology Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Academic Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Advising</td>
<td>Yes, within program advising, one campus has non-program advisor</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Library</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support Services</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Community resources located on campus for students with dependents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tutoring</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Interviews with administration and program staff.
Table A8 *Community College Census Data for Adult Students and Study Participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community College 2006–2007 and 2007–2008 Academic Years</th>
<th>Total Enrollment</th>
<th>Adult Students</th>
<th>Study Participants</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
<th>Percent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>2,437</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>45.1%</td>
<td>1.5%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>1,738</td>
<td>860</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>71.3%</td>
<td>81.2%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>684</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>28.1%</td>
<td>18.8%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&lt;25</td>
<td>1,323</td>
<td>495</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>54.6%</td>
<td>45.0%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>≥ 25</td>
<td>1,099</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>45.4%</td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25–32</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33–40</td>
<td>291</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26.5%</td>
<td>20.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41–50</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>51 and over</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>7.7%</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American Indian, AL Native</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian or Pacific Islander</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>This information is not reported</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>0.0%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>White Non-Hispanic</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Enrollment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full Time</td>
<td>1,766</td>
<td>439</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>72.5%</td>
<td>41.5%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part Time</td>
<td>671</td>
<td>620</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>27.5%</td>
<td>58.5%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hi,

My name is Debbie Moffatt. I am an adult student at the University of Cincinnati. I would like to invite you to participate in a research study about the experiences of adult undergraduate students on your university campus.

My goal is to learn about you!
  ❖ Why did you choose Name of College?
  ❖ What it is like to be an adult student on your campus?
  ❖ What you have experienced in class or with campus services?

Your participation in this study will be important to the field of adult education. Many research studies about students are from the perspective of the college or university. This study will be from your perspective. The information and experiences you share may help us understand more about the experiences of adults undergraduate students.

What is involved?
Individual Interviews - (1 - 2 hours in length) scheduled at convenient times and locations
OR
Focus Groups - (2 hours in length) meet with other adult students to share your experiences

Participation is voluntary. Everything we discuss will be confidential.

If you would like to be involved, you can:
  ❖ See me before class or after class to sign-up for more information.
  ❖ Email me at Debbie.Moffatt@uc.edu
    Please include your name, email address, phone number and best time to contact you.

Thank you,

Debbie Moffatt
College of Education, Criminal Justice & Human Services (CECH)
Curriculum & Instruction Doctoral Program
Appendix C Survey Instrument

- The survey was specifically designed for this study with the assistance and permission of ACT and uses a mixture of fixed choice and open-ended questions with space comments (R. McClanahan, ACT, personal communications August 10, 2005 and July 3, 2007).
- The survey begins with a cover letter and consent to complete.
- The survey was field tested and critiqued in July, 2007 by graduate students, faculty, colleagues, and other adults.
I would like to thank you for expressing interest in my research about adult students at Name of College, and for signing-up to receive this survey.

Consent to Complete Survey

This voluntary survey asks you to share information about yourself and some of your experiences at Name of College. You are not required to complete this survey or participate in this study. Completion of this survey indicates that you are interested in participating in my research about adult students.

Participation may include:

- Individual interviews
- Focus group sessions
- Completing the survey to add your responses to overall study statistics about adult students

The survey asks for your name and the name of your college or university. This information will ONLY be used to contact you and invite your participation in an interview or focus group. The overall study statistics generated from survey responses will not be associated with your name.

If you do not wish to participate in interviews or focus groups, completing the survey without your name will allow me to include your responses in the overall study statistics about adult students.

Your response to this survey and any further participation in the study is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in advance for your interest and willingness to participate in this study.

Deborah (Debbie) Moffatt
University of Cincinnati
College of Education, Criminal Justice and Human Services
513-508-5199 (cell)
Email: Debbie.Moffatt@uc.edu

Name of College or University ________________________________

__________________________________________  __________________________  ________
Name (Please Print)             Signature             Date
Adult Student Survey

This voluntary survey asks you to share information about yourself and experiences at your college.

**Background Information**

Questions in this section will help me learn about you and your life commitments. If there is not enough space to say what you think is important; please feel free to add additional comments.

1. Sex/Gender
   - Female
   - Male

2. Age
   - 25 – 29
   - 30 – 39
   - 40 – 49
   - 50 or older

3. Marital Status
   - Single
   - Married/Partnered
   - Separated/divorced/widowed
   - Other – Please Explain

4. In addition to yourself and your spouse/partner, who else lives in your household? Check all that apply
   
   A. Children for whom you have responsibility
      - Birth to 5 years
      - 6 to 12 years
      - 13 – 17 years
      - 18 and older
      - Child/children with disabilities
   
   B. Family members or others for whom you have responsibility
      - Aging or physically dependent parents
      - Extended family members
      - Other adults or minors
      - Other - Please Explain

5. Employment
   - Full-time ________ hours per week
   - Part-time ________ hours per week
   - I am not working at this time.
   - Other - Please Explain

6. Ethnicity/Race – When asked, which box do you usually check on forms?
   - African American, African, Black
   - Asian American, Asian Pacific Islander (i.e. Japanese, Korean, Vietnamese, Filipino/Filipina, Chinese, Indian, Other Asian or Pacific Islander)
   - Hispanic (i.e. Mexican American, Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Spanish, Latino/Latina)
   - Native American, Native Alaskan, Native Hawaiian
   - White or Caucasian
   - Mixed or More than one
   - Other
     - What? ______________________
     - I prefer not to respond.

7. Community Involvement – In addition to family, employment, and college, please list or describe your community commitments.
Educational Information
Questions in this section will help me learn more about you and your college. If there is not enough space to say what you think is important; please feel free to add additional comments.

8. Please, share your reasons for enrolling in college.
Check the response(s) that best describe you.
☐ Prepare for a first job or career
☐ Job requirements or improve job skills
☐ Meet needs of family, life situation or circumstances
☐ Career advancement
☐ Expand career opportunities or increase marketability
☐ Desire to obtain a college degree (associate, bachelor)
☐ Personal satisfaction or self-enrichment
☐ Role model for others
☐ Other – Please Explain

Additional Comments:

9. What influenced your decision to choose Name of College?
Please check all that apply.
☐ Location of the college
☐ Cost of attending
☐ Availability of Financial Aid or Scholarship
☐ Entrance requirements of college
☐ Size of college/classes
☐ Diversity of students or faculty
☐ Availability of a particular Program of Study
☐ Variety of courses or degrees offered
☐ Reputation of college
☐ Recommended by family, friend or co-worker
☐ Other Explain

Additional Comments:

10. A. Before enrolling and beginning classes at this college, how many years had it been since you were in school or a formal educational program?

__________________

B. What was the highest level of education you completed before beginning classes at this college?
☐ Attended High School
☐ Completed High School
☐ Completed High School Equivalent (GED)
☐ Attended Vocational/Technical School
☐ Completed Vocational or Technical School
☐ Attended college, completed some courses, no degree
☐ Other Explain

11. A. What is your current enrollment at this college?
☐ Full-time
☐ Part-time

B. How many quarters/semesters, including this one, have you attended at this college? Check only one and fill in the blank.
☐ Semester _______
☐ Quarters _______

C. How many classes have you successfully completed at this college?

__________________

Additional Comments:
## Campus Services

This section asks you about services on your campus. For each service please indicate if you:
- know about this service.
- have used or attended this service.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Campus Service</th>
<th>I know about this service</th>
<th>I have used or attended this service</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Admission Services (i.e. Application process, Transfer, Continuing Education, Lifelong Learning)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Financial Aid</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Orientation (University/College or Program)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Advising (University/College, Department or Program)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Registration</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Tutoring/Learning Center (i.e. Math, Reading, Writing, Other)</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. Library</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Technology/Computer Services</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Minority/International or English as a second language (ESL) Services</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Campus Based Services that provide academic and personal support</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Disability Services</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Counseling</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>13. Child Care</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>14. Career Planning</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
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<tr>
<td>15. Job Placement</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. Health Services</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. University/College sponsored social activities</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. Campus Sponsored Organization</td>
<td>☐</td>
<td>☐</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Please list or describe other services you have used.

Thank you for completing this survey.
Appendix D Semi-structured Interview Guide

The following types of questions were asked during each interview.

- Background information to identify relevant individual characteristics:
  - Age or Date of Birth
  - Cultural and ethnic identity
  - Family, work, and community commitments
  - Reasons for attending college
  - Previous college experience
  - Full or part-time enrollment
  - Why choose college
  - Gender as it may relate to college experiences
  - Explore influence of family/cultural group and attitudes toward education/higher education

- Classroom experiences
  Participants asked to describe their experiences with faculty, peers, and course content including:
  - First impression of professor
  - Teaching strategies, methods, course organization
  - Assessment of student learning
  - Interaction and communication among students and faculty
  - Interaction and communication among students
  - Identify and discuss what is helpful, what is not helpful, what is needed, what is essential.

- Academic and Campus Services
  - Participants asked to identify and describe contact with campus and academic services.
  - Identify and discuss what is helpful, what is not helpful, what is needed, what is essential.
Appendix E Follow-Up Reflection Activities

- **Day in the Life reflective activity**
  - Selected participants were asked to keep a diary of typical/atypical activities
  - Details of typical and atypical days.
  - In narrative form, describe your typical/atypical day. What caused you to decide it was a typical/atypical day?
  - Did you attend classes, work on Blackboard, complete assignments or do any other college related activities on your typical/atypical day?
  - Finally, reflect on your experiences. Describe the affect on your ability to engage in your college program including whether the experiences of these days contributed to or hindered your successful progress toward your educational goals

- **Experiences in the Classroom**
  - What is your impression of the professors? What contributed to this impression?
  - How do your professors teach?
    
    - Lecture
    - Small groups
    - Use of examples to help student understanding
    - Questions encouraged
    - Talk fast, slow or medium
    - Structured or spontaneous
    - Focus on subject of course
    - Focus on how students are learning
    - Other ____________________________

    - Whole class discussion
    - Blackboard assignments
    - Define new terms and vocabulary
    - Visual Aids
    - Write on board
    - Transparencies on overhead
    - Power Point
    - Video
    - Lab

  - Describe the professor’s interaction with students.
  - How does your professor review and evaluate your learning?
  - Discuss student – student interactions.
  - What contributes to your success in learning?
The following topics were discussed during the focus group sessions.

- Participants completed a one page handout with a list of commitments.
- Classroom Experiences
  - Utilizing newsprint groups established lists of common classroom experiences.
  - Students identified and discussed what is helpful, what is not helpful, what is needed, what is essential.
  - Suggested topics:
    - Teaching strategies, methods, course organization
    - Assessment of student learning
    - Interaction and communication among students and faculty
    - Interaction and communication among students
- Academic & Campus Services
  - Utilizing newsprint, groups established lists of common campus services.
  - Students identified and discussed what is helpful, what is not helpful, what is needed, what is essential.
  - List of services at each institution and from the survey form were used.
- Support Systems
- Factors that contribute to success, helpful and essential
The following handouts were used in the focus group sessions.

- **Focusing Activity**
  - Take a minute to jot down what is uppermost in your mind, **right now**. Then set the list aside. When our focus group session is over, you can pick up the list and return to your other priorities.
  - We are all adult students, but being a student is only one part of our life. Make a brief list about the other parts or commitments in your life.

- **Experiences in the Classroom**
  - What is your impression of the professors? What contributed to this impression?
  - How do your professors teach?
    - [ ] Lecture
    - [ ] Whole class discussion
    - [ ] Small groups
    - [ ] Blackboard assignments
    - [ ] Use of examples to help
    - [ ] Define new terms and vocabulary
    - [ ] student understanding
    - [ ] Visual Aids
    - [ ] Questions encouraged
    - [ ] Write on board
    - [ ] Talk fast, slow or medium
    - [ ] Transparencies on overhead
    - [ ] Structured or spontaneous
    - [ ] Power Point
    - [ ] Focus on subject of course
    - [ ] Video
    - [ ] Focus on how students are learning
    - [ ] Lab
    - [ ] Other ____________________________
  - Describe the professor’s interaction with students.
  - How does your professor review and evaluate your learning?
  - Discuss student – student interactions.
  - What contributes to your success in learning?
Appendix G Analysis Procedures: Coding of Transcripts

Coding Scheme

- Pink = earlier life and education
- Blue = factors about success - support
- Yellow – current responsibilities

Step 1 – Open Coding with Highlights

I had always wanted to go to school. I planned all the way through HS that I was going to go to college and I ended up meeting my husband, getting married, having a baby and school hit the back burner.

At that time, my cousin, who I am very close to, she had enrolled in school and she wanted me to go with her. [in 2006?] I kept putting it off and putting it off and finally she just kept going at me and going at me and my husband said, why don’t you just do it. It is okay. So I said, okay,

I will try it for one quarter. If I don’t do very good or if it is too hectic, then I am not doing it anymore.

Step 2 – Highlight and Comments

I had always wanted to go to school. I planned all the way through HS that I was going to go to college and I ended up meeting my husband, getting married, having a baby and school hit the back burner.

At that time, my cousin, who I am very close to, she had enrolled in school and she wanted me to go with her. [in 2006?] I kept putting it off and putting it off and finally she just kept going at me and going at me and my husband said, why don’t you just do it. It is okay. So I said, okay,

I will try it for one quarter. If I don’t do very good or if it is too hectic, then I am not doing it anymore.

Step 3 – Sorted by comments in the same interview

Note page numbers in comments

Graduate from HS 1998

Comment [DEM1]: J past educational plans Page 3
Comment [DEM2]: J cousin encouraged her to enroll, husband support Page 3
Comment [DEM3]: J current life and decision to try enrollment Page 3
Comment [DEM4]: J past educational plans Page 3
Comment [DEM5]: J HS grad 1998 Page 4
I will try it for one quarter. If I don’t do very good or if it is too hectic, then I am not doing it anymore.

It was hard on them anyway. They were not used to me working during the day and they weren’t used to me working at night and then I was trying to sleep some and I was doing all of this homework, anymore.

At that time, my cousin, who I am very close to, she had enrolled in school and she wanted me to go with her. [in 2006?] I kept putting it off and putting it off and finally she just kept going at me and going at me and my husband said, why don’t you just do it. It is okay. So I said, okay.

It strengthens me overall as a person and it gives me more motivation to succeed in that because I want it for myself, but I also want it for them. school.

Step 4 – Combined with other transcripts
Note participant initial and page numbers in comments

It was part-time at a factory 10:30 PM – 2:30 AM. It was okay because it did not interfere with any of the kids at all. He worked second shift at the time. He got off at 10:00 PM and got home just in time for me to walk out the door and go to work at the same place. time.

I work part-time,

The reason why I switched jobs is because all of the financial functions for the company were moved and you either moved or you weren’t going to get a job. I didn’t want to move.