COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENTS’ PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR ACADEMIC WORKLOAD

By

William H Neff

Associate of Arts
General Studies
Fresno City College
1994

Bachelor of Arts
Speech Communication
California State University, Fresno
1995

Master of Arts
California State University, Fresno
1997

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William H. Neff

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Doctor of Philosophy – Higher Education
Department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education

Dr. Vicki Rosser
Examination Committee Chair

Dr. Nancy Lough
Examination Committee Member

Dr. Nathan Slife
Examination Committee Member

Dr. Howard Gordon
Graduate College Faculty Representative

Kathryn Hausbeck Korgan, Ph.D.
Graduate College Interim Dean
ABSTRACT

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By

William H Neff

Dr. Vicki J. Rosser. Examination Committee Chair

Professor of Higher Education

University of Nevada, Las Vegas

One major barrier to success, for first-time, full-time college students, is course workload (Bowyer, 2012). How students respond to their situation and the barriers they face may influence decisions they make about classes in which they should enroll or those they should avoid, completing or dropping a class during the semester, and persisting from term-to-term and year-to-year. In an effort to help students succeed, colleges often give them a specified set of core courses and a specific or even prescribed pathway to complete the “general education” requirements. These core courses such as mathematics, communication, and English, among others, taken separately might not present any great challenge for well-prepared students. However, for an underprepared student who is directed to take not one, but possibly three or even four of these core courses in their first semester, this could present a huge challenge.

The purpose of this case study is to determine first-time, full-time, students’ perceptions of workload in their first semester at a large southwestern community college. The study will examine students’ expectations regarding their course workload through Tinto’s (2012) conceptual framework for institutional action (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, Involvement).

Keywords: Academic Workload, Guided Pathways
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Give me six hours to chop down a tree and I will spend the first four sharpening the axe.

– Abraham Lincoln

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Overview

In his July 2009 "American Graduation Initiative Address” President Barrack Obama set a "goal of graduating five million more Americans from community colleges by 2020" (Obama, 2009). For years community colleges have focused much of their attention on access and having an "open door." For the most part this effort has been a successful one, a 2012 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) report states that "by 2010 community colleges enrolled more than 13 million students in credit and noncredit courses annually" (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012, p. viii). However, successfully graduating students has presented a bigger challenge. Community colleges have become very good at getting students through the door, but not as good at getting them successfully out the door with a degree, certificate, or the credits and experience needed to smoothly transfer to a university. Of all the first time college students who enrolled in community college in 2003-2004, fewer than 36 percent earned a post-secondary credential within six years (Bailey, Leinbach, & Jenkins, 2006; Crawford & Jervis, 2011; Goldrick-Rab, 2010).

Background of the Study

While there is not a great deal of literature specific to course workload and how that may influence a student's decision to drop out of a class or from college altogether, there is a substantial body of research pertaining to college persistence as it relates to other factors. Academic preparation, psychosocial, socio-demographic, as well as situational, and institutional factors may all play a role in a student's decision about whether or not to continue working toward their academic goals (Porchea, Allen, Robbins & Phelps, 2010). Students who are unprepared and low performing are more likely to dropout (Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1987). Spady
argued that a model based on Durkheim's theory of suicide could provide a tool for summarizing the research available at that time on college dropouts. Tinto (1987), drawing on Spady's work, developed his model of student retention. Retention has been an interest of mine for many years. More recently, as Faculty Leader of the Achieving the Dream initiative at a large community college in the southwest United States, I was intimately involved in researching barriers to retention, developing interventions to address those barriers, and evaluating the results. I believe with my background and experience; I am well prepared to research how perceived course workload may play a role in decisions students make about persisting or dropping out of specific courses or college altogether.

**Review of Literature**

The bulk of the research on student workload has been conducted in Asia, Europe, and Australia. Researchers have studied how workload may contribute to many undesirable outcomes such as dropping out of college (Chambers, 1992; Woodley & Parlett, 1983), adopting a surface learning approach (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982; Kember, 2004; Kyndt, Dochy, Struyven, & Cascallar, 2011), committing plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007), and experiencing high levels of stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998). There has been no significant research on the potential impacts of perceived workload on unprepared or underprepared students at community colleges.

Workload has been found to be among the most important factors contributing to student dropout (Chambers, 1992; Woodley & Parlett, 1983). Measuring workload can be difficult. It could be measured by looking at the number of contact hours students are in class, in addition to the number of hours students spend studying outside class to master the material and completing assignments. While class hours may be fairly easy to measure, the amount of time studying and
preparing assignments will vary from student to student (Chambers, 1992; Kember & Leung, 1998). However, even if these activities could be accurately measured, they may not give a realistic picture of how a student perceives his or her workload. In fact, there may be little to no correlation between actual workload and perceived workload (Kember & Leung, 1998). Kember and Lueng (1998) hypothesized that “perceived workload should be thought of as a complex function of a number of variables” (p. 295). These variables may include class contact hours, independent study hours, English language ability, grade point average (GPA), and ‘the students’ propensity to employ meaning or reproducing approaches to learning” (p. 293).

Kember and Lueng (1998) found correlations between actual (class hours and independent study) and perceived workload. The study supported their assertion “that time spent in formal classes and studying out of class differ in the extent of their influence on perceived workload” (p. 302). These two measures were combined and used to estimate actual workload and its correlation with perceived workload and this was found to be statistically significant. However, actual workload was not found to be a good measure of perceived workload with only 4 percent of the variance in perceived workload being explained by actual workload.

Much of the research on academic workload has been focused on how perceived workload affects learning approach. There appears to be a correlation between surface approaches to learning and perceived workload (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982; Kember, 2004; Kyndt, Dochy, Struyven, & Cascallar, 2011). Other research has examined the relationship between teaching and learning factors including workload on a variety of academic as well as personal issues including contributing to incidents of plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007), students’ evaluations of instructors (Remedios & Lieberman, 2008; Thornton, Adams, & Sepehri, 2010) and stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998; Tripathi & Sharma, 2013).
In a study that looked at the relationship between workload and success in a particular course, Harris, Hannum, and Gupta (2004) looked at students enrolled in their first semester of college, to determine what factors may be associated with success in undergraduate Anatomy and Physiology courses at Lewiston-Auburn College. In addition to demographics, data about prior preparation for science classes, and data about factors in students’ lives outside of college were collected (p. 168). Three independent variables were examined in this study, caring for children, working, and the number of hours each week of coursework. Only caring for children was found to be not statistically significant (p>.05). The other two independent variables, number of credit hours of coursework each week and hours of paid employment correlated negatively with final course grade (p=0.025 and p=0.054 respectively (p. 170).

While this study did not specifically look only at academic workload, it does provide insight into how factors such as the number of courses students are taking, or if they work in addition to going to school may affect final course grades. These factors should be considered when looking at FTFT students’ perceptions of their course workload as well. Community college students often find themselves working to support a family in addition to going to college. In a national study of more than six hundred former college students, more than half reported that they needed to work to make money and this was the reason why they left school early without finishing a certificate or degree. The study also reported that even if they had a grant that would pay for all tuition and fees, 36 percent of the students in the study would still have left school to work full-time (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & Dupont, 2009). In terms of the workload in the early semesters, when students are required by the guided pathway to take almost all general education courses, working is also a barrier as six out of 10 students who
failed to graduate report that having to work as well as going to school was too stressful (Johnson et al., 2009).

Increasing the number of students who are successful is critical to meet President Obama’s mandate. One group of college students at risk of not completing are First Time, Full Time (FTFT) students. According to a July 2014 study by the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, only 68.7 percent of first-time college students who started in the fall of 2012 were enrolled in the fall of 2013 and only 58.2 percent were enrolled at the same school. The report points to an alarming trend as those year-to-year persistence rates have dropped by 1.2 percentage points since 2009 ("First-Year persistence and retention," 2014). Fain (2014) points out that, based on the number of students entering college during that period, this amounts to about 37,000 students who are no longer enrolled. For two-year colleges in the public sector the decrease in persistence was 2.3 percent (Whissemore, 2014).

Helping students succeed is the job of every community college professional. Whether they are faculty members, administrators, or staff members everyone has an important role to play in student success. However, identifying the barriers to student success must be of primary concern. Clearly, all students encounter barriers to success as they navigate their way through college. Today’s community college student faces a host of barriers to retention. Those barriers may be academic or personal, they include the culture shift to being a college student, financial pressures, family issues, work and job issues, poor time management, and at times there are even things that the college is doing that may present challenges for students (Bowyer, 2012; D’Amico & Dika, 2013). Some students successfully navigate these barriers and are able to achieve their goal, while others do not and either dropout or stop out.
Statement of Problem

One major barrier, for FTFT students, is course workload (Bowyer, 2012). How students respond to their situation and the barriers they face may influence decisions they make about classes in which they should enroll or those they should avoid, completing or dropping a class during the semester, and persisting from term-to-term and year-to-year. Students’ responses to situations are based on their perception of the situation and therefore may not be the same as that of the instructor, curriculum designer, or even other students (Kember & Lueng, 1998, p. 294).

In an effort to help students succeed, colleges often give them a specified set of core courses and a specific or even prescribed pathway to complete the “general education” requirements. These core courses such as mathematics, communication, and English, among others, taken separately might not present any great challenge for well-prepared students. However, for an underprepared student who is directed to take not one, but possibly three or even four of these core courses in their first semester, this could present a huge challenge. It is possible that these FTFT students on guided pathways may actually have a heavier course workload than more experienced students who are in their last semester or two before completing an Associate's degree or transferring to a university.

While considerable research has been conducted on a variety of factors that may influence student retention and success, there has been little research that has examined students’ perception of their workload. Little direct research could be found that specifically addressed course workload as a barrier to success for FTFT, community college students, who may be less prepared for college academics than students who are further along in their academic journey or than those students at more selective institutions.
Kember and Lueng’s (1998) study of students’ perceptions of workload contributes to the conversation by establishing that when students’ perceive they are overloaded it can have a negative impact on course outcomes. However, the metrics they used for measuring engineering students’ perceptions of workload at a university in Hong Kong may not be appropriate for studying U.S. community college students.

Community colleges need to understand how their students perceive the course workload they are directed to take using the guided pathway model. Furthermore, they need to know what, if any, influence the perceived workload has on the students’ decisions about courses they will take and whether or not they, by guiding the students to a specific set of courses, are actually creating barriers to student success.

**Purpose of Study**

The purpose of this case study is to determine first-time, full-time, students’ perceptions of workload in their first semester at a large southwestern community college. The study will examine students’ expectations regarding their course workload through Tinto’s (2012) conceptual framework for institutional action (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, Involvement). Tinto explains that to significantly improve on student retention and graduation rates institutions must focus on interventions that affect students in the classroom. Because they have little control over students’ backgrounds, colleges need to concentrate on student success in the classroom. He explains that this is especially important during the first year and that institutions need to make changes to the way classes are structured, taught and, most importantly experienced by students, especially those students who come to college unprepared or underprepared. The colleges, according to Tinto must also “align those classrooms, one to
another, in a way that provide students coherent pathways of courses that propel them to timely program completion” (Tinto, 2012, p. 6).

This study attempted to determine if underprepared students, those students who “oftentimes lack college-ready skills in areas such as financial literacy and study habits, and are frequently unfamiliar with the general practices of college life, such the importance of reading a syllabus and meeting due dates” (Sherwin, 2011, p. 21) are experiencing difficulties being successful in their first semester as a result of being overloaded with “bad workload.” Marsh (2001) explains that bad workload is work which the students view as being unrelated to meeting their goals, put differently, bad workload is that which the students perceive as busy work. While this case study will not attempt to make a direct connection between student attrition and workload, it will try to identify how the workload students are given during their first semester affects their expectations, their perceptions of support from the institution, how the amount of work they are being asked to produce affects their perception of their ability to make the grades they need to feel like they are on track to meet their goals (assessments and feedback).

Conceptual Framework

In his 2012 book, Completing College; Rethinking Institutional Action, Vincent Tinto outlines “a framework for institutional action” (p. 6). There are four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework: Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement. Tinto explains that students’ self-expectations are one driver of success and those are, at least in-part, “shaped…by a variety of institutional actions” (p. 7). In order for students to meet their expectations, Tinto explains that students must have support, be it financial, academic, or social. Students are more likely to be successful if they are given feedback on their performance in a timely manner. This is especially true during their first year of college. Finally, involvement or
engagement is, according to Tinto, perhaps the most important condition to be met if community colleges are to help students succeed. This means involvement with faculty, staff, and peers.

In this case study of first-time, full-time, freshman, students at a community college, Tinto’s model will be used as a conceptual lens to study their perceptions of course workload. The four elements of Tinto’s framework provide a valuable framework as the first-time, full-time students may be insecure and underprepared. Having an unmanageable workload could easily contribute to the decline in their college expectations. While they may feel their workload is heavy, having the right support in place may prove to be a success tool to help students adjust to college life. Faculty may not give timely feedback if they are assigning multiple tasks over a short time period. This could have an impact on students’ perceptions of how well they are performing and not allow for them to make changes in time to help with the next assignment. Involvement may be negatively impacted for those students with an especially heavy workload, preventing them from meaningful engagement outside the classroom.

In addition to Tinto’s model, Marsh’s (2001) model of good workload versus bad workload was used to categorize interview subjects’ perceptions of the coursework that they are given. Marsh explains that good workload, or hours spent on coursework, are those spent doing work that students deem to be valuable and bad hours are those that students don’t believe are valuable to them. For example, students might perceive assignments and activities that they consider to be busy work as bad hours. Therefore, before determining how workload could influence a student’s decision to persist or drop out is first important to determine if they believe the work being done is valuable or not.

Research Questions
In order to properly conduct a case study of students' perceptions of their course workload, specific questions to guide the inquiry are needed. According to Creswell (2014), researchers in qualitative studies should only ask one or two central questions. These may be followed up with additional sub-questions. In keeping with that advice this study will examine the following research questions:

**RQ1**: How do first-time, full-time, freshman students, who have been placed on a guided pathway, perceive their workload during their first semester of college?

**RQ2**: How do students’ perceptions of workload influence their academic and social integration when examined through the lens of the four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement)?

**Definition of Terms**

The following definitions are provided to provide clarity and insight into terms and phrases used in this study.

*First-time student (undergraduate)*: "A student attending any institution for the first time at the undergraduate level. Includes students enrolled in academic or occupational programs. Also includes students enrolled in the fall term who attended college for the first time in the prior summer term, as well as students who entered with advanced standing (college credits earned before graduation from high school)" (International Center for Education Statistics: Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2014, p. B-1,2).

*Full-time undergraduate student*: "A student enrolled for 12 or more semester credits, or 12 or more quarter credits, or 24 or more contact hours a week each term" (International Center for Education Statistics: Institute of Education Sciences [IES], 2014, p. B-2).
Retention: "The rate at which an institution retains and graduates students who first enter the institute as freshman at a given point" (Tinto, 2012, Appendix A).

Student persistence and student retention: refers to student's continued enrollment at an institution from one semester to another (Summers, 2003, p. 65).

Student attrition and student dropout: refers to a student’s failure to enroll from one semester to another" (Summers, 2003, p. 65).

Guided Pathways: Students choose coherent academic majors or programs, not random, individual courses. A clear path to on-time completion is prepared for students, semester by semester. Students remain on their chosen path unless given approval to change by an adviser (Complete College America website, 2014).

Student perceptions of workload: “a function of class contact hours, independent study hours, English language ability, GPA and the students' propensity to employ meaning or reproducing approaches to learning” (Kember & Leung, 1998, p. 1).

Limitations

As with any research project, this study has some limitations. This study does not attempt to make a causal link between workload and attrition, but merely seeks to gain a clearer understanding of how students perceive the level of work they are required to do in order to succeed in their first semester of college to determine if they are being integrated socially and academically into the institution.

The study is limited by the fact that it was conducted at a single site with a small number of participants. For this reason, no assentation is made that it is generalizable to other institutions only that it can hopefully serve to inform future discussions of similar interventions.
Additionally, the document review of course syllabi limits the study because of the small number of syllabi available for review and the fact that generally speaking faculty, especially full-time faculty, have great latitude in how they teach their classes in terms of assignments, textbooks, and class pace as long as they meet prescribed outcomes for the class. In an effort to protect the identity of faculty, participants were asked to “scrub” any identifying information about the instructor and course section prior to submitting the documents for review. So, there was no way of knowing if the pace and workload of the course for which the syllabus was reviewed is reflective of other sections of the same course taught by different instructors. Because many students do not follow the guided pathway to the letter for a variety of reasons, such as registering late or being required to take developmental education courses, the pool of potential participants is somewhat limited. This will be addressed further in chapter three.

By its very nature qualitative research that relies heavily on participant interviews is always limited by the participant’s memory, his or her own biases, and when it comes to workload, academic abilities.

Finally, the researcher brings to the study certain limitations. These may include biases that have emerged after twenty years as an educator in community colleges and as key member of the team that developed aspects of the intervention. My own ability to conduct interviews and illicit valuable information by probing for information without being overbearing may limit the study. Also, my ability to “unpack” and analyze the data collected will be tested. It was incumbent upon me to follow the prescribed ethical and methodological standards for conducting quality research.
Significance of Study

As community colleges face the challenge of increasing success among their students for reasons related to funding and President Obama’s mandate, they are turning to interventions such as the guided pathways in order to help students meet their goals. As Tinto (2012) explains:

if institutions are to significantly increase the retention and graduation of their students, especially those from low-income backgrounds, their actions must be set on the classroom. They must focus on improving success in the classroom, particularly during the first year and lead to changes in the way classes are structured and taught and, in turn, experienced by students, especially those who have not fared well in the past. Furthermore, institutions must align those classrooms, one to another, in ways that provide students coherent pathways of courses that propel them to timely program completion (p. 6).

As colleges do this, it is critical to keep in mind that many of the students at community colleges have not fared well in the past and are likely either unprepared or at least underprepared for college-level work. It would be of little use to implement interventions that not only do not solve the problem but create new barriers for those students.

This study aims to gain a better understanding of how students in that first semester perceive their workload and how that may or may not affect any potential decisions they may make in the future about their academic career. Hopefully, this will better inform decisions made at institutional level about the appropriateness of said interventions.

Summary

President Obama has issued a challenge to America’s community colleges to increase graduation rates by upwards of 60 percent. In order to meet this challenge, it’s important that
colleges increase student success and graduation rates. Community college students may face many barriers as they matriculate through their academic career these barriers may be personal, they may be related to services provided or not provided by the institution, or they may be related to their ability to succeed academically. Interventions have been developed and implemented at community colleges in an effort to help students overcome those barriers.

One of those interventions involves implementing guided pathways which are a specific set of courses that students are required to take each semester. For first-time full-time students this may present a barrier as their ability and availability to complete the required work for twelve or more credit hours of general education courses may not be adequate. The amount of work they are given, as perceived by some students, may be too great.

Research on workload for students has focused primarily on how it contributes to a surface approaches to learning, instructor evaluations, plagiarism, and stress. Most of this research is been conducted in Asia, Europe, and Australia. Those findings may not be applicable to a community college student in the United States. Very little research exists on the relationship between attrition and workload and that which does exist points towards a negative correlation.

This case study looked at first-time, full-time students’ perception of their workload through the lens of Tinto’s 2012 Framework for Institutional Action. Students were interviewed and asked to member check interview transcripts and interpretations prior to the final data analysis, a document review of course syllabi and the guided pathways was also conducted. The data from the interviews was analyzed and then examined using Tinto’s framework.

In chapter one the study was introduced along with a brief review of literature, statement of the problem, research questions, and the conceptual framework. Limitations of the study as
well as the significance of the study were also discussed. In chapter two the literature review will be expanded beyond what was offered in chapter one. The evolving mission of community colleges, relevant policies, the guided pathways, student success, retention and persistence, perceived workload, and the conceptual framework will be discussed.
CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Introduction

As more and more states are turning to performance based funding in higher education, it is clear that community colleges are under increased pressure to improve student success. No longer can access alone be the primary mission of community colleges (D’Amico, Friedel, Katsinas, & Thornton, 2014, p. 231, Hermes, 2012, p. 26, Dougherty & Reddy, 2013, p. 1). With that in mind, this qualitative case study seeks to examine the influence of perceived course workload for first-time, full-time, community college students. More specifically this study aims to examine how students, who are given a prescribed set of courses known as a guided pathway, during that first semester perceive their workload and how that perception may influence decisions they make about future semesters. These guided pathways often include classes that have a heavy workload such as developmental Math and English as well as a variety of general education courses. The comparison to students farther along in their academic journey serves to inform the study by giving insight into not only the perception of course workload, but also the actual amount of coursework they are expected to produce over the course of the semester.

By conducting this multiple case study of students’ perceptions about the amount of work they are expected to produce in their first semester it may be possible to inform decisions about the guided pathways and how they are used at an institutional level. Monitoring student workload and understanding how they perceive it could lead to increased student success.

Chapter two provides a review of the relevant scholarly research and theory related to several salient themes including the evolving mission of community colleges, relevant policies affecting student success, guided pathways, student success, retention/persistence, perceived workload. Finally, a conceptual framework for the study will be discussed.
Evolving Mission: Access Versus Success

Community colleges have long had a focus on access, and the primary concern was for getting students through the door and enrolled in classes. This is not to say that there was no concern for the success of students, but other issues seemed to take priority. Having access as a priority is often reflected in the colleges’ mission statements. Mission statements are “widely considered to be the first step in strategic planning and the basis or starting point for all activities in formulating strategies…despite this importance, however, there is limited and inconsistent empirical research on mission statement content” (Peyrefitte & David, 2006, p. 296). The mission of the community college has been called “comprehensive and complex and some also argue conflicting, contradictory, ambiguous, and paradoxical” (Beach & Grubb, 2011, p. 1). Beach and Grubb, (2011) quote an unnamed scholar and education practitioner who argued that the emblem of the community college should be the hermit crab. This they say is because community colleges seem to be “destined always to borrow its shell from the landscape surrounding it, lacking a permanent form of its own” (p. 1).

According to Townsend and Dougherty (2006), “questions and concerns about the community college’s missions have reoccurred throughout the institution’s history” (p. 6). They also explain that mission statements contribute to an institution in a variety of ways and shape how things are done (Townsend & Dougherty, 2006). Because they do help “shape” the institution, understanding what is included, and more importantly what is excluded, from the mission statement is a critical component in how a college defines itself and how it addresses such important issues as reasource allocation among others.

The potential for problems with workload for first-time full-time freshmen students are the result of the guided pathways. The guided pathways are the result of an effort to increase
student success. The guided pathways will be discussed in detail in a later section. While it may seem logical that student success would be the mission of all colleges that is not always been the case.

In fact, Ayers (2002) conducted a review of mission statements from 102 community colleges accredited by the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges (SACS) in order to identify salient themes. The first review “yielded a rudimentary coding scheme” and subsequent and much more through reviews were then done to refine the coding scheme while narrowing and clarifying the themes. “Running tallies indicated the proportions of community colleges in the sample that reflected each salient theme” (Ayers, 2002, p. 17). Ayers then calculated 95% confidence intervals to determine the probable high and low proportion of mission statements which reflected each theme in the study population. He explains that it was possible to calculate “interval estimates for the qualitative data because proportions are a type of mean.” Using the interval estimates, the prominence of each salient theme was assessed “relative to the other salient themes.” Themes with interval estimates above .5 were considered to be present in the majority of the mission statements studied (p.16-17). Seven salient themes emerged through the study. They are access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, quality and excellence, responsiveness, service area, and diversity.

Access, workforce and economic development, comprehensiveness, quality and excellence, responsiveness, service area, and diversity are all laudable goals and clearly relevant to the mission of community colleges, however the absence of student success as one of the seven salient themes is shocking to say the least. In order to better understand the evolution of student success as a mission of community colleges it’s necessary to look back at the history of community colleges and their missions.
Ironically, while student success has not until recently become a focus of community college missions, a lack of success in universities was one reason given by an early advocate for the formation of junior colleges. Ray Lyman Wilbur, who was president of Stanford University in 1927, argued that the junior college presented students with an opportunity to “try out” higher education without having to leave home following high school which would relieve some of the financial strain (Beach & Grubb, 2011, p. 5). According to Beach and Grubb (2011), Wilbur believed that “The large student mortality in the freshman and sophomore years of the great universities has been mortifying and humiliating to thousands of our youth. The junior college offers the opportunity for students to find out more about their own interests and capacities, and helps them through the preparatory stages if they know that they want to [go into a profession] . . .” (p. 5).

Early community colleges were a place to provide an “opportunity for students to finish the secondary education without the unnatural break which now comes at the end of the four-year high school” (Zook, 1922, p. 576). Zook (1922) also believed that “junior colleges were a solution for paraprofessional work being required by the professional schools. For example, in medical schools, two years of arts and science work [were] required for admission” (p. 577). Zook, who had served as the leader of the division of higher education at the US Bureau of Education from 1920 to 1925, and as president of the University of Akron, as well as the US Commissioner of Education during the Roosevelt administration, was a strong advocate for “junior” colleges (Brint & Karabel, 1989). However, not everyone agreed with Zook’s ideas about the junior colleges. Brint and Karabel (1989) write that junior colleges were at one time considered “a radical organizational innovation” (p.23). Others believed that “the work of the first two years [of university education], as a matter of history and fact, is all of the piece with
secondary education and should, therefore, be relegated as soon and as far as practicable to secondary school” (Lange 1915 quoted in Brint & Karabel, 1989, p. 24).

Community colleges begin to be looked at differently as World War II came to a close. In July 1946, President Truman formed the President’s Commission on Higher Education. In the Letter of Appointment to the commission, Truman writes “as veterans return to college by the hundreds of thousands, the institutions of our education face a period of trial which is taxing the resources and the results resourcefulness to the utmost” (Zook, 1947, letter of appointment). It’s not surprising that community colleges became one of the focuses of the commission as Zook was the chairman.

The commission saw community colleges as “one means of achieving the expansion of educational opportunity and the diversification of educational offerings” (Brint & Karabel, p. 67). The commissioners recommended that the “number of community colleges be increased and that their activities be multiplied” (Brint & Karabel, p. 67). The report discussed several different possibilities for community colleges stating that most of them would probably just be two-year colleges or end at the 14th grade, but did say that some community colleges might offer four year degrees (Brint & Karabel, p. 67). According to the report, “whatever form the community college takes, its purpose is educational services to the entire community, and this purpose requires of it a variety of functions and programs. It will provide college education for use of the community certainly, so as to remove geographic and economic barriers to educational opportunity and discover and develop individual talents at low cost and easy access” (Brint & Karabel, p. 67). Three important things of note here, the first being the use of the term community college in the commission’s report as opposed to junior-college, the second being the
first reference to access as a primary purpose or mission of the community college, and third no mention whatsoever of the students being successful.

Bogue (1950) forever cemented the name change from junior college to community college when he titled his influential book *The Community College*. The name community college better described the institutions he believed because it better represented the key functions and objectives of the community colleges of the time than the term junior-college. Bogue envisioned the community college as the peoples’ college. A 1970 Carnegie Commission report echoed the notion of community colleges as the peoples’ college (Beach & Grubb, 2011, p. 17).

Thornton (1960) also wrote that access should be the mission of community colleges. He believed that the nation had been founded on the concept of individual worth and that every person should make the most of their abilities and to do so everyone should have an opportunity for education (p. 33). He argued that the local “community junior colleges,” which had little to no tuition, and diverse programs of instruction were a complement to a high school education, to technical institutes, and to other colleges and universities (p.33). Community colleges served the whole population and welcomed students who otherwise might not need or desire advanced degrees (Thornton, 1960). The focus on access continued through the 1960s and 1970s.

In the early days, junior colleges had been seen as agencies for democracy. The junior colleges “had helped open up access to higher education in the 20th century through the convenience of greater geographical proximity and through low tuition, which enabled more and more Americans in lower socioeconomic classes to attend a postsecondary institution” (Beach & Grubb, 2011, p. 17). As community colleges focused on access, questions began to arise about rigor and the quality of the education students received at these institutions. Beach and Grubb
(2011) point out that in some cases community colleges were described as “a halfway house for losers,” “a self-esteem workshop,” “a place for old people go to keep their minds active as they circle the drain of eternity”, and of course the famous “high schools with ashtrays” description from Zwerling’s 1976 book Second Best: The Crisis and Community Colleges (Beach & Grubb, 2011, p. xx).

Through the 1960s and into early 1970s, faculty and administrators focused on policies of more access to higher education, along with helping disadvantaged minorities, as well as meeting the needs of the community. There was often support for these optimistic goals at the local level (Beach & Grubb, 2011). However, Cross (1981) points out that by the late 1970s access was no longer the number one priority of many community college stakeholders. According to Cross, many of the early founders of community colleges believed that open access was the major commitment of the colleges. By the end of this 1970s, and into the first few years of the 1980s, many community college faculty and administrators seemed to believe that goal had been accomplished. Cross’ research found that other “Should Be” goals such as keeping cost at a level that would not create a barrier to attendance for financial reasons, designing academic programs which could meet the needs of adult students, recruiting of students who may have previously had been denied the opportunity for higher education, or who have not been valued, or who have not been successful in formal education, as well as access, and the educational experience had become priorities. Even then, student success was not on the list of “should be” goals. The goals of community colleges in the 1960s were ranked very low in the early 1980s. Goals such as protecting the right of faculty and students to present controversial ideas and engage in off-campus political activities, social criticism, and humanism/altruism, the
understanding of moral issues, and the pursuit of world peace were ranked very low by those Cross studied.

Access has always been a goal of colleges and continues to be today. As Ayres (2002) study of salient themes found in community college mission statements illustrates, at least some of those early goals of the community colleges have remained priorities into the 21st century. The goal of humanism/altruism which according to Cross (1981), include respecting cultural differences, understanding of moral issues, and pursuing world peace, was one of the salient themes Ayres identified in so much as diversity was one of the seven themes. Access was another of the themes that Ayres identified. However, it is only later that community colleges begin to recognize the importance of placing a priority on student success. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which are changes in funding formulas at the state level as well as other policies at the state and institutional level. Some of the policies that have impacted on student success will be discussed in further detail later in this chapter.

A 2012 report by the American Association of Community Colleges outlined a framework for change in community colleges and called for a shift from a focus on access to a focus on access and student success. The notion of guided pathways also was included in the AACC framework. The report stated that colleges need to move from fragmented course-taking to clear, coherent educational pathways, from low rates of student success to high rates of student success, from tolerance of achievement gaps to a commitment to eradicating achievement gaps, and from a culture of anecdote to a culture of evidence. (American Association of Community Colleges [AACC], 2012, p. ix).

In 2004 the Lumina Foundation and seven partner organizations launched the most comprehensive, non-governmental reform movement for student success in higher education
history; Achieving the Dream (ATD). Today the network is comprised of over 200 institutions of higher education, 100 coaches and advisors, 15 state policy teams, and numerous investors and partners working throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia (Achieving The Dream, 2014). According to their website, "Achieving the Dream is a national reform network dedicated to community college student success (emphasis added) and completion; focused primarily on helping low-income students and students of color complete their education and obtain market-valued credentials" (Achieving The Dream, 2014). Five principles guide ATD's student centered model of institutional improvement (1) Committed Leadership; (2) Use of evidence to improve policies, programs, and services; (3) Broad engagement; (4) Systematic institutional improvement; (5) Equity (ATD, 2014).

In addition to ATD another student success focused organization, Complete College America (CCA), has had an impact on how colleges approach student success from a policy perspective. CCA was established in 2009 with the goal of working with states to significantly increase student success through degree attainment and certificates and to close achievement gaps for students from underrepresented populations. The Complete College America program consists of five “game changers” which include performance funding, co-requisite remediation, full time is fifteen, structured schedules, and guided pathways to success (Complete College America website, 2014, about cca).

Western State Community College (WSCC), where this case study was conducted, is both an ATD school and is located in a state that is a member of CCA. As a result of their participation in these organizations, and the state’s move to performance funding, WSCC has made systematic policy changes in an effort to increase student success. Principal among the changes made at WSCC are the college’s mission and vision statements which not only
acknowledge some of the more common themes such as quality and diversity, but also list “promoting student success through excellence in teaching and learning” as the first of six visions. More specific institutional and state level policies will be examined next.

Policies

Birkland (2011) explains that a policy is a statement at any level about what an organization or governmental body intends to do to solve a problem. Birkland was specifically dealing with governmental policy however, organizations and institutions also implement and enforce policy. A number of policies at WSCC have been changed or implemented in an effort to increase student success.

Among those was the elimination of late registration effective the spring semester of 2014. According to WSCC’s website, “many colleges and universities are eliminating late registration because research has shown that students who register late are unlikely to succeed. The first class is critical in setting the tone for the rest of the semester or term. WSCC students will gain from this change with higher retention and successful course completion rates” ("Ending late registration," 2013). In a 2002 study, Smith, Street, and Olivarez found that students who register late had a higher withdrawal rate and lower success rate than students who register early (p. 268). Additionally, students who register late tend to have lower average GPAs, earn fewer college credits, and are less likely to persist from semester to semester (Shriner, 2014). O’Banion (2012) explains that after 30 years of study, the evidence that late registration is detrimental to student success is overwhelming. WSCC found that the prohibition on late registration resulted in students, who had not registered early, not being able to get classes and dropping out even before they started. As a result, in the spring 2016 semester, the
policy was amended to allow for late registration within the first week of classes, this still differs from the earlier policy that allowed for late registration for two weeks.

In addition to changes to the late registration policy, in the fall of 2014 WSCC conducted a large pilot of a major change in institutional policy known as the Mandatory Matriculation Process (MMP) to address persistence issues, particularly among African American students. MMP involved a complete redesign of the college’s intake process and academic guidance procedures. MMP modifications were grouped under Phase I and Phase II. Under Phase I, new students were required to complete three intake steps prior to enrolling in first semester classes: 1) participate in orientation (either online or in-person); 2) take the English and Math placement tests; and 3) meet with an advisor/success coach. Phase II of the MMP initiative required cohort students to meet with an assigned academic counselor within their major prior to second term enrollment.

Cohort students in fall 2014’s pilot project were all new-to-college, degree-seeking, local County School District (CSD) graduates without previously earned college credits. Over 2,300 CSD graduates completed all intake steps in Phase I and enrolled in semester coursework. MMP scale up for fall 2015 once again limited participants to incoming CSD graduates but this time included students with earned college credits from participating in dual-enrollment programs while in high school. The 2015 scale up was estimated to increase the cohort size by another six-hundred students. Full-scale up, planned for fall 2016, will encompass all new-to-WSCC, degree-seeking students, including college transfers and high school graduates from outside the district.

The counselor meeting (Phase II) is where students get specific advice about their chosen major therefore, they are encouraged to declare a major in their meeting with an advisor before
they attend any classes their first semester. Because the guided pathways for the first semester are essentially the same for all majors, they would be placed on the pathway at their first meeting with the advisor, during Phase I of MMP.

While not stated as a required policy, another initiative undertaken by WSCC to promote student success is Finish in Two. Finish in Two is WSCC’s version of Fifteen to Finish. Fifteen to Finish is an initiative that has been adopted by several states in an effort to encourage “full-time college students to finish college faster by completing a full fifteen-credit schedule each semester, or thirty credits a year, the standard course load for on-time graduation” (“15 to Finish,” 2015, para. 1). At WSCC there is an acknowledgement that, for many community college students, taking fifteen credits a semester is unrealistic. However, students are still encouraged to compete thirty credits a year by taking summer classes. This means that the FTFT students are taking twelve credits a semester in fall and spring.

With the elimination of late registration along with the Finish in Two program came more specific policy changes. Chief among them was the reorganization of counseling and advising services in order to better serve the students. The changes to counseling and advising services also included changing from a set number of hours of tutoring a student was entitled to, based on the number of credit hours in which they were enrolled, to free and unlimited tutoring. These changes specifically addressed two of the four critical elements of Tinto’s (2012) conceptual framework: Expectations and Support. Tinto explains that students’ self-expectations are one driver of success and those expectations are, at least in-part, “shaped…by variety of institutional actions” (p. 7). In order for students to meet their expectations, Tinto (2012) explains that students must have support, be it financial, academic, or social. The reorganization of advising
and counseling services, and making tutoring free and unlimited was done to provide that needed support.

While it is too early to have any specific data on the impact of MMP, data from earlier cohorts does indicate that the college’s commitment to student success has improved retention rates. The ATD cohort (first time, full-time, CSD graduates) from the previous year was examined. The overall and disaggregated groups have all shown increases in fall-to-spring (term) persistence. There was a notable increase in term persistence from the 2012 cohort (65.4%) to the 2013 cohort (69.4%). Disaggregation by ethnicity shows increases in all groups with the lowest performing group, African American, showing the largest gain (54.5% to 63.6%). Other groups show gains: Hispanic (68.8% to 69.5%), White (65.3% to 69.6%), and Other, including all other race/ethnic groups (68.8% to 72.4%). In regards to gender, both male and female groups showed improvement: male (63.7% to 66.4%) and female (66.9% to 71.9%). Finally, Pell recipients, a low performing group in persistence, showed a marked improvement (58.1% to 62.7%), while non-Pell recipients also improved (74.0% to 76.5%) (Annual Reflections, 2015, p. 8).

In addition to institutional policies, the state has implemented policies which may also have an impact on student success. The impetus for the new policies, which include an excess credit fee and a performance funding formula, was the economic crash of 2008 and the recession that followed. In 2010 the state higher education board issued a report entitled, The State & the System: WSSHE Plan for Western State’s Colleges and Universities. The report was subtitled Combining Excellence & Austerity to Attain Success. The notion of excellent austerity may be an oxymoron but the report laid out the state’s goals for accomplishing it. It was in this report that goals were enumerated which became drivers of policy. One goal was to create “Incentives
for Decreased Time to Degree; Target use of tuition and fees to build incentives for students to complete college sooner, such as guaranteed fee levels up to a certain number of credits or penalties for students who drop or repeat classes” (Western State System of Higher Education [WSSHE], 2010, p. 6). It was also in this report that the goal of a review of the state’s funding formula for higher education was articulated (p. 3-4). Those goals later became policies to include the excess credit fee and performance funding.

Also behind the policy changes was state’s participation in the national organization Complete College America. Western State (WS) joined 23 other states as members of Complete College America, which is a national nonprofit based in Washington DC, in 2010 ("WS seeks to graduate more college students," 2010, para. 3). Fifteen to Finish (Finish in Two at WSCC) was also adopted statewide as a result of participation in Complete College America. Complete College America was established in 2009 with the goal of working with states to significantly increase student success through degree attainment and certificates and to close achievement gaps for students from underrepresented populations. The Complete College America program consists of five “game changers” which include performance funding, co-requisite remediation, full time is fifteen, structured schedules, and guided pathways to success (Complete College America website, 2014, about cca). The influence of Complete College America can be seen in some of the policies that have been adopted, one of which is the excess credit fee designed to reduce the number of program or major changes that students are reasonably able to do.

According to an article from the October 28, 2013 in the local newspaper, students who have not completed their degree within 150 percent of the credits required for their program will be charged an excess credit fee. The article quotes Crystal Abba, Vice Chancellor of Academic and Student Affairs at the WS System of Higher Education, who said “we want them to finish on
time.” Abba also explained that the adoption of these types of policies is a trend in several states (Amaro, 2013, para. 3). Title IV, chapter 17, of the WS System of Higher Education handbook states “a 50 percent excess credit fee on the per credit registration fee shall be charged to a student who has accrued attempted credits equal to 150 percent of the credits required for the student’s program of study. The excess credit fee shall be imposed on registration fees charged in the current semester and in subsequent semesters, including summer terms where student’s cumulative credit hours total exceeds 150 percent of the credits required for the student’s program of study” (Excess Credit Fee, 2013).

Former university president Neil Smatresk said he believed the fee would be a strong motivator for students to graduate on time (Amaro, 2013, para. 15). And, Abba said she thought the policy was fair (Formoso, 2012, para 3). However, students don’t necessarily agree. A former student body president at UNLV said “enough is enough” with the burden of fee increases (Amaro, 2013, para. 17). Another student was quoted as saying that it is unfair for the board to raise student fees without consulting students, the film major said “I think it deters people from wanting to go to college… How are you going to afford it, especially if you don’t get an opportunity to discuss it or anything” (Formoso, 2012, para. 6).

So while ostensibly designed to encourage students to graduate on time, thereby promoting student success, when looked at through the lens of Tinto’s framework the excess credit fee may actually make students perceive that they are not receiving the support necessary for them to be successful. The data on Fifteen to Finish, which is the reason for the excess credit fee, is not yet available. According to Complete College America that data will be provided in 2015 (Complete College America website, 2014).
Another policy change that resulted from participation in complete college America was the implementation of a new funding formula based on performance funding. The performance funding model was adopted an effort to increase student success according to former WS state senator Stephen Horsford (Marcus, 2012, para. 3). Performance funding in higher education is not a new concept, however the model adopted in WS is among the most dramatic with almost the state’s entire higher education budget based on credits earned rather than students enrolled (Marcus, 2012, para. 4). The performance funding in WS has had a significant impact on student success according to Complete College America. The data provided by the organization indicates a 43.3 percent change in to your associate degree completion over the last five years (Complete College America website, 2014, state data WS). However, since the funding formula has not been in place for five years, and since the website offers little explanation of the data, it is difficult to ascertain the validity of that statistic. Because the performance funding has made such an impact on WSCC, as well as other institutions within the WS System of Higher Education, it will be examined in more detail next.

Performance funding is not a new idea, since the 1970s state legislatures have attempted to improve college performance by implementing funding formulas which would base, at least in part, appropriations to colleges on performance metrics. These metrics may include retention, graduation rates, transfer, and job placement (Dougherty et al., 2014). Dougherty et al. (2014) explained that as of June 2014, twenty-six states were using a performance funding model while four more had adopted them but had not yet implemented them, and several more states are considering moving to performance funding (p. 164). Tennessee was the first state to adopt a performance funding model in 1979 and other states either considered adopting or did adopt performance funding models from that time through the 2000 recession which caused a decline
in the adoption of the model. In 2007, a “new wave” hit with about two thirds of the new performance funding models being re-adoptions of previously discontinued programs (Dougherty et al., 2014, p. 165).

In WS, the state legislature approved a performance funding model in the 2013 session. During the 2011 legislative session, a committee was formed to determine methods with which to reward institutions for graduations. No additional state funding was to be allocated so the performance pool had to be based on carve-outs from state funds. Under the plan institutions are able to earn back the carve-out depending on the prior year’s performance (Western State System of Higher Education [WSSHE], 2014). During the first budget cycle,WSCC outperformed the metrics, but with less than anticipated revenues in the state and with the decreasing enrollments, the necessary budget cuts had to be taken.

While somewhat complex, the formula for community colleges in the state is basically in order to receive money from the performance pool the colleges need to demonstrate that they are increasing the number of graduates, increasing number of graduates in underserved populations and selected fields, that students are completing the first college level mathematics and English courses, and students are hitting momentum points (30 credits, 60 credits). Defining what is success in the community colleges always been difficult and it remains to be seen how the WS performance funding model will work over time.

However, it’s measured, the question remains; do performance funding models really improve student success? In a 2014 study of the Pennsylvania performance funding model, it was found that “while state officials expected the program have a positive impact on completions, results from [the] study indicate that these outcomes were not achieved” (Hillman, Tandberg, & Gross, 2014, p. 850). Hillman, Tandberg, and Gross (2014) posit that some state
officials may believe that the program is successful even though the intended outcomes are not achieved because degree completions did not decrease. However, “it’s not enough to claim a policy is successful because it ‘did no harm’ to students in the state. Furthermore, state policymakers and system officials may not have a compelling reason to sustain a program given the results found in this study” (p. 850). For some state policymakers, improving completion rates may not be as important of a goal as increasing accountability for higher education institutions within their state. Therefore, even if completions or student success metrics did not improve, the policymakers may still see the performance funding model as a success because of their alternate goals (Hillman et al., 2014, p. 832). This is a dangerous notion as it could lead to a scenario in which an institution experiences reduced funding because of lower than expected completion rates, leading to a situation where student support services are reduced as a result of the lower funding leading, which could then lead to even lower rates of student success based on the performance metrics used for the funding formula, leading to even lower funding and so on.

It is incumbent upon all faculty, administration, and staff at the institutions as well as organizations such as the Western State Faculty Alliance to closely monitor this situation in the coming years as the new performance funding model is used to allocate funds to the colleges and universities in the state.

Since joining CCA, there has been a tremendous push in the state, and at WSCC in particular, to increase student success. Clearly, this is a laudable goal and one worthy of the efforts of everyone at the institution. As has been discussed in this section, throughout the history of community colleges there has not always been a clear focus on student success. With more and more community colleges begin to focus on student success and with organizations such as CCA and ATD shining that focused light on a national level it’s possible the community
colleges will play an even larger role in higher education in the coming decades. Policies such as MMP at WSCC, community colleges may well become the path of first choice for many students who otherwise might have tended to look toward a four-year college or university even for their first two years of school.

Guided Pathways

Recent efforts to increase student success in community colleges have focused in part on developing “guided pathways” designed to help students, especially those FTFT students with little to no “college knowledge,” navigate their way through a degree program toward successful completion or transfer. Jenkins and Cho (2012) explain that students who enter a degree program within their first year are far more likely to complete their degree or transfer to a university than those who do not get into a program until their second year. Guided pathways can help students, many of whom are confused and frustrated with trying to find their way through college (Venezia, Bracco, & Nodine, 2010). However, while there has been some research on guided pathways, a recent search of academic databases yielded very little in the way of empirical data to support the notion that they actually help students be more successful. In fact, “rigorous research on the effectiveness of guided pathways in higher education is just beginning” (Jenkins & Cho, 2013, p. 31). In addition to little empirical data being available on whether or not guided pathways actually help students, when compared to those who self-advice, there is essentially nothing in the research that addresses how being on those pathways impacts on a student’s expectations as they attempt to transition from being in high school or the workplace to being a college student or on the amount of work these students are assigned in their first semester.
Students on guided pathways are often directed to take general education (GE) and possibly one or more developmental courses in those early semesters. Kay McClenney, Director of the Center for Community College Student Engagement at the University of Texas in Austin, famously said that “students don’t do optional,” this, she explains, is a universal rule of college students (Jacobs, 2012, para. 8). It is a rule that teachers of lower division GE courses know all too well. As a result, students are often assigned graded deliverables for almost everything done in classes. This may be even more a “universal rule” for those students in GE courses. In an as yet unpublished, institutional study conducted at Our Lady of the Lake University in Texas, it was found that freshman students in their first semester had a much greater workload than did the seniors. The study found that freshman averaged, for example, over fifty deliverables during the month of October and seniors had less than fifteen during the same time period (K. Gonzalez, personal communication, December 4, 2014).

**Student Success**

While it is alarming to find that student success was not one of the themes that emerged from Ayers’ study, it is not all that surprising. This is due in part to it being so difficult even to define student success in community colleges, let alone measure it (Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, & Kleiman, 2011). Defining student success for community colleges is difficult because students have diverse goals and plans (Summers, 2003, p. 65; Provasnik & Planty, 2008; Porchea, Allen, Robbins, & Phelps, 2010). Some want to get a degree or transfer, some are seeking a professional certificate, while others may be taking a few classes for personal enrichment. Bailey, Leinbach, and Jenkins (2006) quote an unnamed community college president who says:
I continue to be discouraged that these articles do not ever account for the students who come to the community colleges with different goals. While I agree that the students we get whose goal is, or should be, a degree and transfer need more focused attention from us, I am always discouraged that community colleges are made to look like failures when the number of students who come to the community colleges to gain particular job skills or some similar goal are not separated out when the percentages are run (p. 1).

Baldwin, Bensimon, Dowd, and Kleiman, (2011) discuss present the work of a multistate, multi-institution work group that set about to create a set of benchmarks in an effort to provide clarity in defining student success. They explain that group began with some key questions including (p. 76):

- Are students being retained from term to term and year to year?
- What are the key credit thresholds that point to student progression and completion?
- Are students progressing through developmental education and into credit-bearing gatekeeper courses?
- Are students completing the gatekeeper courses within a certain period of time?

The group came up with three sets of measures and milestones. Those measures at the fourth and sixth years included being awarded an associate degree or higher with or without transfer, transfer without a degree, and still enrolled with thirty or more credit hours. First-year milestones included term-to-term persistence, passing eighty percent of classes with a C or better grade, and earning twenty-four or more credit hours. Second and third year milestones include year-to-year persistence, completing developmental gatekeeper courses and earning forty-eight
or more credit hours. They explain, the Benchmarks for Student Success establish “a common language and set of expectations that, when shared among institutions and publicly, makes student progression and outcomes more transparent” (p. 78). This is important, and additionally, it demonstrates just how difficult it can be to pin down student success for community college students.

In the past, community colleges have had a focus on access and having an "open door.” As previously mentioned, in 2012 American Association of Community Colleges (AACC) reported that "by 2010 community colleges enrolled more than 13 million students in credit and noncredit courses annually" (AACC, 2012, p. 12). Unfortunately, they are often not successful once they are in college. Crawford and Jervis (2011) report that for first time college students attending community colleges in 2003-2004, less than 36 percent were able to complete a post-secondary credential within six years. The AACC report says that community colleges must switch their focus from student access and focus on both access and student success.

The recent push toward performance funding in many states, along with meeting the challenge laid out by President Obama, and with student success initiatives such as ATD and CCA, are serving to shift that focus to include student success along with other themes such as access and diversity (Achieving the Dream, 2012). With that has come questions about factors that contribute to student success. According to Bremer, Center, Opsal, Medhanie, Jang, and Geise (2013), several input and environmental variables of “theoretical relevance to retention have been identified in models of postsecondary retention offered in previous research. They include variables “associated with students' background, such as how prepared are they for college, or demographic variables, such as age or ethnicity” (p. 155). Research has attempted to
identify both these types of personal characteristics as well as institutional initiatives that may lead to a greater chance student success.

Porchea, Allen, Robbins, and Phelps (2010) study examined the impact of variables such as academic preparation, psychosocial, socio-demographic, as well as situational, and institutional factors that influence enrollment and degree outcomes. The sample consisted of 21 community colleges and 4,481 students. The study attempted to develop a “conceptually grounded model, for community college matriculate degree and transfer outcomes, which includes each of these classes of student factors, as well as institutional factors” (Porchea et al., 2010, p. 688). They ask, “[w]hat are the student characteristics that are predictive of enrollment and degree outcomes for students that initially enroll at a community college and how does the predictive value of each characteristic vary by specific outcome” (p. 687)? Students from a fall 2003 cohort participated in the study by completing the Student Readiness Inventory (SRI), a self-report instrument consisting of 108 Likert-type items yielding ten scale scores. As expected, the study found that higher levels of academic preparation would lead to greater community college degree attainment and transfer to four-year institutions.

This is an important factor to consider given a 2013 Government Accountability Office (GAO) study reported that approximately 42 percent of students an entering community college are not adequately prepared for college-level courses and must enroll developmental education. Researchers at GAO also estimate that less than 25 percent of the students in developmental education will complete a degree or certificate. The GAO study concludes that “Improving developmental education is key to increasing degree and certificate completion. Some community colleges and states are instituting various initiatives to improve the outcomes of students placed into developmental education” (U.S. Government Accounting Office, 2013).
In addition to academic preparation, another student characteristic to consider is a student’s capacity to be successful. Harsh and Mallory (2013) discuss the need to build on the capacity of students to be successful. They explain three levels of learning; first-order learning is “doing more of the same within a similar boundary without examining or changing the assumptions that inform the work” (p. 17). This, they say, is what comprises most formal education. In their report they explain that when a significant change in thinking occurs, this is second-order learning. Here values and assumptions are examined. Deeper more reflective learning is third-order learning. Harsh and Mallory (2013) say that programs can be designed to build capacity for students to succeed and attain performance goals. This would be in addition to the personal success factors such as resilience, efficacy, and academic and leadership potential.

Students' preparation and personal characteristics are not the only area factors impacting student success found in the literature. Another is looking at institutional initiatives that can lead to greater success. Cho and Karp (2013), conducted a study to determine if student success courses along with student and institutional characteristics, has a positive influence on shorter-term student outcomes. Cho and Karp hypothesize that students who enrolled success courses early in their college careers will be more likely to have earned credits in their first year and to have persisted into the second year than students who did not complete a success course.

For the purposes of the study, Cho and Karp offer an operational definition of student success as enrollment in either Discipline-Specific Orientation or College Survival Skills that may be used in lieu of College Success Skills for the graduation requirement. They then compared outcomes for students who enrolled in at least one student success course with outcomes of those students who did not enroll in any of the courses meeting their definition.
Logit regression models were developed for the three short-term outcomes, using standardized marginal effects coefficients. The study found positive short-term outcomes for students enrolling in student success courses in their first term. The results indicate that there is a “consistently positive association between student success course enrollment among female students and student outcomes. There is a consistently negative association between black students and outcomes, and a slight positive association between Asian students and outcomes” (p. 94). There is also a positive association between older students and credit attainment. They also found that there is a positive and statistically significant association between full-time enrollment outcomes.

Whether it is a question of students’ characteristics or institutional initiatives and programs, students are not successfully completing at acceptable rates. One possible explanation for the dismal success rates may be underutilization of services offered by community colleges such as tutoring and advising. Richman, et.al (2013) drawing on data from the 2010 Community College Survey of Student Engagement, made two critical discoveries. First, programs and services, that are beneficial to the students who use them, are being underutilized, and second, students are often confused and frustrated by "what they perceive to be a complex and bewildering web of pathways and services" (p. 2). More clearly defining pathways for students is one possible solution, but it is also important to understand student motivation.

According to Geiger and Cooper (1996), instructors are trying attempting to determine why students are able to excel in their courses. In this study, they use Vroom’s 1964 expectancy theory in an effort to determine what motivates students to put forth the needed effort to succeed in their courses. They explain expectancy theory models, the force model and valence model.
The valence model is used to “capture perceived attractiveness, or valence, of an outcome by aggregating the attractiveness of all associated resultant outcomes” (p.1).

Using the valence model, they attempt to explain how students evaluate the attractiveness of academic success, for example earning an A in the course would be considered a first level outcome. Second level outcomes are less direct, such as earning a higher overall GPA. This study attempted to measure valence by looking at three second level outcomes, “(1) increasing one’s overall GPA, (2) allowing one to perform at a superior level in his/her initial post college job, and (3) obtaining a strong feeling of personal satisfaction.” Using a judgment modeling exercise involving “multiple decision-making cases, each requiring separate decisions based on varying combinations of values for instrumentality and for expectancy of success.” The judgment modeling approach uses individuals' decisions as operational measures of valence and motivation this study measured the three second level outcomes. Geiger and Cooper report that “The findings of this study have uniformly supported the applicability of a within-persons application of expectancy theory to evaluate a student's valence and effort level decisions in an academic setting” (p.2).

**Retention and Persistence**

Whether it is students' personal characteristics, academic preparedness, or some institutional factor, for community colleges, persistence and retention have long been issues of great concern for community colleges. This has never been more true than it is today in the face of President Obama's challenge to community colleges to take a leading role in economic policy by granting five million new associate degrees over the next ten years. For community colleges "this is a daunting task" as they will need to increase graduation rates by 60% from the current
level of about 800,000 annually (Fogg & Harrington, 2009, p. 12). Increasing graduation rates necessarily means increasing persistence from term-to-term and retention from year-to-year.

Over the past three decades, college student retention has been the subject of many research studies. Social adjustment, academic difficulty, uncertain goals, commitment, finances, social integration, and/or isolation have been identified as possible contributing factors in a student’s decision to not complete a course or return to school for another semester. Retention appears to be a multi-factored and complex decision (Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994).

Retention is an important factor in a college's success for a number of reasons, including the ability to maintain financial stability and to keep academic programs stable and relevant. Legislators and boards want accountability and student retention leading to graduation or transfer is a good measure of success for them. The federal government may use graduation rates as one measure of how effective colleges are, and perhaps the most important reason, is insuring that students complete their academic goals, and are able to get jobs (Fike & Fike, 2008).

However, retention, like student success, especially for community college students, is difficult to define. Is it graduation rates, the number of students returning the following academic year (fall to fall), should we count those who complete a single course for personal enrichment, or those who seek some type of certificate, and what about those transferring to a four-year institution to pursue a bachelor’s degree? All of these are possibilities and therefore clearly measuring retention in a community college presents many challenges. Because, as discussed in the previous section, students have many different reasons for enrolling in a community college, measures of retention/persistence that might be used at a university, can be misleading in terms of evidence of success and non-success (Hagedorn, 2006).
Hagedorn (2006) writes that “measuring college student retention is complicated, confusing, and context dependent. Higher education researchers will likely never reach consensus on the correct or best way to measure this very important outcome” (p. 2). This is in part because of the difficulty in how to define retention as well as determining which students to measure and which to ignore. Once a cohort of students to study is identified, next colleges must decide exactly what needs to be measured (Hagedorn, 2006). There are at least four basic types of retention: institutional; system; in the major (discipline); and in a particular course. Should we be concerned with system retention which focuses on the student and turns a blind eye on which institution a student is enrolled? Or, should the focus be on institutional retention which is the most basic and easy to understand and is the measure of the proportion of students who remain enrolled at the same institution from year to year? A third possibility is retention within a major or discipline which takes a more limited view of the topic by viewing retention within a major area of study, discipline, or a specific department. For example, a student who declares engineering as a major but then switches to biology may be retained in an institutional sense but is lost to the College of Engineering. And finally, the smallest unit of analysis with respect to retention, course retention, measures course completion (Hagedorn, 2006).

With President Obama’s recent edict, community colleges are presented with a task that seems insurmountable. We do know some things, however, about what works to improve retention and while Obama’s goal may not be met anytime soon, there are things that can be done. For starters, when students perceive the institution as committed to their educational success, retention generally is higher (Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994). Another factor that contributes to the decision not to continue for students is academic preparedness. Many students are ill-prepared academically for college level work (Bremer et al., 2013). Additionally, students
may well have financial factors that impact their decision to persist in school (Cabrera, Stampen, & Hensen, 1990)

These non-institutional factors confuse the analysis of retention and especially with respect to instructor responsibility for the lack of persistence, which has been an area of interest to me for a number of years. Race, gender, and socioeconomic status are all examples of confounding factors (Clewell & Flicklin, 1986).

**Perceived Workload**

Workload has been found to be among the most important factors contributing to student dropout (Chambers, 1992; Woodley & Parlett, 1983). Measuring workload can be difficult. It could be measured by looking at the number of contact hours students are in class, in addition to the number of hours students spend studying outside class to master the material and completing assignments. While contact hours may be fairly easy to measure, the amount of time studying and preparing assignments will vary from student to student (Chambers, 1992; Kember & Leung, 1998). However, even if these activities could be accurately measured, they may not give a realistic picture of how a student perceives their workload. In fact, there may be little to no correlation between actual workload and perceived workload (Kember & Leung, 1998). Kember and Lueng (1998) hypothesized that “perceived workload should be thought of as a complex function of a number of variables” (p. 295). These variables may include class contact hours, independent study hours, English language ability, GPA, and ‘the students’ propensity to employ meaning or reproducing approaches to learning’ (p. 293).

In their 1998 study Kember and Lueng collected data on 174 students enrolled in a three-year program which led to a degree in engineering or science to identify factors contributing to students’ perception of workload. The students in the study responded to a six item Likert-type
scale to study their perception of workload, they were also asked to complete the study process questionnaire (SPQ) to determine learning approach, English language ability was ascertained by examining the students’ examinations that were taken as part of the criteria to enter the program, and students were also asked to rate their own English language ability, and class contact hours were also examined.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to estimate and test the hypothesized interrelationships among the variables. The researchers found correlations between actual (class hours and independent study) and perceived workload. They found a statistically significant correlation between perceived workload and class hours \(r = 0.28, p\text{-value} < 0.05\). The relationship between perceived workload and independent study was not statistically significant \(r = 0.06, p\text{-value} > 0.01\). The data supports the researchers’ assertion “that time spent in formal classes and studying out of class differ in the extent of their influence on perceived workload” (p. 302). These two measures were combined and used to estimate actual workload and its correlation with perceived workload and this was found to be statistically significant \(r = 0.20, p\text{-value} < 0.05\). Interestingly, actual workload was not found to be a good measure of perceived workload with only four percent of the variance in perceived workload being explained by actual workload. Additionally, students’ perception of English language ability impacted perceived workload. This, according to the researchers “gives evidence that perceived workload is a complex function of a variety of variables” (302).

Much of the research on academic workload has been focused on how perceived workload affects learning approach. There appears to be a correlation between surface approaches to learning and perceived workload (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982; Kember, 2004; Kyndt, Dochy, Struyven, & Cascallar, 2011). Other research has examined the relationship
between teaching and learning factors including workload on a variety of academic as well as personal issues including contributing to incidents of plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007), students’ evaluations of instructors (Remedios & Lieberman, 2008; Thornton, Adams, & Sepehri, 2010) and stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998; Tripathi & Sharma, 2013). While interesting, none of this research is particularly relevant to this study.

In a study that looked at the relationship between workload and success in a particular course, Harris, Hannum, and Gupta (2004) looked at students enrolled in their first semester of college, to determine what factors may be associated with success in undergraduate Anatomy and Physiology courses at Lewiston-Auburn College. In addition to demographics, data about prior preparation for science classes, and data about factors in students’ lives outside of college were collected.

The researchers conducted a stepwise linear regression on the dependent variable (course grade) with age, sex, type of degree desired, number of hours per week of paid employment, number of credit hours of coursework each week, number of children at home, number of mathematics and science courses taken in high school, number of credit hours, mathematics and science courses completed in college, and a science attitude score as independent variables. There were 107 students who took part in the study, 7 did not complete their questionnaires and 9 left before the study was completed. The subjects were 82 percent female and 31 percent were 30 years old or older (p. 169). Sixty-five percent of the students in the study completed the Anatomy and Physiology course with a grade of C or better. The average number of hours of paid employment among the participants was 29, they averaged 10 hours of coursework per week including the Anatomy and Physiology courses, and 49 percent were responsible for children in the home.
Of the three independent variables which inform this study, caring for children, working, and the number of hours each week of coursework, only caring for children was found to be not statistically significant (p>.05). The other two independent variables, number of credit hours of coursework each week and hours of paid employment correlated negatively with final course grade (p=0.025 and p=0.054 respectively.

While this study did not specifically look only at academic workload, it does provide insight into how factors such as the number of courses students are taking, or if they work in addition to going to school may affect final course grades. These factors should be considered when looking at FTFT students’ perceptions of their course workload as well. Community college students often find themselves working to support a family in addition to going to college. In a national study of more than six hundred former college students, more than half reported that they needed to work to make money and this was the reason why they left school early without finishing a certificate or degree. The study also reported that even if they had a grant to pay for all tuition and fees 36 percent of the students in the study would have left school anyway to work full-time (Johnson, Rochkind, Ott, & Dupont, 2009). In terms of the workload in the early semesters, when students are required by the guided pathway to take almost all general education courses, working is also a barrier as six out of ten students who failed to graduate report that having to work as well as going to school was too stressful (Johnson et al., 2009).

The majority of the research that has been done on academic workload has been conducted in Asia, Australia, and Europe at universities. The studies have looked at how workload may impact on learning, evaluations of courses, of instructors, and contribute to stress. No relevant research on community college students, or for that matter university students in the
United States, that specifically addressed the potential influence of academic workload on a student’s decision to dropout or stop-out was found. This buttresses the need for this research.

**Conceptual Framework**

As discussed above, attrition and persistence are critical for the success of any college or university. This is especially true for community colleges given the current economic and political climate. Since the 1970s, a great deal of research on factors contributing to student attrition has been conducted and several important models have been developed (Astin, 1977; Bean & Metzner, 1985; Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 2012). In the following paragraphs some of the foundational theories and models will be briefly discussed followed by an explanation of the conceptual framework to be used for this study.

One of the most widely used models of student persistence and retention is Tinto’s (1975) model which has its roots in Durkheim’s theory of suicide. Tinto explains that “according to Durkheim, suicide is more likely to occur when individuals are insufficiently integrated into the fabric of society” (Tinto, 1975, p. 91). Tinto (1975) explains, that according to Durkheim, insufficient moral integration and insufficient collective affiliation increase the likelihood of suicide. Therefore, if you think of college as a social system, which has its own values and social structures, then dropping out of college is analogous to committing suicide (Tinto, 1975). A lack of integration into a college’s social system can result in low commitment to that system and eventually may increase the probability that students will decide to dropout rather than persist in meeting their goals. Tinto’s (1975) longitudinal model of student departure has long served as a theoretical foundation of student retention and attrition based on the notion “that the process of dropout from college can be viewed as a longitudinal process of interactions between the individual and the academic and social systems of the college during which a person's
experiences in those systems (as measured by his normative and structural integration) continually modify his goal and institutional commitments in ways which lead to persistence and/or to varying forms of dropout” (p. 94). According to the model, students enter college with several background variables including their family background, their individual attributes, and the amount of education they had prior to entering college which play a role in how committed they are to their goals and to the institution. As students interact with the academic system their grade performance and intellectual development impact on academic integration while peer group interactions and interactions with faculty members impact on social integration. As students become both academically and socially integrated this in turn impacts on their commitment to their goals and to the institution which leads to decisions about dropping out.

Tinto posited that retention is influenced by the level of integration, sometimes described as the match or the fit experienced by the student with the institution. A higher level of integration results in a more positive experience and therefore a greater likelihood that the student will be successful and persist. A lower level of integration can lead to feelings of isolation, and may lead the student to dropout or stop-out (Tinto, 1975; Kern, 2011). While being probably the researched model of student retention, Tinto’s model is not without its critics. This is due in large part to the fact that Tinto’s model was designed with traditional age, full-time students at four-year universities in mind.

Bean and Metzner (1985), proposed a model of nontraditional students as they believed that Tinto’s model was limited in its usefulness when applied to nontraditional students. They explained that students who are older than the traditional age and who may attend college only part-time have less interaction with other students and faculty within the college, are less likely to participate in extracurricular activities and use campus services, and have much greater
interaction with their external environment such as a job and family. According to this model, nontraditional students based their decision to drop out of college on four sets of variables these include poor academic performance, the intent to leave, background and defining variables, and environmental variables.

While at first glance Bean and Metzner’s model may appear to be a better model for studying community college students, that is not necessarily the case. Community college students may well be, and often are, nontraditional however many community college students, especially those who are enrolled on a full-time basis, are traditional students.

No model exists which was designed specifically as a model of persistence for community college students. However, several studies have applied Tinto’s model to community college students and suggest the model can provide a useful framework for understanding withdrawal-persistence behavior at less traditional institutions such as community colleges (Pascarella, Duby, Miller and Rasher, 1981; Pascarella and Chapman, 1983; (Halpin, 1990). Tinto’s (1975) longitudinal model offers a reasonable lens for studying community college students however because the implementation of guided pathways is an institutional action, his later work is more appropriate for this study.

Building on his earlier work, in his 2012 book, Completing College; Rethinking Institutional Action, Tinto outlines “a framework for institutional action” (p. 6). There are four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework: Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement. Tinto explains that students’ self-expectations are one driver of success and those are, at least in-part, “shaped…by a variety of institutional actions” (p. 7). In order for students to meet their expectations, Tinto (2012) explains that students must have support, be it financial, academic, or social. Students are more likely to be successful if they are
given feedback on their performance in a timely manner. This is especially true during their first year of college. Finally, involvement or engagement is, according to Tinto, perhaps the most important condition to be met if community colleges are to help students succeed. This means involvement with faculty, staff, and peers.

In this case study of first-time, full-time, freshman, students at a community college, Tinto’s 2012 model will be used as a conceptual lens to study their perceptions of course workload. The four elements of Tinto’s framework provide a valuable framework as the first-time, full-time students may be insecure and underprepared. Having an unmanageable workload could easily contribute to the decline in their college expectations. While they may feel their workload is heavy, having the right support in place may prove to be a success tool to help students adjust to college life. Faculty may not give timely feedback if they are assigning multiple tasks over a short time period. This could have an impact on students’ perceptions of how well they are performing and not allow for them to make changes in time to help with the next assignment. Involvement may be negatively impacted for those students with an especially heavy workload, preventing them from meaningful engagement outside the classroom.

In addition to Tinto’s model, Marsh’s (2001) model of Good Workload versus Bad Workload was used to categorize interview subjects’ perceptions of the coursework that they are given. Marsh explains that good workload, or hours spent on coursework, are those spent doing work that students deem to be valuable and bad hours are those that students don’t believe are valuable to them. For example, students might perceive assignments and activities that they consider to be busy work as bad hours. Therefore, before determining how workload could influence a student’s decision to persist or drop out is first important to determine if they believe the work being done is valuable or not.
Summary

Community colleges have long had a focus on access, and the primary concern was for getting students through the door and enrolled in classes. This is not to say that there was no concern for the success of students, but other issues seemed to take priority. Having access as a priority is often reflected in the colleges’ mission statements. More recently community colleges have begun to recognize the importance of placing a priority on student success. There are several reasons for this, not the least of which are changes in funding formulas at the state level as well as other policies at the state and institutional level. A number of policies at community colleges have been changed or implemented in an effort to increase student success.

The impetus for the many of the new policies was the economic crash of 2008 and the recession that followed. Resulting policies have included new funding formulas based on performance funding, excess credit fees and programs such as “15 to Finish” and “Finish in 2”.

One such policy is the implementation of guided pathways. An American Association of Community Colleges report stated that colleges need to move from fragmented course-taking to clear, coherent educational pathways, from low rates of student success to high rates of student success, from tolerance of achievement gaps to commitment to eradicating achievement gaps, and from a culture of anecdote to a culture of evidence. In response, community colleges have focused in part on developing “guided pathways’” designed to help students, especially those FTFT students with little to no “college knowledge,” navigate their way through a degree program toward successful completion or transfer. Students on guided pathways are often directed to take general education (GE) and possibly one or more developmental courses in those early semesters.
Whether it is students’ personal characteristics, academic preparedness, or some institutional factor, for community colleges, persistence and retention have long been issues of great concern. Over the past three decades, college student retention has been the subject of many research studies. Social adjustment, academic difficulty, uncertain goals, commitment, finances, social integration, and/or isolation have been identified as possible contributing factors in a student’s decision to not complete a course or return to school for another semester.

Retention appears to be a multi-factored and complex decision and is an important factor in a college's success for a number of reasons, including the ability to maintain financial stability and to keep academic programs stable and relevant. Legislators and boards want accountability and student retention leading to graduation or transfer is a good measure of success for them.

Workload has been found to be among the most important factors contributing to student dropout. However, measuring workload can be difficult. It could be measured by looking at the number of contact our students are in class, in addition to the number of our students spend studying outside class to master the material and completing assignments. While contact hours may be fairly easy to measure, the amount of time studying and preparing assignments will vary from student to student. Even if these activities could be accurately measured, they may not give a realistic picture of how a student perceives their workload. In fact, there may be little to no correlation between actual workload and perceived workload.

No model exists which was designed specifically as a model of persistence for community college students. However, several studies have applied Tinto’s model to community college students and suggest the model can provide a useful framework for understanding withdrawal-persistence behavior at less traditional institutions such as community colleges. Tinto’s 1975 longitudinal model offers a reasonable lens for studying community
college students however because the implementation of guided pathways is an institutional action, his later work is more appropriate for this study.

In 2012, Tinto outlined a framework for institutional action. Tinto explains that to significantly improve on student retention and graduation rates institutions must focus on interventions that affect students in the classroom. Because they have little control over students’ backgrounds, colleges need to concentrate on student success in the classroom. He explains that this is especially important during the first year and that institutions need to make changes to the way classes are structured, taught, and most importantly, experienced by students, especially those students who come to college unprepared or underprepared. The colleges, according to Tinto must also “align those classrooms, one to another, in a way that provide students coherent pathways of courses that propel them to timely program completion” (Tinto, 2012, p. 6).

There are four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework: Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement. These will be the variables examined in this study. Additionally, Marsh’s 2001 model of good workload versus bad workload will be used to categorize interview subjects’ perceptions of the coursework that they are given.

In the next chapter, the methodology which will be applied to this case study will be discussed. Ontological and epistemological assumptions and the purpose of the study will be reviewed. The chapter will explain the research design and the rationale for the site selection and how participants will be selected. Methods of data collection along with data analysis procedures will be outlined. Finally, reliability and credibility will be addressed as they relate to case studies generally and this study specifically.
CHAPTER 3: METHODS

Introduction

As stated earlier, with the push toward performance-based funding, along with President Obama's challenge to community colleges to take a leading role in economic policy by granting five million new associate degrees over the next ten years, it is more important than ever that colleges closely examine factors that may inhibit course completion, retention, and ultimately success. Community colleges will need to increase graduation rates by 60 percent from the current level of about 800,000 annually (Fogg & Harrington, 2009, p. 12). The challenge is even greater given that community college enrollments are in decline and completion rates have also decreased slightly (Juzkiewicz, 2015, p. 3). For students, the decision to complete a course, a semester, or even a degree is a complex one with many factors potentially having some influence (Tinto, Russo, & Kadel, 1994, p. 27).

Chapter 2 provided a review of the relevant scholarly research and theory related to themes including the evolving mission of community colleges, relevant policies, guided pathways, student success, retention/persistence, perceived workload, and finally a conceptual framework for the study was discussed. Much of the research on student workload has been conducted in Asia, Europe, and Australia. Researchers have studied how workload may contribute to many undesirable outcomes such as dropping out of college (Chambers, 1992; Woodley & Parlett, 1983), adopting a surface learning approach (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982; Kember, 2004; Kyndt et al., 2011), committing plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007), and high levels of stress (Nonis et al., 1998). There has been no significant research on the potential impacts of perceived workload on unprepared or underprepared students at community colleges.
This qualitative study attempts to shine a light on those students in hopes of informing interventions ostensibly designed to increase student success.

**Ontological and Epistemological Assumptions**

The term “worldview can be used to describe the “general philosophical orientation about the world and the nature of research that a researcher brings to a study” (Creswell, 2014, loc. 732). Ontology and epistemology are other terms sometimes used to for a researcher’s worldview (Creswell, 2014, loc. 732). Creswell (2014) explains that because qualitative research is interpretative and as such the researcher is “typically involved in a sustained and intensive experience with participants. This introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research process” (loc. 4448). Because of these concerns, it is crucial for the researcher to explain their background, biases, and values which play a role in shaping how they interpret the data. As mentioned above, I have formally served as the faculty leader, essentially the director of the ATD initiative at WSCC. In that role, I was responsible for overseeing the implementation of student success interventions which included the MMP and by extension the guided pathways. Clearly, improving student success is a very important concept to me and has been at the core of decisions I have made with respect to my career and research. However, the lack of empirical data to support the notion that guided pathways benefit students as they relate to workload lead me to this project. While my bias is that I am supportive of anything that may improve student success, I am also aware that with each intervention there are unintended consequences one of which may be that the workload on FTFT students is a barrier.

According to Koro-Ljungberg, Yendol-Hoppey, Smith, and Hayes (2009), “an articulation of a study's theoretical perspective(s) and the description of epistemology that frame one's research could serve as one possible identifier, as a proxy, or as an explicit connection to
the researchers' epistemological awareness” (p. 688). This study was framed as constructivist. When taking a constructivist point of view, a researcher attempts to better understand a phenomenon by “describing individuals’ perspectives, experiences, and meaning making processes” (Koro-Ljungberg et al., 2009, p. 689). Taking this constructivist perspective means that, as a researcher, I am obligated to provide explicit details about the experiences of students who have been placed on guided pathways and how they perceived that experience as it relates to the workload and how that compares to the experiences of students who are further along their own educational path. I feel like my background in working with a variety of student success initiatives over the past several years gives me the knowledge and experience needed to analyze and interpret the findings.

**Unit of Analysis**

Yin (2014) explains that there at least two important steps in determining the unit of analysis for a case study, defining the case and bounding the case (location No. 1310). In order to be considered a case, the phenomenon being studied must be bounded (Merriam, 1998, p. 27).

Defining the case, and ultimately the unit of analysis in a case study, can be tricky and even confusing. For example, Yin (2014) discusses a case study that looked at the early development of a computer. He asks was the case a study of technology or the computer itself, or was it a study of a small group, the engineers on the development team (Location No. 1320)? In this case study, a similar problem exists. Because the goal of this case study was to determine the influence of being on a guided pathway on students’ perception of workload, it could be mistakenly assumed that guided pathways are the unit of analysis or even workload. However, the key word here is *perception*. The study sought to determine students’ perceptions about course workload, therefore, the unit of analysis is the individual student.
The second issue of concern is bounding the case. Yin (2014) explains that the research questions should set the boundaries for the case (Location No. 1346). The research questions for the proposed case study have done that. Clearly, the participants were identified in the research questions, as was the time frame. The case study looked at FTFT freshman students in their first semester.

**Design of the Study**

Merriam (1998) explains that qualitative research is an "umbrella term" which refers to multiple methods of data collection and analysis which can lead to a better understanding of a phenomenon by gaining insight into its meaning and context (p. 5). Case studies can contribute to our understanding and knowledge about social, political, group, organizational, and individual phenomenon as they are understood and interpreted by others and based on their worldview (Merriam, 1998, p. 6, Yin, 2009, p. 4). Case studies allow researchers to take an in-depth look at a social phenomenon and gain understanding of the situation and meaning for those involved (Babbie, 2007, p. 298, Merriam, 1998, p. 19).

Because several students were selected for the study, rather than just one, this study is a collective case study (Stake, 1995, p. 3-4). The research was completed using interviews, document examination, and member checking. Using interviews in a case-study allows a researcher to gather multiple interpretations and descriptions from subjects who will not see things the same as each other or the researcher (Stake, 1995, p. 64).

In addition to interviews, a document review was completed. Documents are easy to access and can be rich sources information (Merriam, 1998, p. 112). A document review can provide information that a researcher is unable to get from direct observation (Stake, 1995, p. 68). For most case studies, a document review likely to be needed and this study is no exception.
(Yin, 2009, p. 101). Documents can be used to verify what is learned through interviews and may lead to additional questions which need to be addressed (Yin, 2009, p. 103). Documents examined included course syllabi, degree sheets which give students a list of all courses needed to complete the degree in their major, and guided pathways.

Finally, the study utilized member checking in an effort to triangulate results. Study participants were asked to review early drafts of the data analysis and provide feedback about "accuracy and palatability" (Stake, 1995, p. 115). Stake (1995) explains that members should be encouraged to provide alternate language and interpretation of the data. While the researcher cannot and should not promise that the subject's interpretation will be included in the final draft of the study, it often is (p. 115).

**Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this case study was to explore first-time, full-time, students’ perceptions of their course workload in their first semester at a large community college in the western United States. The study examined students’ expectations regarding their course workload through Tinto’s conceptual framework for institutional action (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, Involvement). Tinto explains that to significantly improve on student retention and graduation rates, institutions must focus on interventions that affect students in the classroom. Because they have little control over students’ backgrounds, colleges need to concentrate on student success in the classroom. He explains that this is especially important during the first year and that institutions need to make changes to the way classes are structured, taught and, most importantly experienced by students, especially those students who come to college unprepared or underprepared. The colleges, according to Tinto must also “align those
classrooms, one to another, in a way that provide students coherent pathways of courses that propel them to timely program completion” (Tinto, 2012, p. 6).

This study attempted to determine if those unprepared and underprepared students are experiencing difficulties being successful in their first semester as a result of being overloaded with “bad workload.” Marsh (2001) explains that bad workload is work which the students view as being unrelated to meeting their goals, bad workload is that which the students perceive as busy work. While this case study did not attempt to make a direct connection between student attrition and workload, it did try to identify how the workload students are given during their first semester affects their expectations, their perceptions of support from the institution, how the amount of work they are being asked to produce affects their perception of their ability to make the grades they need to feel like they are on track to meet their goals (assessments and feedback).

Research Questions

In order to properly conduct a case study of students’ perceptions of their course workload, specific questions to guide the inquiry are needed. According to Creswell (2014), researchers in qualitative studies should only ask one or two central questions. These may be followed up with additional sub-questions (p. 139). In keeping with that advice this study examined the following research questions:

RQ₁: How do first-time, full-time, freshman students, who have been placed on a guided pathway, perceive their workload during their first semester of college?

RQ₂: How do students’ perceptions of workload influence their academic and social integration when examined through the lens of the four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement)?
A lack of empirical research on both student workload as well as guided pathways make it difficult to argue that the research questions flow directly from the research. However, there is significant research on student success and on barriers to student success. That literature, along with Tinto’s framework, lead to these questions.

Site Selection

Western State Community College (WSCC) was founded in 1971 with one location and about 1000 students, it has since grown to become the largest institution of higher education in its state "with 36% of student headcount enrollment; 31% of the student FTE in the state public higher education institutions; and 64% of student enrollment of the four community colleges" (WSCC Human Resources, n.d.). It is the largest and most ethnically diverse institution of higher education in [Southwestern State]. In 2015, WSCC was designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). WSCC serves over 43,000 full and part time students who have more than 200 degree and certificate programs to choose from in over 120 areas of study. The college boasts over a million alumni from 48 states and 59 countries (WSCC President, 2013). The College’s mission statement says that WSCC “creates opportunities and changes lives through access to quality teaching, services, and experiences that enrich our diverse community,” and one key element of the Vision Statement is student success (WSCC, 2013). Because student success is vital to the WSCC mission and vision, in 2011, the college applied to join the Achieving the Dream (ATD) national reform network which is “a national nonprofit that is dedicated to helping more community college students, particularly low-income students and students of color, stay in school and earn a college certificate or degree” (Achieving the Dream, 2012). In the fall of 2012, WSCC received notification that the college had been accepted into the network. Below is a brief description of ATD.
In 2004 by Lumina Foundation and seven partner organizations launched the most comprehensive, non-governmental reform movement for student success in higher education history; Achieving the Dream. Today the network is comprised of over 200 institutions of higher education, 100 coaches and advisors, 15 state policy teams, and numerous investors and partners working throughout 34 states and the District of Columbia (Achieving The Dream, 2014). Five core principles guide ATD's "student centered model of institutional improvement" (1) Committed Leadership; (2) Use of evidence to improve policies, programs, and services; (3) Broad engagement; (4) Systematic institutional improvement; (5) Equity (ATD, 2014).

Western State Community College was selected for this study because it provided an opportunity to evaluate student workload at a large, dynamic institution, with a strong commitment to student success, and one in which guided pathways were recently introduced. The pathways were being introduced as one piece of an overhaul to the student intake procedure. In the fall of 2014, the college began a pilot of a new Mandatory Matriculation Procedure (MMP). MMP was introduced as one of two interventions for ATD. The pilot included all incoming, freshman students who had graduated in 2014 from the local school district. Students who had attended the college in the past, such as those with dual-enrollment credits, were excluded. There are two phases of the MMP. In Phase I, students are required to attend orientation, which they may do in person or by completing an online orientation, take their placement tests for math and English, and meet with an academic advisor. It was during the advising session that students were given a pathway, and based in part on the results of the placement tests, given a class schedule for the fall semester. There were enrollment holds placed on each student's records, so they could not register for any classes until they had completed all of the steps. In Phase II, students were required to meet with a counselor in their major,
following Phase II students are "handed off" to a faculty member who serves as their mentor and advisor for the remainder of their time at the college.

Additionally, the college was given goals resulting in the state’s higher education board joining another program, Complete College America leading to a new funding formula, which included performance funding, for public higher education institutions statewide. The benchmarks from Complete College America were one of the measures used to evaluate the performance of the college. Increasing retention, persistence, and ultimately graduation rates, quickly became top priorities for everyone in the organization. The combination of their commitment to student success, their participation in Complete College America, and ATD, as well as the MMP intervention that was born as a result of those efforts,WSCC is an ideal site to conduct the case study.

Participants

This case study seeks to determine how first-time, full-time students at a large, open enrollment, community college perceive their workload. The sample of students was limited to those who took part in Western State Community College’s new Mandatory Matriculation Procedure (MMP). MMP was implemented as a part of the work being done at the college related to their membership in the national student success organization, Achieving the Dream (ATD). MMP requires incoming freshman take placement examinations in English, math, and reading, complete an orientation, and meet with an advisor at which time they are placed on the guided pathway. These steps must all be completed before students are allowed to enroll in classes for their first semester.

Because the guided pathways for the first semester are essentially the same for all academic majors, students were selected based on their enrollment status, their participation in
MMP, and subsequent placement on the guided pathway. Students selected for the study were enrolled in at least twelve credits and at least nine of those credits must be on the courses from the pathway for the first semester. This allowed for the small amount of flexibility that students are allowed when registering for classes. Because the courses on the pathway often fill quickly, some students will be registered in a class that is not on their pathway because they could not get a seat in the required class and needed to maintain full-time status. Additionally, at WSCC over half of all new students are enrolled in at least one developmental course. The developmental courses are not on the pathway, therefore students who are enrolled in nine credits of courses mandated by the pathway and three credits of developmental education will not be excluded.

The participants could have any major in any academic discipline within the liberal arts and sciences. Students enrolled in health sciences and career and technical education programs will be excluded as their pathways differ somewhat from those of the other academic disciplines. One student who was planning to major in Nursing participated in the study, however, she had not yet applied to the Nursing school and was on the pathway for general studies, another planned to be in a career and technical program, but was not yet in that program. Students who have accumulated some college credits through dual-enrollment programs while in high school will also be excluded as they will likely have already completed many of the requirements of the first semester on the pathway.

The participants for the study were selected using Purposeful Sampling. Patton (1990) explains that, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting in formation-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling" (p. 169). Patton (1990) describes 15 different types of purposeful sampling (pp. 169-
For this study, homogenous samples were used. A homogenous sample is used to "describe some particular subgroup in depth. A program that has many different kinds of participants may need in-depth information about a particular subgroup" (Patton, 1990, p. 173). The sample is not necessarily homogenous in terms of demographic variables such as sex, race, or socio-economic status. They were homogenous in terms of the focus of this study. Namely, they were all students at WSCC majoring in the liberal arts and sciences disciplines, and all were first-time, full-time freshman with no prior college experience. (Note: some were already beginning the second semester at the time of the interview, but the interview focused on their perceptions of their first semester)

**Data Collection Procedures**

After receiving Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval, data collection began. Interviews were conducted at a location convenient for students. This meant meeting on campus in an empty room or off-campus at a location agreed upon by both the researcher and the interview subject. Participants were also given the choice of being interviewed online via Skype if that was more convenient for them. The interviews typically lasted between thirty minutes and one hour. Semi-structured interviews were conducted. According to Merriam (1998), a semi-structured interview involves using more open-ended questions (p. 74). Because there is usually some information that the researcher wants from all interviewees, there may be some more structured questions. The interviewer comes prepared with a list of topics and questions, most of which are open-ended and may not be worded the same way each time, or asked in the same order each time (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). Yin (2009) says that in qualitative research, interviews are "guided conversations, rather than structured queries" (p. 106). This type of interview structure should meet the needs of the study, while "simultaneously putting forth friendly, non-
threatening questions" (Yin, 2009, p. 107), and allowing interview subjects to "define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 1998, p. 74). The interviews were recorded and notes were taken by the interviewer during the interview as well.

Along with the interviews, a document review was conducted. A document review allows a researcher to verify that information from the interviews, in this case information about what deliverables were required in a course. The document review also provides details to verify or contradict information from the interviews. Finally, reviewing documents allows the researcher to make inferences (Yin, 2009, p. 103). Yin (2003) warns that these inferences should be "treated as clues worthy of further investigation" (p 103).

The participants were asked to provide the researcher with copies of their course syllabi. Prior to submitting the syllabi, the participants were asked to blackout or delete any information that could be used to identify the course section or the instructor. By examining the syllabi, the researcher was able to make some determinations and inferences about how actual course workloads of the participants compares to their perceived workload.

Finally, member checking was used to get feedback directly from the study participants. They were asked to read rough drafts of the report of their interview and provide feedback about "accuracy and palatability" and provide alternate language and interpretation of the data (Stake, 1995, p. 115). While the feedback from members could influence the final report, Stake (1995) explains that the researcher cannot promise that the subject's interpretation will be included in the final draft of the study, although those interpretations frequently are included in the final draft (p. 115).
Data Analysis Procedures

Analysis of qualitative data should begin with the first document examined, or the first interview conducted. For a researcher to wait until data collection is complete, and then try to analyze mountains of interview transcripts, field notes, and collected documents is folly and could very likely lead to the researcher becoming overwhelmed and perhaps even unable to complete their research. Therefore, data analysis must happen simultaneously with data collection (Berg, 2007, p. 45, Merriam, 1998, p. 162, Stake, 1995, p. 71).

As each interview is completed, the recordings were transcribed and coded. The field notes were "edited, corrected, and made more readable" (Berg, 2007, p. 46). The field notes were compared and reconciled with the interview transcript. This information was added to the computerized data analysis software Dedoose to better organize the information and create meaningful categories. An initial coding scheme proved to be less than helpful. The researcher then recoded the data in Dedoose by combining like codes, eliminating codes that duplicated information, and creating parent and child codes. The coded data were then categorized and examined for emergent themes.

The categories were closely examined in an effort to identify themes. As themes emerged, they will be divided into classifications based on Marsh’s (2001) model of good workload versus bad workload. Marsh explains that good workload, or hours spent on coursework, are those spent doing work that students deem to be valuable and bad hours are those that students don’t believe are valuable to them.

The next step in the data analysis was to interpret the interview transcripts and field notes through the conceptual lens of Vincent Tinto's (2012) "framework for institutional action” (p. 6). There are four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework: Expectations, Support,
Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement. Tinto explains that students’ self-expectations are one driver of success and those are, at least in-part, “shaped…by a variety of institutional actions” (p. 7). In order for students to meet their expectations, Tinto (2012) explains that students must have support, be it financial, academic, or social (p. 7). Students are more likely to be successful if they are given feedback on their performance in a timely manner. This is especially true during their first year of college (p. 7). Finally, involvement or engagement is, according to Tinto, perhaps the most important condition to be met if community colleges are to help students succeed. This means involvement with faculty, staff, and peers.

Once the data was categorized and interpreted, it was written up in a draft form which will be sent to interviewees for member checking in order to get direct feedback from the study participants. They were asked to read rough drafts of the report of their interview and provide feedback about "accuracy and palatability” and provide alternate language and interpretation of the data (Stake, 1995, p. 115).

The document review included course syllabi with descriptions of the deliverables for each course. The deliverables were divided into categories again based on Marsh’s good and bad workload. In addition to being divided into the categories the assignments will be examined chronologically in an effort to determine the ebb and flow of course work over the semester. The documents were compared to the interview data to verify or contradict information from the interviews and to allow for inferences which can serve as clues for further investigation (Yin, 2009, p. 103).

**Trustworthiness (Validity and Credibility)**

Research, of any type must be concerned with “valid and reliable knowledge in an ethical manner (Merriam, 1998, p. 198). In qualitative research, one valuable tool for reaching valid and
reliable knowledge is through the use of multiple “lines of sight” much like the navigator guiding a ship at sea might. This process in qualitative research, as in navigation, is known as triangulation (Berg, 2007, p. 5, Stake, 1995, p. 109). By using multiple methods of gathering data, a researcher can limit threats to internal validity. Internal validity refers to knowing whether or not the study actually measures the constructs that the researchers are attempting to measure (Merriam, 1998, p. 201).

Internal validity is a larger concern in studies where the goal is to explain something, or as Yin (2009) writes, a study attempting to explain “why event x led to event y” (p. 42). Because this case study is concerned with how students perceive their course workload, rather than how that perception affected decisions they made about their academic future, that is less of an issue here. However, another threat to internal validity comes from the nature of this case study, and for that matter any case study that uses data beyond direct observation, the problem of making inferences (Yin, 2009, p. 43). This study does not look at how perceived workload affected decisions students made about their academic future, but it does examine how course workload may affect some future decision. In other words, inferences are being made in this study. To avoid threats to internal validity that come from making incorrect inferences, multiple data sources were used including interviews and document review. Finally, member checking was used in an effort to triangulate and limit the threats to internal validity.

Reliability

Reliability refers to the ability of a future researcher to get the same results from a new study following the same procedure (Yin, 2009, p. 45). Yin (2009) suggests that planning carefully, following a case study protocol, and documenting data and procedures carefully in a case study database can help a researcher to improve reliability (p. 45). In the course of this
study, data was carefully documented and the researcher followed the advice of Yin (2009) to act as though “someone is always looking over your shoulder” (p. 45). Even in the best circumstances a different researcher at a different time and place may find different results. Merriam (1998) explains that, in case study research reliability means that the data is consistent and dependable. She says that the question is not if the results will be found again but rather that the results are consistent with the data collected. She suggests that a researcher clearly explain their position on the group being studied as well as the theory and assumptions behind the study.

Summary

In this chapter covering the proposed research methodology, several key issues were discussed. The chapter began with an introduction of the research method and an explanation of how the study was designed. The research purpose and questions were discussed. An overview was given of the site selected for the case study, additionally, the participants were described. The plan for data collection and analysis were outlined next. Finally, reliability and credibility addressed as they relate to case studies generally and this study specifically.
CHAPTER 4 RESULTS

Introduction

Chapter 4 presents results from a case study designed to determine how first-time, full-time college students perceive their academic workload when placed on a Guided Pathway. Students participated in interviews either face to face or online via Skype. The interviews were coded by assigning a “shorthand designation” in order to easily retrieve and organize data (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Coding was done using the Dedoose software platform. The interviews were followed by an email asking that they review the interview transcripts and write-up to check for errors and omissions, as well as the accuracy of the researcher’s write-up. Course syllabi from courses that would be expected on the Guided Pathway of most first year students were reviewed for number of homework and reading assignments, quizzes, major assignments, exams, and graded activities.

Organization of Chapter

The chapter begins with a brief description of Western State Community College. This is followed with a statement of the research questions and a definition of two key terms; Guided Pathways and academic workload. A discussion of the participants is included along with a chart with demographic information about the students interviewed is included. The next section contains the write-ups or vignettes of each student interview. This section focuses on the two research questions. Also included in this section is a chart that shows the data gleaned from the document review.
Western State Community College (WSCC) was founded in 1971 with one location and about 1000 students, it has since grown to become the largest institution of higher education in its state "with 36% of student headcount enrollment; 31% of the student FTE in the state public higher education institutions; and 64% of student enrollment of the four community colleges" (WSCC Human Resources, n.d.). It is the largest and most ethnically diverse institution of higher education in [Southwestern State]. WSCC serves over 43,000 full and part time students who have more than 200 degree and certificate programs to choose from in over 120 areas of study.

Research Questions and Key Terms

In order to properly conduct a case study of students' perceptions of their course workload, specific questions to guide the inquiry are needed. According to Creswell (2014), researchers in qualitative studies should only ask one or two central questions. These may be followed up with additional sub-questions. In keeping with that advice this study will examine the following research questions:

RQ₁: How do first-time, full-time, freshman students, who have been placed on a guided pathway, perceive their workload during their first semester of college?

RQ₂: How do students’ perceptions of workload influence their academic and social integration when examined through the lens of the four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement)?

The following terms are key to the study and are defined below:
Guided Pathways: Students choose coherent academic majors or programs, not random, individual courses. A clear path to on-time completion is prepared for students, semester by semester. Students remain on their chosen path unless given approval to change by an adviser (Complete College America website, 2014).

Student perceptions of course workload: “a function of class contact hours, independent study hours, English language ability, GPA and the students’ propensity to employ meaning or reproducing approaches to learning” (Kember & Leung, 1998, p. 1).

Interview Participants

Because the guided pathways for the first semester are essentially the same for all academic majors, students were selected based on their enrollment status, their participation in MMP, and subsequent placement on the Guided Pathway. Students selected for the study were enrolled in at least twelve credits and at least nine of those credits were courses on the pathway.

The participants were pursuing a variety of academic disciplines within liberal arts and sciences. Initially, students enrolled in health sciences and career and technical education programs were to be excluded, as their pathways differ somewhat from those of the other academic disciplines. However, in the course of conducting the interviews two students volunteered to be included who had academic goals within the Health Sciences and Career and Technical Education (CTE) areas. They were included after the researcher determined that the student in CTE was early in his academic career and his Guided Pathway mirrored students in liberal arts and sciences at that point. The student who hoping to become a nurse had not yet applied to the nursing program and was on the Guided Pathway for general education as would the case any first year student in liberal arts or sciences.
The participants for the study were selected using Purposeful Sampling. Patton (1990) explains that, "The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting in formation-rich cases for study in depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the research, thus the term purposeful sampling" (p. 169). Patton (1990) describes 15 different types of purposeful sampling (pp. 169-186). For this study Homogenous samples will be used. A homogenous sample is used to "describe some particular subgroup in depth. A program that has many different kinds of participants may need in-depth information about a particular subgroup" (Patton, 1990, p. 173).

Below is a table presenting the demographic characteristics of the participants:

**Table 1: Interview Subject Demographic Characteristics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Respondent</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Race/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>First Language</th>
<th>Living Situation</th>
<th>Children</th>
<th>Siblings/College or no College</th>
<th>Parents Education Level</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td>On Own</td>
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<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>Less than HS</td>
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<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes/No</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>African</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes/Yes</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>Hispanic</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes/Yes</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
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<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes/Yes</td>
<td>HS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>F</td>
<td>Other</td>
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<td>HS</td>
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<td>Parents</td>
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<td>Yes/Yes</td>
<td>College Grad</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>RB</td>
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<td>Caucasian</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>English</td>
<td>Parents</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>Yes/Yes</td>
<td>Grad School</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Interviews**

The following section includes vignettes which will present a summary of each participant interview. The interviews were conducted over a period of several months. An audio
recording device was used in each interview and the researcher took notes as well. They were then transcribed using an online transcription service. The transcripts were edited and checked against the audio recordings and field notes to insure accuracy. They transcripts were coded using Dedoose. The initial coding was refined as the process developed. Some codes which were very similar were eventually combined under a parent code, others were eliminated. The interview transcripts along with the codes were then analyzed. After the interviews presented below, were coded and analyzed, it was clear that saturation had been reached. The process of conducting the interviews, transcribing, and coding the interviews took about 30-40 hours to complete.

The vignettes below present a summary of each interview. They are presented in alphabetical order based on a pseudonym which was assigned to each participant in order to protect their identity.

**AQ**

AQ is a 48-year-old Hispanic male. He is a reentry student who had been considering enrolling in college for quite some time but circumstances prevented him from being able to do so. His job as an event coordinator kept him very busy and often away from home. Recently, with the full support of his employer, he had the opportunity to attend college as he explained:

Well, I kept playing with the idea of returning to school since I was 20, but due to my job I was traveling a lot. I'm talking about two or three times every month, I wasn't able to [attend college]. My company is actually going [in] different directions, so they have given me the opportunity to do whatever I wanted in school, because they always knew
that I wanted to come back to school. So now that they're helping me, I feel more support and now...can do what I really want to do.

When asked what being a WSCC student meant to him, AQ was clearly excited about his opportunity to be a student at the institution and having the opportunity to study Psychology with an eye toward changing not only his life, but the lives of others:

Well, the opportunity, I mean, this is what it is for me, you know? Um, yes, I've been doing special events for twenty years and, you know, it gets to the point where, with events, you can only go so far. So now it's like I want to [major in] Psychology, I have seen too many things going to events, dance parties at night, during the day and I think that, you know, especially with addiction, stuff like that, I think a lot of people need help and so that's why I'm doing this.

At the time of the interview AQ had finished his first year as a first-time, full-time college student and was still not clear about exactly what his academic goals were. He explained, “I am not sure exactly where I'm going. I'm not sure if I want to transfer to a university, I'm still debating whether I'm going to do that or not. I mean I'm forty-eight-years-old. I know that I want to get a certificate so I can start working on the field that...while I go into my Masters, but I'm still not sure how I'm going to work that out.” He had plans to meet again with an advisor for some guidance, but clearly was unsure what his next steps should be. In terms of how he was doing at accomplishing his goals, AQ was more sure of himself saying that he was enjoying being a student and that “I’m doing great, I mean my, my grades are A and B, I only, I really got one C, um, you know, but everything else is going great.”
AQ had been taking classes on his Guided Pathway including English 102, Anthropology 101, Philosophy 102, and Sexual Psychology 130. He felt that these classes were helping him reach his goals. Next, he was asked about his academic workload and explained that:

I always have something going usually we see a chapter throughout one week, which is two classes and then I have an assignment for that. So every week I have an assignment, English, we have, um, four essays throughout the semester and uh, and we are [going to] start working on the last one actually, which has just got the instructions yesterday…We have a questionnaire and we also have an inquisitive, that we have to do based on the book, of course, and that always helped. For psychology, we are working on an essay, of a book a critique we have to put our own criteria on that as well.

AQ, was about how the workload compared to what he thought it would be before he entered college, he talked about how much easier it was in the beginning and how it has increased as he has advanced. In his first semester AQ, for whom English is a second language, had begun with developmental English, and he had found it to be fairly easy. As his classes became more challenging, so did his workload, but even then he did not feel overwhelmed except “I'm doing a research, you know, but this is what I expected basically. I knew it wasn't going to be easy.”

AQ spends about four to five hours each week doing homework, studying, and reading outside of class time and this was about what he had expected before he had started college. He also said that doing the work had helped him in terms of his English ability:
I knew that it was going to be a lot of work. I just, you know, because this is, this is near to me. Um, I heard my friends talking about it, you know, it can be hard at times. You're going to have a lot of assignments. I just did not know that it was going to be too many essays. I really didn't have any idea how college was going to work. I just didn't realize that for everything we have to do an essay and you know, it, it sure have helped me improve my English because English is my second language. So, um, you know, even my friends from two years ago, you know, they tell me that my English has improved so much and I mean they can notice that and that's a great feeling.

AQ’s employer had been very supportive of his efforts to return to school and when asked, “How do you manage your time outside of school like work, family, and other activities?” He explained:

Well, I'm working really minimal right now, so really my full time job is the school at the moment. So, I only work when they really need me to do events, events to do the promotions and what not. And, usually they're out of town but at the same time because they're usually on the weekends, I don't miss any class, so that's great. I'm actually my, the owner of the company who used to be my boss, when I started to come to college, told the marketing department that if they needed, if they have any questions, to make sure that they called me after 4:00 in the afternoon, they cannot call me before.
AQ said he was satisfied with the time with which it took to receive feedback and grades for his work with the exception of one class where the instructor had not used Canvas (the WSCC LMS). About the class where the LMS was not utilized AQ said:

That's really frustrating because um, you know, I, you know, when I travel or when I'm anywhere, not anywhere, but usually when I go out, my laptop is in the car so you know, if I decide to get together with some friends. I could just pull out my laptop if I'm waiting for them and just work it or really I can work from it from anywhere. Um, you know, but when I cannot, but for this specific class, if I don't have my notes with me sometimes I feel like, oh shoot, I forgot my notebook. I, you have brought it with me so I could do my homework. So yeah, Canvas is definitely a plus [for completing homework].

AQ was receiving grades of A and B which was what he had expected prior to coming to college. He also said that he been taking advantage of the academic support services, particularly the Writing Center. When asked he smiled and said, “Yes the writing center. Everybody knows me and yeah I spent a lot of time over there.” Not only did AQ often seek out help with essays at the Writing Center he also encouraged his classmates to take advantage of the center. He seemed pleased that some had heeded his advice saying, “Yeah. So yeah, I'm always encouraged by, um, you know, the other students to go over there.”

AQ was asked if there was anything else WSCC could do to help him be more successful and he said, “Not, not that I can think of. I mean, uh, you know, [WSCC has] … so many things
to help the students and um, and I'm still, you know, looking into them to see what is it that, you know, I can benefit from really.”

When asked about participating in clubs or organizations on campus, AQ said he was not participating at this time, but told a brief story about his attempt, along with one of his teachers, to start a club on campus:

I don't know what I was thinking of, I [was] going to create a club…with one of my English teachers …English 92 actually. [because] she is really into recycling and helping the environment. And she did two field trips. One of them was at the reservation, the Springs Preserve, and that we went to see the tiny house there and it was really cool and we were talking about creating a club where we can teach other students about, you know, recycling and help to, to live, not necessarily [in] a tiny house, but how to save energy and whatnot. But um, you know, we started to do other things, you know, and the people that I actually have sign up, they called me and they told me that they couldn't make it. So, [in] the end I was standing alone with the teacher. So it's like, well, I guess it's not happening.

When asked if there was anything else he would like to share about his experiences at WSCC, AQ was quite positive saying,” Everybody’s great. Everybody that I have come across asking for any kind of help, I mean even I went to the, uh, to the, the department that they help you help you to you know to look for a job, Um, there is also, I don't remember the name of the organization here as well where, you know, they help you with your assignments and your homework and in everything that you need if you stay here for the four years. I don't remember
what's the name of the club or organization is actually here in this building. And um, um, um, uh, you know, everybody's been really helpful. Yes.’

Table 2: AQ Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b Expectations</th>
<th>RQ2a Feedback</th>
<th>RQ2b Support</th>
<th>RQ2c Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are on GP Workload as expected</td>
<td>Certificate of Achievement</td>
<td>1 Instructor not using Canvas</td>
<td>Getting support from employer</td>
<td>Does not participate in clubs or organizations on campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments valuable</td>
<td>Grades are as expected</td>
<td>Grades usually received in 1 week from others</td>
<td>Instructor not providing support (when not using the LMS)</td>
<td>Tried to organize a club, not other students will to participate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4-5 Hours weekly</td>
<td>Classes are helping to reach goals</td>
<td>Has used tutoring centers</td>
<td>College provides support (Tutoring)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent as expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork does not interfere with outside activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

AT

AT, an eighteen-year-old, Asian, female, was interviewed via Skype early in the summer following her first year of college. AT came to the decision to go to college at WSCC after being accepted at the local university and learning that the cost for attending was more than double that of attending WSCC she explained, “I was originally accepted, to [local university] but they asked for so much. They asked for like 5K in tuition and I cannot afford that. So I had to go to [WSCC]. They asked for like 2K.” AT was asked what being a WSCC student means to her and she said that it had “just absolutely open[ed] new opportunities, more opportunities and help[ed] me discover myself as an individual.” AT’s academic goals were clear in terms of what she wanted to accomplish general speaking, however she was unsure of the program that she would ultimately transfer into beyond it being in the sciences. However, her more immediate goals were quite clear as she stated, “For each semester achieve like a full academic workload, like at least five classes or at least fifteen credits and complete my associate's science degree and graduate in
two years.” At the time of the interview AT had completed her first year as a first-time, full-time college student and was taking two summer classes. She said that so far she was doing well when it came to accomplishing her academic goals. She had finished the first two semesters with a 3.22 Grade Point Average (GPA). Her classes had been a part of her Guided Pathway and when asked if the classes were helping her reach her goals she replied, “I mean it's like a required class or I guess you can say it does.”

AT was asked to talk about the workload she had been assigned in her first two semesters of college. She said:

Last semester I had remedial class and that was like really easy. Um, um, the fall semester was OK. It was like what I expected a little bit to have more coursework expected from high school because I went to a magnet school and they have like the same about same workload as college, took AP classes too. So I'll just used to kind of the workload and I was taking 12 credits, so it was my four classes, so it's not that bad. The spring I took 15 credits and I worked part time. And that was like really, really hard to balance school and work at the same time. It helped me learn about time management, but it really stressed me out.

The next question was a follow-up about how the workload compared to her expectations to which she replied, “I wasn't used to the reading. So in order to like start push myself to read the textbook, that was the [hardest] thing for me to do. The homework was OK just about the same level of high school. It's just what the reading caught me off guard and the amount of time you need to study for each class.” She was then asked if she felt like the classes had been valuable and she said she did feel like they had and commented, “I know I've learned a lot about
just humans itself or how they act and just the psychology of humans. The fall semester I took ALS (Note: Advanced Life Skills is the freshman experience course at WSCC) and I think that helped me overall.” AT stated that she normally sets aside six or seven hours each day, including weekends for homework, studying, and reading outside of class. This, she explained, was substantial when compared to high school because she, “Didn’t spend a lot of time through high school, a lot of time studying because it's the easy material.”

When asked how she manages time constraints outside of school AT said that:

Since I got a part-time job at [WSCC]. Um, what I had to do is I wouldn't, there's when there's usually off time I would just take out my homework and just do it until it gets busy, then I help other people, other students in need.

The interviewer followed up with, “What about your social life? Do you have time for hobbies and family?” She answered by explaining that “Sometimes [she does her] hobbies. If I choose to stay up past midnight or like when I'm just really stressed out with homework itself, I just do something.”

AT said that it takes, on average about two weeks for her to receive grades and feedback on her assignments. She was also asked if the grades she had been receiving are what she had expected before starting college. She said, “I was upset that I got a C, so like not really, because I'm an A and B student throughout high school.” AT has visited the Math Lab at WSCC for help and assistance with her math class. The tutors were helpful with her homework, but she struggled to remember what she had learned from the tutors and the class when taking tests. She also commented that the staff in the Math Lab were friendly.
AT was then asked if there was anything else WSCC could do to help her be more successful and she said she thought that, “Honestly, as of right now, my opinion is that they should just add more extracurricular [activities]. This even though it may, because, it may help with student success or may not, it can at least help students [kind of] be less stressed from this, from just the school environment itself.” This was a wonderful segue to the next question which was about AT’s participation in clubs or organizations at WSCC. She said that she had participated in clubs at the local university but had not at WSCC because, “They really haven't grabbed my attention like those [at local university], most of the clubs at WSCC are either academic related and I haven't taken most of the classes there are related to, um, the club itself such as like bio[logy] or chem[istry].” She also said that in high school she had been a member of the debate team, something not offered at WSCC in many years.

Finally, AT was asked about anything else that WSCC could do to help her be successful and she said that “Honestly, all I think you need to know is that WSCC really did help me grow, helped me find myself and how much it can actually handle on my plate.”
Table 3: AT Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b Expectations</th>
<th>RQ2a Feedback</th>
<th>RQ2b Support</th>
<th>RQ2c Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are on GP</td>
<td>Associate’s degree in 2 years</td>
<td>Grades usually received in about 2 weeks</td>
<td>She has used Math Lab</td>
<td>Not involved in any clubs or organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload was easy first semester, hard to balance in second semester</td>
<td>Grades not as expected (1 C)</td>
<td>Classes helping to reach goals (because they are required)</td>
<td>Staff friendly and helpful</td>
<td>No interest in WSCC clubs and organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Classes are valuable</td>
<td>Assignments are valuable</td>
<td>Workload more than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 6-7 hours daily (including weekends)</td>
<td>Time spent more than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No time for outside activities (does have a job)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

CJ

CJ, an 18-year-old, African American, female student was interviewed at about the midpoint of her first semester at WSCC. CJ had been out of state and returned to Western State and began attending a local high school where she met a group of students who were going on a field trip to WSCC. She joined that group and went with them for a campus visit. She explained that they had talked her into attending WSCC. She said that her mother had attended WSCC in 2004 and was also a big influence on her decision to go to the college.

CJ has the goal of becoming a pastry chef and felt like WSCC was a good start, but that she would need “a little bit more than [WSCC].” Because, at this early point in her academic career
CJ was taking general education courses exclusively, she said that, “The classes I'm taking now aren't necessarily, well, they’re important but to me they're not like the main classes that I should be taking.” She said that so far her first semester was going “Pretty good. I'm passing my classes and they seem fairly easy. Maybe a little bit too easy?” For her first semester CJ was taking hospitality, English, a composition class, and oral communication. All of the classes CJ was taking in her first semester were a part of her Guided Pathway except for the English class which was developmental education course (English 92). CJ felt like the courses she was taking had helped her reaching her goals. She was especially excited about her hospitality class because, as a part of that class, she had done an internship at a local hotel for two weeks. She said, “I was in the back of the house and I was in the front of the house is because it was like adventurous, kind of.”

The workload in her first semester was actually less than she had anticipated. She explained:

First started is I expected like books, so many books and books piled high, but it's not like maybe like one or two, books for each class and then the quizzes or what's in the book. You do them online. The only thing that's really like in person are papers that we write and the get editing back and we fix them. We do like workshops. We'll do two workshops before our final, but it's not really not what I expected. I expected more work in like more hardship. I thought it was going to be hard and like stressed out. People make college seem like its stressed out when it's not really.

CJ stated that she thought the assignments in her classes had been valuable to her. When asked about the amount of time she normally spends each day on homework, studying, and reading for her classes each week she said, “Each week? I don't really set a time limit. I just do it,
get it done, go back and reread it and make sure everything's great.” The interviewer probed a bit more asking, “Do you think you spend more than a couple hours a day?” She replied, “Yes, the paper that I'm working on is three to four pages and I think I've been working on it for five days now. Two rough drafts and then the final so twelve pages.” Again, the interviewer asked a probing question, this time asking about how many hours CJ spends on classwork outside of class and she said, “Maybe about six, and then I take a break and then if I feel like there more than three more hours. And then I'm just done for the day.” Next, the interviewer asked her about how that compared to her expectation prior to coming to college. She seemed to be surprised by the workload and said:

I didn't think I was going to study at all. I thought it was going to be like, they give us a book and they give us some questions and we do it and we turn it in and that was it and I didn't think I was going to study as much as I do or work as much as I do.

CJ said that her latest class ends at 1:50pm and after that she is able to begin her school work and family commitments but still has time for a social life.

With respect to her grades CJ was satisfied overall and was receiving the grade she thought she would, before entering college, with the exception of her English class. She explained that in English, she was required to turn in several drafts of her papers before the final paper was due. She said that while she always turns in the final draft, she is sometimes remiss in submitting the early drafts or submits incomplete versions and that has had a negative impact on her grade in that class.

CJ was required to visit the Writing Center for her English class. She said, “It's kind of like a mandatory thing, you have to go to the writing center for at least one of the workshops. It
can be the seventh workshop, the first workshop, we have like a set total of, I think, eight workshops and you have to visit the Writing Center at least once so you can get feedback from people other than your classmates.” When talking about her experience with the Writing Center she was less than satisfied saying “It wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t good.” The interviewer followed up asking her specifically what she meant to which she replied:

We had a paper, I explained it to [the tutor]. They didn't really understand what he was having us write about. So they didn't know how to go about talking about my paper, like for editing, and like conversation lines they weren't sure. So we didn't really know what the assignment was and they asked you about that.

The interviewer probed, “Did you have a copy of your assignment?”

Yes, the lady didn't understand. It was a complex paper. We were putting two stories together that didn't really have a similar meaning, but they, each story had something that the other one needed. We were putting that in the paper.

CJ said that she thought there was one thing WSCC could do to help her be more successful. She said that keeping the computer labs open more hours would be beneficial to students. Some students, she explained, get to campus early in the morning before the labs are open, others may not have access to the Internet in their homes and would benefit from having increased access to the labs.

CJ was asked about participating in clubs and organizations on campus and said she has not as yet, but might in her second semester. She explained, “Well my mom's more school than clubs type of person. She's not a really a ‘OK you have sports,’ she's more like, ‘did you do your
homework?” Lastly, she was asked if there was anything she would like to share about her experience at WSCC so far, she said, “They’ve been pretty good.”

**Table 4: CJ Research Question Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b</th>
<th>RQ2a</th>
<th>RQ2b</th>
<th>RQ2c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Development English not on GP other classes are</td>
<td>WSCC “good start” for academic goal</td>
<td>Some instructors assign grades right away; some take 3 weeks or more</td>
<td>Has family support</td>
<td>Has not participated in clubs or organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload less than expected</td>
<td>Classes are helping to reach goals</td>
<td>Frustrated with how long some take to return grades</td>
<td>Has visited tutoring center</td>
<td>Experience at tutoring center “not bad, but not good”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments are valuable</td>
<td>Time spent on schoolwork more than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutor did not understand the assignment</td>
<td>Computer labs need to have more hours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 6-9 hours a day (did not seem to be sure of answer)</td>
<td>Some grades as expected; others less than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork not interfering with outside activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**GL**

*Author’s Note: GL is one of two students interviewed whose plans for the future were not in-line with the original subject profile of the study, as he planned to enter the Computer Information Technology field, however he was early in his academic career, and the courses on his Guided Pathway mirrored those of students on Guided Pathways for Liberal Arts and Science majors. Therefore, he was interviewed and included in the results*

Being a first generation college student played a big role in the decision to attend WSCC for GL, a nineteen-year-old, male, Hispanic, student who said, “Well, I came to the decision of attending college because my parents never gone to college and all, the[ir] highest degree is high school diploma, but that’s just about it, because now they are, my parents were persuading us to
actually strive higher than they are doing and have a better life.” GL had tried to enroll in a dual enrollment program between WSCC and the local university, but eventually decided it was best for him to finish at WSCC and then transfer. For him, being a WSCC student meant having more flexibility and freedom to choose his class schedule and class times he wanted instead of having a set schedule like he had when attending high school. He is planning to go into computer maintenance and said of his academic goals:

Well, my academic goal is to actually help other people because [what] I'm trying to do is try to work at CCSD, so I'm going to, my major is computer science, so whatever broken where, whatever's broken for computers, I'm usually there and help them instead of, instead of kids having to wait for other students to finish their projects we're there to fix it, fix the computer right before the end of the happens to make sure that you finish on time.

GL was asked how he was doing so far in achieving his goals and said:

Well, for the first semester it was actually scary because the teachers [in] high school just keep on telling you that it's going to be scary and that and there's no time to write notes and all that. But most of it is a lie because there's more than most professors that tell you what you need to write and there's whiteboards they use. And also, while I'm at [WSCC], I didn't know anybody in there, because everyone else who I knew, friends from high school [had] gone to other colleges. But yeah, you can make friends over here as well, which like halfway through the first semester I met up
with a group of people at the cafeteria who played a lot of board games. So I actually joined, actually joined the groups.

GL had just started his third semester at the time of the interview and had begun the first of the classes in CIT. Prior to that he had taken only general education courses on the Guided Pathway. Not only did GL feel like the course in his first year had helped him in reaching his goals, he was hoping to be able to share his experience with others, telling the interviewer that, “There are some classes that I'm starting to know more about the world, which I just want to volunteer more at our high school that I been to and talk about it.”

Next, GL was asked about his workload and if it compared to what he had expected before coming to college. He said:

I think so and I expect it to be a lot of work from professors, but it's always at an even balance is giving you time to actually work. And I like how they have the calendar on Canvas (LMS). They actually told the assignments ahead of time, whereas at high school day you get the work right there and right then and there you have to finish it by tomorrow.

GL felt like the assignments in his classes had been valuable, saying that, “they've been actually valuable. Like some, because, the EGG 101 is actually physics. So were you dealing with real word problems like how much tension can one object can hold it before it starts to break.”

He said that he spends about six to eight hours a week typically doing homework, studying, and reading for his classes. On weeks when he has a test he will spend more time, about twelve hours. This, according to GL, is about what he had expected before coming to
college. He also said that he has enough time for family activities and meeting his time commitments outside of school and he explained:

I do a part-time job that you to be where I film the football games and practices. So I've been doing that since I started doing college, so whenever I'm at school I also worked there or when I'm not where we're doing work now whenever we're on break like winter or summer break, I'll work over there at the same time.

Next, GL was asked about how long it usually takes for grades and feedback on his assignments and he said he normally gets his grades by the next class period. He also said that he is had the expectation that he would be a B student before starting college and he was surprised and pleased that he had an A average.

He said that he had taken advantage of the tutoring center and that his experience had been positive adding “it was actually nice for them to actually help because even though there's not a lot of things going over there, so there's a constant one on one tutoring.” The next question asked what else WSCC could do to help him be successful and he said “none that I can think of.”

GL does not participate in any clubs or organizations at WSCC, however he did in school being in the marching band. When asked why he did not participate in any of the clubs at WSCC he said “I don’t know, I just don’t.”

Finally, he was asked if there was anything else about his experience at WSCC that he would like to share. He said:

It was actually wonderful. That experience as a first semester, like I said, it was scary but actually made some acquaintances that did board games, but by second semester it was a bit iffy because I had
some professors that didn't teach that very well in classes, like I had one for Psychology 101, and I'm taking IS 115 again [be]cause the one I had before she, she teaches us like we already know the already know how things work. So, that way now I'm doing it online, now that professors teaching us everything from scratch. And so, um, right now I'm using Rate My Professor as a quote, unquote reliable source just to get it, just to get a, just to get a gist of it, see if it's good or not because there's some things teachers say treat kids, treat students as kids, which I tried to avoid those at all, at all, all times.

Table 5: GL Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b</th>
<th>RQ2a</th>
<th>RQ2b</th>
<th>RQ2c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are on GP</td>
<td>Transfer to university</td>
<td>Grades usually received within 1 week</td>
<td>Has visited tutoring center</td>
<td>Met group of students who play board games in school cafeteria</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload as expected</td>
<td>Classes are helping to reach goals</td>
<td></td>
<td>Positive experience at tutoring center because one-on-one attention from tutors</td>
<td>Does not participate in clubs or organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments valuable</td>
<td>Grades received are better than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 6-8 hours on weeks without a test; about 12 hours on test weeks</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>No interest in participating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent is as expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork not interfering with outside activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JB

JB, an eighteen-year-old, Caucasian, female student, decided to attend WSCC for financial reasons stating that, “After graduating high school I wanted to attend [local 4-year...
university], but knew that it would be smarter financially to start here and transfer.” When asked what being a WSCC student meant to her, JB replied, “It means getting my education and keeping myself on track and knowing my priorities, what I need to be doing and staying on top of everything in my coursework.”

We next discussed her goals and what she hopes to accomplish at WSCC. JB, a Psychology major, said that maintaining a 3.5 Grade Point Average (GPA) and getting her Bachelor’s degree as soon as possible were her goals and that at WSCC she hopes to complete her core classes and other requirements needed to get into [local 4-year university]. JB said that she plans to complete an Associate’s degree before transferring to the university.

JB was asked about how she is doing at achieving her goals and said, “it's been going very well. I've maintained that 3.5, which also helped me maintain my scholarship. I'm planning on continuing that this upcoming fall semester and the summer semester for that.”

The interview was conducted after JB’s first full academic year in which she should have been placed on a Guided Pathway. When asked if she was familiar with the Guided Pathway and were her first year’s courses on the pathway she asked, “are you, are you talking about like the core classes and what I need to accomplish before actually moving on into like the specifics of my degree?” The interviewer clarified that the Guided Pathway should have been given to her in a required meeting with a counselor prior to starting her first semester at which time she should have been instructed to take specific courses in each semester. She said:

They didn't tell me what to take. They gave me the option to pick and choose as my schedule allows me to with work it gets complicated but I've been taking three to four classes each semester. So maintaining full time.
The interviewer asked, “[the counselor] gave you a degree sheet and said these are the courses you're going to need to graduate and you pick and choose what you want to do rather than giving you an actual pathway… this is your first semester of courses, second semester and so on?” She responded by saying “Yeah, they handed me the degree sheet and basically told me like we recommend you take these but you don't absolutely have to…you get to choose but this is what we recommend and I have taken the recommendations into consideration.” JB was asked if the classes she had chosen to take were helping her in reaching her goals and she said, “yes, they are actually.”

JB, when asked to talk about the amount of work she had been assigned in her classes and how her workload compares with what she was expecting before coming to college, explained that she has an older brother who is a doctoral candidate and that she has watched as he went through school, so she fully expected to have a “heavy workload.” She went on to say that, “[I] was able to handle it a lot better than I had assumed at first. It's definitely been like a lot of writing and you know, a lot of comprehension and things like that. But it's, it's been well.” JB felt that the classes had been valuable and specifically stated, “My English professors have really, like what they've taught me has definitely carried over, especially in my other classes and everything like that. Um, along with the Psychology courses I've taken that I carry over to other courses in terms of, you know, um, in finding the way things work and everything like that. Just looking at the Psychology.”

JB spends about eight to ten hours doing homework, studying, and reading outside of class each week. She said that the amount of time spent on school work is “definitely almost right on to what I expected” prior to coming to college. She was then asked, “how do you manage time commitments outside of school? Things like work, family and other activities?”
said for her, “school is always placed at the top priority. So everything I schedule is based around my schooling.” As a follow-up she was asked if school interfered with her other activities or did she feel like she still have enough time to do everything, to which she replied, “No. No. It definitely interferes, but I make it work.”

Next grades were discussed, first she was asked how long does it usually take for her to receive grades and feedback on her work. JB said it never takes more than a day or two and sometimes she gets a notification on Canvas the next day. She was also asked if the grades she was receiving were what she expected before starting college, and she said they were and that she had been meeting her goal of maintaining a 3.5 GPA.

JB has taken advantage of the academic support centers at WSCC and said of her experience there:

It was very pleasant. Everyone here is extremely nice and um, I already had some like, prior relationships with her because I work up at the café here so a lot of them will come up for lunch or whatever and you know, well we had that established kind of thing. You serve my coffee, I'll help you, I'll tutor you, kind of thing.

JB was asked if there was anything else that WSCC could do for her to help her be successful. She replied, “Give me free classes. No, I'm just kidding. But um, um, the first thing that really comes to mind is, um, I guess helping students be aware of more scholarship opportunities.”

The final questions were about her level of participation in clubs and organizations on campus and if there was anything else WSCC could do to help her be more successful. JB has not participated in clubs or organizations at all due to a lack of time. About there being anything
else the college could do to help her be more successful, she said, “I don't think so, there's
nothing that comes off the top of the head.”

Table 6: JB Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b</th>
<th>RQ2a</th>
<th>RQ2b Support</th>
<th>RQ2c Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Was not mandated to use GP</td>
<td>Maintain 3.5 GPA</td>
<td>Grades received in a day or two</td>
<td>Has visited the tutoring center</td>
<td>Does not participate in any clubs or organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expected heavy workload</td>
<td>Expected heavy workload</td>
<td>Expected heavy workload</td>
<td>Expected heavy workload</td>
<td>Expected heavy workload</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments have been valuable</td>
<td>Assignments have been valuable</td>
<td>Assignments have been valuable</td>
<td>Assignments have been valuable</td>
<td>Assignments have been valuable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 8-10 hours weekly</td>
<td>Spends 8-10 hours weekly</td>
<td>Spends 8-10 hours weekly</td>
<td>Spends 8-10 hours weekly</td>
<td>Spends 8-10 hours weekly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork interferes with outside activities</td>
<td>Schoolwork interferes with outside activities</td>
<td>Schoolwork interferes with outside activities</td>
<td>Schoolwork interferes with outside activities</td>
<td>Schoolwork interferes with outside activities</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

JS

Author’s note: JS was the second of two students interviewed for the study who had academic goals not completely in-line with the subject profile established for the study. In this case, JS planned to enter the nursing field which would have placed her in a Health Sciences program rather than Liberal Arts. However, the researcher made the determination to continue with the interview and include JS in the results after having determined that while JS aspired to be a nurse, she had not yet applied to the program and as such, was on the same Guided Pathway as an entering student in the Liberal Arts without a declared major.

Several factors influenced the decision to attend WSCC for JS, an eighteen-year-old, female, Hispanic student. To begin with, financial concerns certainly played a role in the decision as she explained, “I was never really interested in like other, like the university or
anything like that simply because I knew that my mom was a single mother, couldn't really afford that.”

In addition to the financial concerns, she had not considered entering a four-year school because her Grade Point Average (GPA) in high school had not been “very, very, high” and she had not been a “really good student” in high school. However, she had a desire to continue her education and after meeting with the counselor at her high school, she decided that the community college would be a viable option. She explained, “I just, I wanted to continue on my education so I came over here to WSCC then because it seemed like it would benefit me more maybe, I was thinking of transferring from here.” When asked about being a WSCC student and what that means to her, JS was neither excited nor disappointed. She said, “to me I feel like actually no less or better,” after all, she was still planning to transfer after completing an Associate’s degree. She was just focused on her goals and whether it was at a university, or community college and said she wanted to “just pursue my career pretty much.”

While JS had earlier stated that she planned to transfer to a university, when asked about her specific goals, she expressed a desire to work as a nurse prior to going to university. She said:

Well, I want to get my Associates and um, in nursing and then I would like to, um, yeah, I would want to get my Associate’s here in nursing and then work a little bit and then probably get my Bachelor’s later on.

When asked about how she was doing at achieving her goals, she said that while “at first it was easy, but then as time goes on I have a lot of trouble, like as a personal, a lot of trouble.” She expressed concerns that she was struggling in some classes and having problems:
…understanding like my English class and also my psychology class.

So I feel like I [will] have to pay for those classes again. That's what's worrying me right now.

JS was enrolled in 12 credit hours of general education courses which at WSCC is considered a full load. She was taking English 101, Sociology 101, Psychology 101, and Math 120. She was asked if those courses were included in a Guided Pathway and if she understood what the Guided Pathway is, she said she did and that they are a part of her Guided Pathway. Next she was asked if she felt like the classes she was taking were helping her in reaching her goals. She said:

Well, I was just told that, when I met with my advisor, I was told that that's how [it] would be if I would get my Associate's here. So I'm pretty much just going with what I was told that I need for my major or degree.

Next, the interview turned to questions about her perceptions of her academic workload. First, she was asked how the workload compared to her expectations prior to entering college. She seemed to have an overall positive view of the workload when compared to her prior expectations and of her professors:

When I would hear from…college students, when I was in high school, I was really, really scared because I thought it was…going to be like sleepless nights and um, uh, just uh, homework back to back and stuff. So when I came into college, um, my professors here in college are more easy going than my high school teachers and they actually have good timing for everything. So I feel like it's not so bad as it sounds.
When asked about the perceived value of the work given in classes JS said, “I understand, uh, activities assigned activities we're doing in class and then we get um, homework assigned. I feel like I understand the lesson more.”

The next few questions dealt with the actual amount of time she spent on school work such as doing homework, studying, and reading for her classes each week. She said that she only attends school two days a week and spends about two hours a day, four days a week on school work outside of class for a total of about eight hours a week not including time spent in class. She was then asked how that amount of time, eight hours a week, compared to what she thought it would be before she started college:

I think I want to get to the point to where college students [say] that it's like very, very hard on them, college is very hard on them because, well I haven't actually gotten into the courses that [are] like it will be in for nursing and stuff. So, um, I think right now it's OK, but later on it's going to be a lot.

When asked about managing time outside of school, JS explained that it wasn’t a problem because:

…When I first started college I didn't, I don't have a job yet. Actually, I barely got called in for an interview, um, this past weekend and it's, my family's fine because since I only take … two days out of the week, I'm here being here in school from 9:00 AM to 9:00 PM. I do spend a lot of time with my family. I'm always with them. I support my brother in school when he needs me. I go to work with my mom whenever she needs me.
And um, well when I start working I [will] choose days out of the week that I don't have school.

Next, she was asked about how long it usually takes to receive grades and feedback on her work. At this point she expressed concerns about one class in particular:

Well, right now, something I'm not OK with is um, my English professor, um, there's a Canvas website (the college’s LMS) that um, we have, uh, the students are supposed to use, but our teacher never um, our English professor never uses it, so I don't know what grade I have in his class and um, but I'm OK with like the rest of my classes. Um, I have a decent grade. They actually do provide me with that information, but my English professor doesn't. And when we ask him for help, you know, it’s just never there actually.

Although earlier in the interview JS had voiced concerns about her grades in a couple of her classes, when asked specifically about her grades and if they were what she had expected before she came to college, she seemed less concerned saying that she was “actually receiving grades that I never thought I would receive. So, I had like Bs and As and I thought I would not be able to like catch up with the work and stuff, but I’m pretty caught up, yeah.”

She was then asked if she had taken advantage of any of the tutoring or academic support centers on campus and she said she had not. When asked why she had not she replied that:

I have thought about it and it's like, um, I have thought about going to the to get help here um, especially for my English class, like on essays, research papers, stuff like that. But um, I always seem to just do it on my own and see if I can do it on my own. Even if I don't understand it or do I
try to work my way around it, I'm pretty much just a little shy or too scared to go over and ask for help.

The next question was, is there anything else that WSCC could do to help you be successful? To this she replied:

I think that WSCC has everything that um, that families can work with and students can work with. Um, they can actually be successful. It's just me personally, I probably just need to get out there and, and actually work with the resources and opportunities that have around me, but I think that they have everything so far. Yeah.

She was then asked about participation in clubs or organizations on campus. She said she had not participated in any clubs or organizations and was not aware that there were clubs on campus for students. Finally, she was asked if there was anything else WSCC could do to help her be more successful, she said simply “nope.”

Table 7: JS Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b Expectations</th>
<th>RQ2a Feedback</th>
<th>RQ2b Support</th>
<th>RQ2c Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are on GP Workload less</td>
<td>Be able to pursue career goals</td>
<td>English professor does not use Canvas</td>
<td>English professor not supportive</td>
<td>Does not participate in clubs or organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>than expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments are valuable</td>
<td>Associate’s degree</td>
<td>Does not know grade in English</td>
<td>Has not visited tutoring center</td>
<td>Was not aware that WSCC has clubs and organizations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 8 hours weekly</td>
<td>Not meeting academic goals (in 2 classes)</td>
<td>Feedback received from other classes is “OK”</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent is less than expected</td>
<td>Classes are helping to reach goals</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork does not interfere</td>
<td>Grades as expected (except in 2 classes)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>with outside activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
KB

For KB an eighteen-year-old, African American, student, and a Business major in her first semester, the decision to attendWSCC came about as a result of her desire to learn about business and, “how to manage a business because, I'm trying to be an entrepreneur and I think going through the business side, and the backgrounds, and the marketing could help me a lot with that.” KB said to her being a WSCC student means, “Ambition, and, um, creative... I think each one of these students are really cool and I talked to my colleagues, they all have like a different goal even though we're all here for like the same thing to get a degree, you're like, it's cool to know what they're doing and what their goals are, So yeah”

KB’s academic goals include an Associate’s in Business Management at WSCC followed by a Bachelor’s degree in Business, and ultimately a Master’s of Business Administration. She plans to transfer, after finishing her Associate’s, to one of two local universities that she mentioned, one the local public university and the other a private school. She said that she thinks she is progressing toward her goals saying that she had, “learned how to, budget financially, and how to know more about the backgrounds of marketing detail.” For her first semester at WSCC she was taking Business Management, Marketing, English and, “Librarian….. I don't know the exact terminology of it, but it's like library.” KB said these courses were a part of her Guided Pathway except the Library class which she said, “I took that class to know how to research my papers because for English you have to know how to report and research... But, Marketing and Business Management is what really helped me to go for my goals.”

When asked to discuss the workload in her classes and how it compared to her expectations prior to starting college, KB said:
It can be kind of hard because I go to school Monday through Thursday and because of that, because of my whole financial aid got messed up, so I had to like reschedule, not reschedule, pick out my classes all over again because of that. But, for next semester I know to just have classes like Tuesday and Thursday or only Monday and Wednesday and I think that would help narrow down like the homework.

To clarify, the interviewer asked, “So, give you more time to do it?” She replied, “Because there's a lot doing it back to back like Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday. So yeah, that's the only thing.”

KB felt as though the assignments in her classes had been valuable, but she was having an issue in one class. She expressed concerns:

Yes, but the only thing is I wish, um, my professor really, how can I say this? Like, I'm not trying to be mean or anything, but I'm just saying like I wish she was more um, more one to one with her students. Like she's more like, oh, do this and like no questions asked but she expects us to know everything but sometimes you have to like break it down and like explain to us to like solve this or how to like do that work, you know what I'm saying?

KB spends sixteen to twenty hours each week doing homework, studying, and reading outside of class. She said that compared to what she thought it would be prior to enrolling, “It's actually not too hard. I mean I pretty much go through, what's it called, Canvas and go through my to do list and that's how I like organize and prepare for what to do, like if its due on next
week on Wednesday, I know to do it before that, like on Monday or Sunday.” The interviewer asked a follow-up to clarify if was more than she expected and she said it was not.

KB explained that to manage her time commitments outside of school this way, “I just have like, I just know… I have a day to do something like on this, like for instance, like I have work at 6:00 tonight, I know to do my work earlier at like 12:00 or 11:00, so I can prepare to go to work at, like 5:30.”

Next, the interviewer asked how long it usually takes for her to receive grades and feedback on her work:

Each professor is different. You mean like professors like getting, grading my papers, um, each one of my professors are different because some of them use Canvas and some of them don't. But um, I'm going to use the example that my professor used. Um, she, it takes her awhile and that's the other thing I wish, there were more detail about what we should work on because she will grade us with like, I don't know, like five out of twenty. I'm like, why I got five out of twenty, like you're not telling, what I need to work on so I can know what to do for the next assignment, but she didn't. So I guess it takes like, I don't know, two to three days. I wish it was more instant.

She said she is meeting her expectations in terms of grades and is happy so far with the grades she has been earning. When asked about seeking help with her classes at one of the college’s academic support centers KB said she normally asks other students for help and has not visited any of the centers. She was asked why she had not and she said that it “just didn’t come
to mind.” She was also asked if there was anything else WSCC could do to help her be more successful to which she replied, “I don’t think so.”

KB said that she would like to participate in clubs or organizations on campus but, “but it's kind of hard because, I feel like announcements be going through one ear out the other because I don't really be paying attention to it because it's just be paper and flyers. Like, I wish it was actually, like announced on like a speaker or something.”

Finally, she was asked if there was anything else she would like to share about her experiences at WSCC. She said there was not.

Table 8: KB Research Question Responses

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1a</th>
<th>RQ1b</th>
<th>RQ2a</th>
<th>RQ2b</th>
<th>RQ2c</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classes are on GP</td>
<td>Get an Associate’s in Business</td>
<td>Wishes professor would explain assignments better and be more “one to one” with students</td>
<td>Has not visited the tutoring center</td>
<td>Would like to participate in clubs and organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workload is more than expected</td>
<td>Transfer</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutoring “just didn’t come to mind”</td>
<td>Would like clubs and organizations to be more effective in communicating with students about activities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assignments are valuable</td>
<td>Grades are meeting expectations</td>
<td>Time it takes to get grades and feedback varies by instructor, within a week for most</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Spends 16-20 hours a week on schoolwork</td>
<td>Taking Library class which is not helping to reach goals; other classes helping to reach goals</td>
<td>Does not understand assignment grades in one class, would like more feedback from her instructor</td>
<td>Has not visited the tutoring center</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent is what was expected</td>
<td>Schoolwork not interfering with outside activities (plans around schedule at her job)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Tutoring “just didn’t come to mind”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

RB

When asked about why she decided to attend WSCC RB, an eighteen-year-old, Caucasian, female explained:
Well, my grade point average at my high school wasn't that great to transfer to a university. And, so my mom gave me the idea of going to a community college and so I was like, alright, that sounds like a wonderful idea so I can get all of my core classes out of the way, and then I'll be able to figure out what I'm interested in. And, so then I decided to just enter into the path of going to the community college like directly after high school,

To RB, being a WSCC student about feeling a sense of community with other students, “we’re all in this together” attitude. She also commented that it meant working with teachers who “care about student success [and] do what they can to achieve that success.”

RB was not sure of her specific academic goals at the time of the interview. She stated that she would like to “figure out what I would like to branch off into.” However, she did feel that she was being successful and moving in the right direction. She cited her 3.4 Grade Point Average as an example of how she was accomplishing her academic goals.

The interview was conducted at the beginning of the summer session just following RB’s first year as a first-time, full-time college student. She was not attending summer classes at the time of the interview. However, with a few exceptions the courses she had taken in her first year were a part of her Guided Pathway. She said that she took two Education courses just to see if being a teacher was something she might wish to pursue. While she had decided that teaching would not be her career choice, she said that the classes did teach her new concepts that she felt would be valuable to her. Her other courses were on the Pathway. She said:

…the first semester I took all of my, pretty much all my science courses out of the way so [I] don't have to deal with that. And my
second semester, um, I took my communications class and I took
like a few courses that kind of branched away from that guided
path, like those education courses. Um, but during this coming
semester I'm going right back onto that guided path.

While RB felt the classes she had been taking were helping her on reaching her goals, she
expressed a desire to do “some internships with different organizations so [her] can find out
where my passions lie. She had declared as an English major saying that she had “found that
English is a very transferable degree and it can go into pretty much anything.”

Next the interviewed turned RB’s perceptions about her academic workload. She was
asked to talk about the workload and how it compared to what she had been expecting before
entering into college. She said:

For some of the classes it was more difficult than what I expected
and for some of it was right on point to what I expected and I kind
of like, um, it kind of balanced out with my expectations and with
um, the different surprises that I saw coming into this whole new
experience.

The interviewer probed asking, “Like what surprises?”

Just kind of the workload and just the general atmosphere because
it was um, like taught in like a different way and it was just
different because I'm, because I'm just right out of high school and
just this whole new field, it was different.
She was asked if the assignments had been valuable to her. She said that they had “for the most part.” The interviewer followed up asking “You said for the most part, What about the others?” She explained:

For some of that I didn’t quite understand. Um, what, um, what sort of like place they held in like that in the criteria that they had. Um, but other than that, I felt that they were valuable and I did do my own, take my time, like completing these assignments. So I did take and complete them in a timely manner.

The next question was “how much time do you spend doing homework, studying and reading for your classes each week, for fall and spring?” She explained that it varies depending on the week but normally she will spend two to three hours each day doing homework and preparing for class. With respect to how this compared to her previous expectations RB said:

I want to say it’s about the same as, uh, when I, when I was about to enter college. I felt that it would be a little more strenuous, like the amount of work. And, the amount of details you would have to put into this work and um, that, um, that hypotheses before entering college it was pretty accurate I want to say.

RB said she manages her time constraints outside of school by always making sure that she gets her work done in “a timely fashion.” She explained that plans her classes in a way that allows her time for family, socializing, appointments, and other commitments. She said this way she has a balance between school and her personal life.
After discussing time management, the interviewer asked RB about her grades, how long does it usually take to receive grades and feedback, and was she getting the grades she had expected before she started college? To which she replied:

Well usually I receive my grades in like a very timely fashion because my instructors would grade very punctually they would grade like within the week or like sometimes by the end of like a week and a half or two although like last semester, I had a professor that would not tell me my grade. And, so that was a bit difficult for me, like it stressed me out quite a bit because he would not use Canvas, and when I asked him when my grade was on one occasion he would not tell me and told me to figure it out myself. And that was a bit irksome for me because, I'm used to using technology or at least being able to ask my professors what my grade is, where my standpoint is, where I stand in the class. And, not being able to get that opportunity. It was irritating and, but from my other teachers I was able to get my grade and get my feedback in a very timely fashion.

RB feels like she gets the grades she earns based on the effort she puts in and the work that she does, and therefore, she is getting grades that are exactly what she had expected.

RB had visited the academic support centers on a few occasions for tutoring and help with her Advanced Life Skills and Geology classes. Of her experience there, she said,

For the geology class I felt that that was just [a] really good experience [the] people were very helpful. If they didn't understand
something, they would help me to try to understand what I had, with the information I brought in. So that was very helpful. Um, with the other course, I didn't quite understand what the, um, the tutor was trying to get, the points trying to be reached and so, um, that was a little bit more difficult for me because we were trying to communicate different ways, and so that was just different.

As to what else WSCC could do to help her be more successful, RB had some thoughts:

Well, I sometimes take longer to do tests to like, read things like in the test or whatever, so maybe getting a little bit longer to do some of them or like, getting extra help outside of the classroom hours. Like to have the teachers just be more accepting of that. I think that would be really great experience. I remember I had my biology teacher, he would do tutoring for me when I needed it, but some of the other ones aren't as helpful, but I think it depends on the teacher.

RB had participated in a club on campus called Sister to Sister. The interviewer said that he was not familiar with that club and asked RB to elaborate about the club. She said, “It's um, basically where you get to be around like-minded individuals and you get to be in like a family like setting, which I think is really cool.”

Finally, she was asked if there was anything else she would like to share about her experience at WSCC. She explained:

I guess a lot of the teachers do their best to um, reach all of their individual students' needs. Um, I have like focus issue. So getting
those teachers that are able to work individually with those types of learning students I think is really great.

The interviewer asked if she had ever had an Individual Education Plan (IEP). She said that she had not, “because it never got out of hand but sometimes, I just get distracted by other things or sometimes I'm just not able to focus but I still get my work done and everything. But just having like the information explained like the same way but in different ways, I think would be very helpful or if I'm able to just approach the instructor, like in like maybe outside of campus or no, well outside of their office hours, like that would be like really great. Like when the class isn't in session per se.

**Table 9: RB Research Question Responses**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RQ1</th>
<th>RQ2a Expectations</th>
<th>RQ2b Feedback</th>
<th>RQ2c Support</th>
<th>RQ2d Involvement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Took classes not on GP Workload varies by class but “balanced out” to expectations</td>
<td>Complete GE requirements Transfer</td>
<td>Grades and feedback usually received within a week, sometimes two weeks</td>
<td>Teachers care about student success “Community setting”</td>
<td>Does participate in clubs and organizations at WSCC</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Had to adjust to college workload after HS</td>
<td>Meeting academic goals/Grades are as expected (3.4 GPA) Classes are helping to reach goals</td>
<td>One instructor told the student to figure out the grade for herself. RB was upset about this instructor</td>
<td>One professor not supportive Has visited the tutoring center (for 2 different classes)</td>
<td>Is involved with Sister to Sister club</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most assignments are valuable, but for some it was not clear how they fit in with the curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on school work varies by class, 2-3 hours a week for some, more than that for others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time spent on schoolwork is what was expected</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Schoolwork does not interfere with outside activities, has a balance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Member Checks

Interview subjects were sent follow-up emails asking that they review and reply with comments, additions, corrections, and any additional thoughts. The email asked for an update on their current academic status as well. JB replied to the request. She said “It’s lovely to hear from you again! I've reviewed the files you've attached and am glad to say they look fantastic, I hope your other transcripts/interviews are going just as well; I've no questions, comments, or complaints at this time… I've been doing well, continuing my core classes and (hopefully) transferring within the next year or so. Other than that, work and school continues to give me a welcomed challenge and I'm looking forward to finishing the current semester.”

A follow-up email resulted in one additional member checks from AQ who asked that the transcript be edited to “clean it up.” He did not offer any further comment on the accuracy or efficacy of the transcript or write-up.

Summary

This chapter began with an overview of WSCC, the research questions and a definition of two key terms was included. Next was a series of write-ups or vignettes of interviews with students in an effort to answer the research questions. The findings of a document review and member checks was also presented.
Chapter 5: Findings and Discussion

Overview of Study

The purpose of this case study was to explore first-time, full-time (FTFT), community college students, who have been placed on Guided Pathways, perceptions of their academic workload. The study examined community college students’ expectations and perceptions regarding their course workload through Tinto’s (2012) conceptual framework for institutional action (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, Involvement). Chapter one served to introduce the study by first stating the problem to be studied, and then providing background, a definition of terms, and introducing the research questions and conceptual framework. Chapter two gave an in-depth review of relevant literature relating to the study which included literature on policies, Guided Pathways, student success, and perceived workload. Chapter three discussed the methodology of the study to include site selection, a description of participants, as well as data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter four reported the results by giving vignettes of the interviews along with demographic information about the participants. Chapter 5 will present an analysis and discussion of these data. Limitations of the study and implications for theory, practice, and future research will also be discussed.

Discussion of Findings

Workload has been found to be among the most important factors contributing to student dropout (Chambers, 1992; Woodley & Parlett, 1983). Measuring workload can be difficult. It could be measured by looking at the number of hours students are in class, in addition to the number of hours students spend studying outside class to master the material and completing assignments. While contact hours may be fairly easy to measure, the amount of time studying and preparing assignments will vary from student to student (Chambers, 1992; Kember & Leung,
1998). However, even if these activities could be accurately measured, they may not give a realistic picture of how a student perceives their workload. In fact, there may be little to no correlation between actual workload and perceived workload (Kember & Leung, 1998). Kember and Lueng (1998) hypothesized that “perceived workload should be thought of as a complex function of a number of variables” (p. 295). These variables may include class contact hours, independent study hours, English language ability, GPA, and ‘the students’ propensity to employ meaning or reproducing approaches to learning” (p. 293).

Recent efforts to increase student success in community colleges have focused in part on developing “guided pathways” designed to help students, especially those FTFT students with little to no “college knowledge,” navigate their way through a degree program toward successful completion or transfer. Jenkins and Cho (2012) explain that students who enter a degree program within their first year are far more likely to complete their degree or transfer to a university than those who do not get into a program until their second year. Guided pathways can help students, many of whom are confused and frustrated with trying to find their way through college (Venezia, Bracco, & Nodine, 2010). However, while there has been some research on guided pathways, a recent search of academic databases yielded very little in the way of empirical data to support the notion that they actually help students be more successful. In fact, “rigorous research on the effectiveness of guided pathways in higher education is just beginning” (Jenkins & Cho, 2013, p. 31). In addition to little empirical data being available on whether or not guided pathways actually help students, when compared to those who self-advice, there is essentially nothing in the research that addresses how being on those pathways impact on a students’ expectations as they attempt to transition from being in high school or the workplace.
to being a college student or on the amount of work these students are assigned in their first semester.

In the preceding case study of students' perceptions of their course workload after being placed on a guided pathway, specific questions were used to guide the inquiry. This study sought to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: How do first-time, full-time, freshman students, who have been placed on a guided pathway, perceive their workload during their first semester of college?

RQ2: How do students’ perceptions of workload influence their academic and social integration when examined through the lens of the four critical elements of Tinto’s conceptual framework (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement)?

A lack of empirical research on both student workload as well as guided pathways made it difficult to argue that the research questions flowed directly from the research. However, there is significant research on student success and on barriers to student success. That literature, along with Tinto’s framework, lead to these questions.

Students participating in the study were asked to discuss their perceptions of the academic workload and how it impacted their life not only academically, but also personally, socially, and professionally. As will be discussed later, there was clear self-selection bias and the students who responded to the email request for participants and ultimately sat for the interviews were, for the most part, high achievers who had an overall favorable view of their academic workload. Analyzing how students perceive the effect their workload has on their life both academically and personally is important for better understanding how guided pathways might be tailored to fit the needs of students. While the focus of the study was on workload, there were
other issues that came out during the course of the interviews that are cause for concern. The participants were honest about their experiences and in some cases the picture they painted was not a pretty one for the college.

**Research Question One**

*How do first-time, full-time, freshman students, who have been placed on a guided pathway, perceive their workload during their first semester of college?*

The results of this study suggest that for many new community college students, the academic workload when prescribed by a guided pathway is not perceived as overwhelming. In fact, for all but one student in the study, the workload was as expected or as less than expected. The average number of hours the participants spent doing schoolwork outside of class was 22.45 weekly. For most of the participants this was about what they had expected before they started college, so they were not surprised by the workload. Only one of the students interviewed reported that their course workload had interfered with their outside activities. In addition to the amount of work the students had, how they viewed the work in terms of it helping them achieve their goals and being valuable for them was examined. Marsh (2001) explains that good workload, or hours spent on coursework, are those spent doing work that students deem to be valuable and bad hours are those that students don’t believe are valuable to them. For example, students might perceive assignments and activities that they consider to be busy work as bad hours (p. 185). Here again, with one exception, the students in this study reported that the work they had been assigned had been valuable for them. The theme that emerged with respect to perceived academic workload for the students in this case study was one of being, if anything, underwhelmed by the amount of work they had been assigned in their early semesters of college.
This finding is rather important given past research into the effect of first semester workload on student success. Duby and Schartman (1997) found that students who enrolled less than full-time in their first semester were less likely to return to college for the second semester and far less likely to return the second year or eventually graduate (p. 11). A 2014 study found that students are less likely to return if they are only enrolled half-time and suggests that this “could be vital information for community colleges, as additional support services could be designed for such a population” (Mertes & Hoover, 2014, p. 657). Ran and Cho (2013) found that students who tended to linger at the community college, rather than graduate or transfer, were less likely to have taken a full course load in their first semester than students who were more successful (p. 2). While no causal link exists between first term course load and retention, it is certainly a predictor (Fike & Fike, 2008, p. 83; Duba & Schartman, 1997, p. 16; Mohammadi, 1994, p. 15). Additionally, first year grade point average (GPA) is a predictor of success and being enrolled full time may actually lead to a higher first year GPA than does having a lighter course load (Scott, Spielmans, & Julka, 2004, p. 66; Cummings & Knott, 2001, para. 6).

Enrolling for less than full time may be an indicator of the student’s commitment to their education, that is students who do not attend full time may be less committed (Beardslee, 1974, np; Duba & Schartman, 1997, p. 16). Tinto (1987) explains that for college students, commitments take two forms, goal and institutional (p. 43). Goal commitment is a student’s commitment to doing the work necessary to accomplish their academic and career goals, while institutional commitment is their level of commitment to the school they are attending and includes academic as well as social interactions (Tinto, 1987, p. 43, Szafran, 2001, p. 28). A 2002 study found that “students who adopted performance goals in their introductory psychology course attained higher grades in that class as well as in their other courses that semester, and
students who endorsed work avoidance goals received lower grades in the course as well as in their other courses” (Harackiewicz, Tauer, Barron, & Elliot, 2002, p. 570). Tinto (1975) explains that “Other things being equal, one would anticipate goal commitment to be directly related to persistence in college” (p. 93). That is to say that a student who does not enroll full time in their first semester “may already be somewhat less committed, and because they have fewer credits, they are less involved and accumulate fewer credits, and the lower level of involvement and the lengthening of time to degree contribute to further weakening of the commitment” (Duba & Schartman, 1997, p. 16).

Overall, the study participants had clear achievement goals, strong commitments to those goals, and were following the guided pathways in an effort to reach them. They felt the classes they were taking or had already completed were helping them achieve those goals with only a few exceptions. They were mostly satisfied with their grades and academic progress. All of the participants had clear goals for the future of their education. This indicates that being given a guided pathway had no negative impact on their first semester experience. They remained focused on their goals and felt as though they were making progress toward achieving them.

Table 10 below provides an overview of the participants responses to questions about their goals and expectations.

**Table 10: Goal Commitment**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Academic Goal</th>
<th>Classes are on the Guided Pathway</th>
<th>Classes Helping to Reach Goal</th>
<th>Grades as Expected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>Certificate</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>Associate's</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>Associate's /Transfer</td>
<td>Yes/No (1)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/No (some less)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>Associate's /Transfer</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No (better)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>Associate’s</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes/No (some less)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KB</td>
<td>Associate’s/Transfer</td>
<td>Yes/No (1)</td>
<td>Yes/No (1)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>GE/Transfer</td>
<td>Yes/No (some not)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 11 provides a brief overview of each participants’ responses to the questions about workload. For example, only two reported that their schoolwork was interfering with outside activities. Only AT reported spending more time than expected on schoolwork.

**Table 11: Workload**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Workload as Expected</th>
<th>Hours Spent Weekly on School Work Outside of Class</th>
<th>Time Spent as Expected</th>
<th>Assignments Valuable</th>
<th>School Work Interferes with Outside Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AQ</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>4-5</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AT</td>
<td>No (more)</td>
<td>42-49</td>
<td>No (more)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CJ</td>
<td>No (less)</td>
<td>6-9</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GL</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6-12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JB</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8-10</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>JS</td>
<td>No (less)</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>No (less)</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KB</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>16-20</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RB</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>8-12</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes (Most)</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In an effort to better understand what the academic workload for a first semester student at WSCC might look like, a document review was conducted. A sample of course syllabi and guided pathways was examined. Table 12 below shows the number of homework/reading assignments, quizzes, major assignments (papers, presentations, projects, etc.), examinations, and other graded activities (primarily in-class activities) for a cross section of courses that would be found on a typical guided pathway in the first semester. Depending on the major, some of the courses would be required others would be electives.

**Table 12: Review of Course Syllabi**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>HW/Reading</th>
<th>Quizzes</th>
<th>Major Assignments</th>
<th>Exams</th>
<th>Graded Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PHIL 207</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY 130</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEO 101</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GEO Lab</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTH 101</td>
<td>8</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL 101</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PSY 101</td>
<td>20</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC 101</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MATH 126</td>
<td>21</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ENG 101</td>
<td>26</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The document review also included a sampling of the guided pathways. The guided pathways vary slightly from major to major, but most are very similar for first and second semester students. The two charts below show examples of courses in which a student in their first semester might be enrolled. Again, there is some flexibility in the pathways as there are elective options. However, even those electives must be selected from mandated areas of study such as Humanities or Social Science. The first table shows what a first semester freshman majoring in General Studies (no emphasis) might expect their workload to be. This is the largest major at WSCC. The second shows the guided pathway for a Communication major. For the General Studies major, they could expect to have about 6 activities that need to be done each week whether it be a major assignment, examination, or just reading a chapter in the book. For the Communication major it would be about 7.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>Credits</th>
<th>Units</th>
<th>Hours</th>
<th>Activities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>COM 101</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART 160</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANTH 101</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Clearly, each of these courses is taught by multiple instructors, using a variety of teaching methods, each with their own syllabus so it cannot be said that these examples are completely precise. However, the course outcomes are the same for each instructor and assignments are often tailored to assess a specific course outcome. Additionally, since students do have options for the elective courses, one Communication major might take a course or two that is different than the representation below. It is also likely that first semester students would be enrolled in a developmental math or English course. No syllabi from developmental courses were included in the document review. So, while no claim is made that these numbers are representative for every student majoring in either of these areas, they do provide some insight into what a first semester
freshman’s workload would be. Table 13 gives a representation of the General Studies first semester workload.

Table 13: *First Semester General Studies Major (No Emphasis)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>HW/Reading</th>
<th>Quizzes</th>
<th>Major Assignments</th>
<th>Exams</th>
<th>Graded Activities</th>
<th>All Coursework</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENG 101</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ART 160</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHIL 207</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ASL 101</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>2.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>6.19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14 looks at the potential workload for a student majoring in Communication.

Table 14: *First Semester Communication Major*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course</th>
<th>HW/Reading</th>
<th>Quizzes</th>
<th>Major Assignments</th>
<th>Exams</th>
<th>Graded Activities</th>
<th>All Coursework</th>
<th>Weekly</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ENG 101</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COM 101</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SOC 101</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>1.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PHIL 207</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>0.94</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Totals</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>113</td>
<td>7.06</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In summary, when looking at their perceptions about academic workload the students in this case study were not struggling with the required full-load for a new student on the guided pathways. They were able to handle the amount of work they were assigned and it was, for the most part, what they had expected before entering college. That said, and given the prior research on the importance of taking a full class load in the first semester, this study would tend to support the notion that the guided pathway model is a valuable tool for promoting student success.

**Research Question Two**

*RQ2: How do students’ perceptions of workload influence their academic and social integration when examined through the lens of the four critical elements of Tinto’s*
conceptual framework (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, and Involvement)?

According to Tinto's model, the decision to persist or drop out of college is influenced initially by a student's personal and pre-enrollment characteristics and, once on campus, by the student's integration the social and academic systems of the college (Tinto, 1987, p. 50; Chapman & Pascarella, 1983, p. 295-296; Tinto, 1975, p. 96). Tinto explains “Given prior levels of goal and institutional commitment, it is the person's normative and structural integration into the academic and social systems that lead to new levels of commitment. Other things being equal, the higher the degree of integration of the individual into the college systems, the greater will be [the student’s] commitment to the specific institution and to the goal of college completion” (Pascarella, Smart, & Ethington, 1986, p. 49; Tinto, 1975, p. 96).

Tinto (1987) says that the process through which many students choose a college is “quite haphazard” (p. 54). Students form a set of expectations about the institutions they are considering and the final choice they make is largely dependent on those expectations. The expectations a student brings with them upon entry to the institution often are the standard by which their early college experiences are measured and their perceptions about those experiences are shaped (Tinto, 1987, p. 54; Pascarella et al., 1986, p. 53).

A nine-year longitudinal study designed to test the validity of Tinto’s model as it applies to students who began their academic career at a community college also found that academic and social integration had a significant impact on persistence and degree completion (Pascarella et al., 1986, p. 65). Pascarella, et al. (1986) suggest that, given the importance of academic and social integration for community college students, it may be possible to improve persistence through “purposeful institutional policies and practices designed to enhance student social and
academic integration” (p. 66). Given the results of this case study, the guided pathway model may be such a practice.

In terms of why they chose the institution, two themes emerged. First and foremost was financial. Several of the participants mentioned that the relatively low cost to attend WSCC was a major factor in the decision. Two mentioned having plans to attend a local university but decided not to because of cost. One participant said that she “was originally accepted, to [local university] but they asked for so much. They asked for like [$5000] in tuition and I cannot afford that. So, I had to go to WSCC, they asked for like [$2000].” While others mentioned that they decided to attend WSCC because their parents and simply could not afford the university.

This finding is consistent with prior research. A 2006 qualitative study which employed focus groups in order to explore why students choose community colleges found that, “By far, the reasons most often cited for choosing the community college were price and location. The students preferred to work, live, and attend school in the same community or section of town. The importance of ‘sticker price’ rather than ‘net price’ (sticker price minus aid) was the most frequent comment about cost. By comparison, many students said that they could not afford more expensive options in the same or nearby towns” (Somers et al., 2006, p. 62). For many minority students, cost of attendance and the ability to live close to home makes the community college attractive (Kelp-Kern, 2000, p. 492). Latinos are more likely than other racial and ethnic groups to attend community colleges due to their family’s socioeconomic status (Kurlaender, Horn, Flores, & Orfeild, 2006, p. 11).

The second theme was being encouraged by others to attend WSCC. Three of the participants mentioned that their parents had encouraged them to attend WSCC. For one, her mom is an alum of WSCC and had suggested that it was a good option for her after she had
attended an orientation at the college with a group of friends from her high school. Another explained that her parents had not attended college and had persuaded her to go to WSCC. Most of the students who participated in this case study were traditional age students and had influenced by their parents. This is consistent with previous research. Bers and Galowich (2002) found that parents often played a large role in the choice to attend community college and would play an even bigger role if not for restrictions placed on colleges as a result of the Federal Education Right to Privacy Act (FERPA) (p. 78). Kelp-Kern (2000) suggests that community colleges need to partner with parents as well as students in the process of transiting to college (p. 492). Not only did parents have an influence but also employers and friends. This is reflected in this case study as well as in the literature. Somers et al. (2006) report that much of the “college knowledge” that first semester community college students have come from peers and family members (p. 61).

With respect to institutional commitment, there was not that strong level of commitment. Students with a strong commitment to their college are more likely to graduate than those with no specific institutional commitment (Tinto, 1987, p. 43). However, as noted in earlier research, for community college students academic integration is a more significant factor in persistence and success (Halpin, 1990, p. 30). Additionally, this may not be as much of a concern for the students in this study as it might be for others who have less of a commitment to their academic goals as those with strong goals may be more likely to “stick it out” than those with less of a commitment to their goals (Tinto, 1987, p. 44).

Apart from expectations, feedback and support are also factors contributing to the academic integration of students. Tinto (2017) explains that “frequent formative assessment and
feedback that enable students to monitor and adjust their behaviors over the course of the first year must be part and parcel of the first-year experience” (p. 260).

The participants of this study were asked about getting feedback from their instructors and here several expressed concerns. While, at first glance, feedback on assignments may not seem like a factor in workload, or the amount of actual work students have, it does have an effect on how they budget the time they have to study and attend to course work outside of class. It is also critical for them in determining how well they are progressing toward their goals. Tinto (2017) explains that it is important to “monitor and frequently assess student first-year performance and provide academic, if not social, support when needed to help students succeed in the first year, especially in the classrooms of the first year. Without support to improve performance, many lose their motivation to persist and subsequently dropout” (p. 260).

It was here that students in the study had a less than positive perception of their college experience. Some expressed frustration with faculty who failed to post grades on the college’s learning management system (LMS). Others reported slow response on grades from their instructors. One student explained it this way, “Some teachers don't put grades in until like three weeks later. So you could be failing a class for three weeks or you could be passing for three weeks and not even know it.” Another was upset with a professor who only gave grades in points and offered no constructive feedback or even a rubric which clarified the grade and gave her insight as to how she could improve. Alarmingly, another reported that one faculty member actually told her to “figure it out [herself].” The lack of posting grades to the LMS was the main complaint from students in the study. The inconsistent use of the LMS seems to be a source of frustration, especially for students who use technology frequently. RB said of a professor not using the LMS “And that was a bit irksome for me because I'm used to using technology or at
least being able to ask my professors what my grade is.” This is a problem for students, especially for newer college students who are in the early stages of their academic journey. They need timely and frequent feedback in order to “reflect on what they have learned, what still need to know, and how to assess themselves” (Chickering & Gamson, 1987, p. 6)

Additionally, the participants were asked about their use of the academic support centers on campus. WSCC has developed academic support programs, which often are “directly connected to or contextualized to the individual courses in which students are enrolled” as suggested by Tinto (2017, p. 260). Several of the participants in this study had taken advantage of the academic support centers. Those who had reported positive experiences. JB described her experience with the tutors as “very pleasant,” RB said the experience was “very helpful,” and AT said the math tutors were friendly and helped her with math problems, although she struggled to retain the knowledge when it came time for tests and AQ said he visits the Writing Center and said “everyone knows me” there. He has also recommended it to his classmates. The only person who expressed any issues with the support services was CJ who said that visiting the Writing Center was mandatory in her English class and that “it wasn’t bad, but it wasn’t good.” She went on to explain that the tutor who was helping her did not understand the complex nature of the specific assignment for which CJ had come to the center. For those students in the study who had not taken advantage of the academic support services, lack of awareness and/or knowledge of the services and in the case of JS, she said she was “just too shy” to go there. Student services such as advising and tutoring significantly increase the likelihood of success for first year students (Chen, 2011, p. 499). Given that interaction, engagement, and involvement are key to persistence, and advising appointments are one of a few ways that students can connect to their college in “meaningful ways” (Swecker, Fifolt, & Searby, 2013, p. 49). Because it requires
students to have regular meetings with academic advisors and counselors, the guided pathway model is a good vehicle for enhancing academic integration. The guided pathways at WSCC are doing just that. The students in the study were, for the most part, taking advantage of the academic support services and were being integrated as a result.

Social involvement or integration on campus can contribute to a student’s success. This may include participation in formal activities such as student clubs and organizations, extracurricular activities, and developing an informal network of friends on campus. Conversely, a feeling of being isolated may lead a student to withdraw (Tinto, 1987, p. 108). The students in this case study reported low levels of formal involvement. Only RB reported having participated in club on campus. AQ mentioned that he, and one of his instructors, had attempted to start a student club and no other students came to the first meeting. The club never came to fruition. JS said “I didn’t even know there were clubs on campus and AT said no club at WSCC had interested her, others were either working when not in school or were simply just not aware of the clubs. CJ said that her mom was not supportive of her doing anything that was not directly academic in nature. Academic workload was not reported as a reason for the low level of involvement. Although, the students in this study, were not involved and therefore not socially integrated into WSCC, it may not be a cause for immediate alarm as Chapman and Pascarella (1983) found that in community colleges, persisters actually had “significantly less formal contact with both faculty and peers than did those who withdrew” (p. 319). They use the analogy that “maybe community college students, in the main, view their institution as something of a supermarket, where one goes to get whatever one needs and then leaves - without anything more happening in the way of integration or involvement in the culture” (Chapman & Pascarella, 1983, p. 319). Still, as mentioned previously in the discussion of institutional commitment, the
students in this case study tended to be self-motivated, high achievers and as such may not have as much need for social integration as some of their peers.

While the focus of this study was academic workload, the broader issue at question is the usefulness of the guided pathways model. Does it help students reach their goals or overload them with more than they are prepared to handle? A recent search of academic databases yielded very little in the way of empirical data to support the notion that guided pathways actually help students be more successful. In fact, “rigorous research on the effectiveness of guided pathways in higher education is just beginning” (Jenkins & Cho, 2013, p. 31). There is however, as discussed above, ample research to suggest that taking a full load in the first semester contributes to academic success.

The results of this case study buttress the notion that guided pathways are a benefit to students. Jenkins and Cho (2012) explain that students who enter a degree program within their first year are far more likely to complete their degree or transfer to a university than those who do not get into a program until their second year. Guided pathways can help students, many of whom are confused and frustrated with trying to find their way through college (Venezia, Bracco, & Nodine, 2010).

To summarize, the students in the study had an overall favorable perception of their academic workload. They tended to have high goal commitment and lower institutional commitment. They seemed to be doing well in terms of academic integration and had a positive view of their college experience at the point in which they participated in the study. Their expectations were being met for the most part both academically and as they relate to the institution. Their only area of concern was in feedback from their instructors. Several were dissatisfied with the timeliness and/or quality of the feedback. The participants had low levels of
social integration and all but one had not participated in campus clubs or activities. Their academic workload was not reported as a factor in the lack of participation.

**Implications**

_Theory:_ The impetus for this case study was an unpublished, institutional study conducted at Our Lady of the Lake University in Texas. In that study, it was found that freshman students in their first semester had a much greater workload than did the seniors. The study found that freshman averaged, for example, over fifty deliverables during the month of October and seniors had less than fifteen during the same time period (K. Gonzalez, personal communication, December 4, 2014). The goal of this case study was to determine how the workload for first semester freshman at a community college was perceived. The findings were examined using Tinto’s (2012) conceptual framework for institutional action (Expectations, Support, Assessment and Feedback, Involvement).

As with any case study, the goal here was not to generalize or to look for specific correlations, but rather to better understand how a specific small group of students at one community college viewed their academic workload, and the effects of that workload on their academic and social integration. Merriam (1998) explains that this type of research employs an inductive strategy to build abstractions, concepts, hypothesis, or theories rather than testing an existing theory (p. 7). The theory building process “occurs via recursive cycling among the case data, emerging theory, and later, extant literature” (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25). Case studies are a popular method for building theory because they are one of the best bridges from rich qualitative data to deductive research (Eisenhardt & Graebner, 2007, p. 25).

This case study serves as the beginning or jumping-off point for the development of a theory of academic workload and student’s perceptions of the effects of that workload. Prior
Research on workload has focused on learning approaches (Entwistle & Ramsden, 1982; Kember, 2004; Kyndt, Dochy, Struyven, & Cascallar, 2011), personal issues including contributing to incidents of plagiarism (Devlin & Gray, 2007), students’ evaluations of instructors (Remedios & Lieberman, 2008; Thornton, Adams, & Sepehri, 2010) and stress (Nonis, Hudson, Logan, & Ford, 1998; Tripathi & Sharma, 2013). The majority of the research that has been done on academic workload has been conducted in Asia, Australia, and Europe at universities. The studies have looked at how workload may impact on learning, evaluations of courses of instructors, and contribute to stress. No relevant research on community college students, or for that matter university students, in the United States that specifically addressed the potential influence of academic workload on a student’s decision to dropout or stop-out was found. Academic workload as a variable in that decision, particularly for under-prepared students in the beginning semesters of their academic career is an issue that requires further inquiry.

Additionally, this study informs the literature as one of the earliest studies on guided pathways. Guided pathways can help students, many of whom are confused and frustrated with trying to find their way through college (Venezia, Bracco, & Nodine, 2010). There has been a push for implementing the pathways at community colleges across the country by organization such as Complete College America, but to date, “rigorous research on the effectiveness of guided pathways in higher education is just beginning” (Jenkins & Cho, 2013, p. 31). Little empirical data exists on guided pathways and there is essentially nothing in the research that addresses how being on those pathways impacts on a student’s expectations as they attempt to transition from being in high school or the workplace to being a college student or on the amount of work these students are assigned in their first semester.
Practice: Because so little research has been conducted on academic workload as a variable in the decision to withdraw, and on guided pathways, the gaps in the research are enormous. That presents a challenge in looking at ways to implement procedures or policies that benefit students. Policy needs to be informed by empirical data. Guided Pathways have been implemented at colleges and universities across the country without much data to support the move. What data does exist on the pathways suggests that they benefit students. The findings of this study support this notion. However, this cookie-cutter approach may be overloading some students. The fact is that we just do not know. If a student withdrew from college because, after being placed on the pathway, they became overwhelmed with the workload, it is unlikely that anyone at the college would be aware that workload was a contributing factor. It is difficult enough to get data from current students, much less former students.

That said, there is one finding in the study that has implications for practice. The students in this study reported difficulty finding out their grades and getting meaningful feedback. While it is impractical to propose a specific policy mandating how long an instructor has to return grades to students for a variety of reasons including but not limited to the amount of labor and time needed to grade some assignments compared to others, and academic freedom, there could, and frankly should, be a campus wide conversation about the importance and timely, meaningful feedback. This could include professional development workshops, panel discussions with students sharing their experiences and perceptions of teacher indolence (Kearney, Plax, Hays, & Ivey, 1991, p. 320).

Limitations

As discussed above, there are certain limitations inherent in case study research. Yin (2014) explains that “case studies, like experiments, are generalizable propositions, not to
populations” (loc. 1065). The study is limited by the fact that it was conducted at a single site with a small number of participants. For this reason, no assentation is made that it is generalizable to other institutions only that it can hopefully serve to inform future discussions of similar interventions.

By its very nature qualitative research that relies heavily on participant interviews is always limited by the participant’s memory, his or her own biases, and when it comes to workload, academic abilities. In this particular case study there was a prevalence of self-selection bias. There is bias when members of the target population who do not participate in the study are different in some way from those who do participate (Costigan & Cox, 2001, p. 706-707). The participants in this study met the sample guidelines outlined before beginning the interviews. That is to say that they were first-time, full-time students enrolled in at least 12 credits, no more of which were developmental education courses, and they had been placed on a guided pathway. So, in the strictest sense, there was not bias, they were representative of the target population. However, the students who participated in the study were all motivated and had clear goals. This does not mean that the data collected has no value, but interviews with less motivated students may have produced different results. Efforts to recruit students for this study who might be more “average” proved fruitless.

Additionally, more inquiry about the participants’ social integration, specifically their encounters with faculty outside of the classroom may have provided additional insight into how they perceived their academic workload and college experience overall. Tinto (1987) explains that informal contact with faculty outside the classroom is a critical component of social integration and intellectual development (p. 108). No interview questions were asked which would have explored those relationships.
Future Research

Because of the limitations discussed above, most specifically, the small sample size and self-selection bias, further research on students’ perceptions of academic workload are warranted. Below are recommendations for future research.

Recommendation 1: Future qualitative research should be done to replicate or contradict the findings of this study. These should draw from a more academically diverse sample of participants. Students who have been referred for early intervention programs would be an ideal target population.

Recommendation 2: Future research should be quantitative with a narrow focus on the specific workload that community college students who have been placed on guided pathways are given. This would serve to inform additional research into the impact of being placed on a guided pathway.

Recommendation 3: Kim, Kim, and Jung (2013) propose a model to measure operator workload by using a three factor classification system including Cognitive, Communicative, and Operational Activities (p. 123). Future research should seek to categorize the workload of first semester students using a similar model in order to inform decisions about pathways should be organized at the institutional level, and assignments given at the classroom level.

Recommendation 4: Future research should look at social integration at community colleges. Chapman and Pascarella (1983) report that social integration does not appear to be a factor for community college students. This should be examined further.
Conclusion

This case study attempted to glean a better understanding of how first semester students at a large community college, who were enrolled full-time, and had been placed on a Guided Pathway, perceived their workload. Chapter four presented vignettes of the relevant information from interviews and chapter five included an analysis of that data. Chapter five also discussed the limitations of the study and some suggestions for further research on academic workload.

Very little empirical data exists on how students perceive their academic workload. The majority of the research that has been done on academic workload has been conducted in Asia, Australia, and Europe at universities. The studies have looked at how workload may impact on learning, evaluations of courses of instructors, and contribute to stress. No relevant research on community college students, or for that matter university students in the United States, that specifically addressed the potential influence of academic workload on a student’s decision to dropout or stop-out was found.

As with any case study, the goal here was not to generalize or to look for specific correlations, but rather to better understand how a specific small group of students at one community college viewed their academic workload, and the effects of that workload on their academic and social integration. It is the hope of the researcher that this study will lead to more research on academic workload, especially how it may impact under or unprepared students in community colleges.
Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. Can you tell me how you first came to the decision to attend college at WSCC?
2. What does being a WSCC student mean to you?
   a. What are your academic goals? What do you hope to accomplish at WSCC?
   b. I know you are still in your first semester, but how are you doing so far in achieving those goals?
3. What classes are you taking this semester?
   a. Are these classes part of WSCC’s guided pathways?
   b. Are these classes helping you to reach your goals?
4. Tell me about the amount of work you have been assigned in your classes?
   a. How does the amount of work compare to what you expected before you started college?
   b. Do you feel the assignments in your classes have been valuable?
   c. How much time do you spend doing homework, studying, and reading for your classes each week?
   d. How does the amount of time compare to what you thought before starting college?
5. How do you manage your time commitments outside of school? (work, family or other activities)
6. How long does it usually take for you to receive grades and feedback on your work?
7. Are you receiving the grades that you expected before starting college?
8. Have you visited the tutoring center or any other academic center to get help or assistance with your classes?
   a. (Yes) How did you feel about your experience there? / (No) Why Not?
   b. Is there anything else CSN can do for you to help you be successful?
9. Do you participate in any clubs and/or organizations on campus?
   a. (Yes) Which ones interest you? / (No) Why not?
10. Anything else that I should know about you and your experiences at WSCC?

Demographic questions:

1. Current age?
2. Race/Ethnicity?
3. English your first language?
4. Live on own, with parents, or in a different situation?
5. Do you have siblings? Did they go to college?
6. Do you have children of your own?
7. Do you know what your parents’ highest educational level?

Appendix B: Informed Consent

EXEMPT RESEARCH STUDY
INFORMATION SHEET

Department of Educational Psychology and Higher Education

TITLE OF STUDY: Community College Students’ Perceptions of Their Academic Workload

INVESTIGATOR(S) AND CONTACT PHONE NUMBER: Dr. Vicki Rosser (702-895-1432) William Neff (702-651-4147)

The purpose of this case study is to explore first-time, full-time, undergraduate students’ perceptions of their academic workload at the college. You are being asked to participate in the study because you meet the following criteria:

✓ at least 18 years’ old
✓ Fall of 2016 or Spring of 2017 was your first-year, first-semester, of college (you have no previous college credits earned).
✓ Enrolled in at least 12 credit hours for the fall 2016 semester or Spring 2017 semester.
✓ You Have been placed on a Guided Pathway (you met with a counselor and were given a list of courses to take for your degree plan).
✓ No more than 3 credits of the 12 credits in either developmental education or other classes not on your Guided Pathway
✓ Not majoring in either the Health Sciences or Career and Technical Education programs
✓ You are not now, nor have they ever been enrolled in a course taught by Professor Neff

If you volunteer to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:
a) participate in a 30-45 minute audio recorded interview.
b) provide copies of your course syllabi and assignment due dates with any information that may be used to identify your specific instructors redacted.
c) Review the interview transcript and initial analysis of the data for accuracy and palatability.

This study includes only minimal risks. The study will take 30-60 minutes of your time. You will not be compensated for your time.

For questions regarding the rights of research subjects, any complaints or comments regarding the manner in which the study is being conducted you may contact the UNLV Office of Research Integrity – Human Subjects at 702-895-2794, toll free at 877-895-2794, or via email at IRB@unlv.edu.

Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may withdraw at any time. You are encouraged to ask questions about this study at the beginning or any time during the research study.

**Participant Consent:**

I have read the above information and agree to participate in this study. I am at least 18 years of age. A copy of this form has been given to me.
References


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http://dx.doi.org/DOI: 10.1080/10668926.2012.711143


http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/03075078712331378062


http://dx.doi.org/http://www.tandfonline.com/action/showCitFormats?doi=10.1080/10668920701380942


Curriculum Vitae

William H. Neff, M.A.

Education
2010-Present
University of Nevada, Las Vegas-Doctorate (PhD) in Higher Education Leadership (completion 2017)

1995 - 1997
California State University-Master of Arts in Speech/ Speech Communication

1994-1995
California State University-Bachelor of Arts in Speech Communication

1992-1994
Fresno City College-Associate of Arts in General Studies

Academic
2011 – Present
College of Southern Nevada - Professor

Professional
2007 – 2011
College of Southern Nevada – Instructor

Experience
2006
Cebu Study Tutorial Language Center – ESL Teacher

1999 – 2006
Odessa College - Instructor

1997- 1998
Iowa Western Community College - Adjunct Instructor

1997
University of Nebraska - Graduate Teaching Assistant

1996-1997
Fresno City College - Adjunct Instructor

1995 – 1997
California State University, Fresno - Graduate Teaching Assistant/Forensic Coach
**Other**

1998-1999  
Training Specialist

**Professional Experience**

1992-1998  
Vishay Intertechnology Incorporated

Full-Time Student

1990-1992  
Magnolia Air Conditioning-Director of Sales and Marketing

1986-1990  
Pacesetter Corporation-Senior Sales Representative/Assistant Sales Manager

1981-1986  
Denny’s & Wendy’s-Restaurant Manager


**Leadership Experience**

2013-2015 College of Southern Nevada - Faculty Leader for Achieving the Dream

2011-2013  
College of Southern Nevada - Lead Faculty, Department of Communication

Courses Taught

Oral Communication (Public Speaking); Applied Communication;
Interpersonal Communication; Business & Professional Communication;
Small Group Communication; Introduction to Communication;
Argumentation & Debate; Applied Communication; Service Learning;
English as a Second Language (while working in the Philippines);
Introduction to PowerPoint

Doctoral Course

The American Community College; Theory of Educational Organizations;
Leadership Development Seminar; Higher Education Law; Designing &
Critiquing Research in Education; Finance and Budgeting in Higher
Education; Public Policy Higher & Post-Sec Education; Special Topics in
Higher Education (Athletic Administration); Special Topics in Higher
Education (Minority Serving Institutions); Seminar: Teaching in Higher
Education; Qualitative Research Methodologies; Qualitative Case Study
Research; Descriptive and Inferential Statistics; Inferential Statistics and
Experimental Design; Multiple Regression and Path Analysis; Evaluation
Research Methods; Advanced Evaluation Research Methods; Doctoral
Internship

Master's Course

Seminar in Consulting and Training; Seminar in Argumentation; Seminar in
History of American Public Address; Seminar in Instructional
Communication; Seminar in Rhetorical Theory; Seminar in Rhetorical
Criticism; Seminar in Communication Theory and Research; Seminar in
Group Communication; Directed Reading in Sociology; Independent Study
in Organizational Communication

Additional

155
Presenting “To Scale-Up or not to Scale-Up” workshop on conducting program evaluation for student success initiatives at Achieving the Dream and League for Innovations conferences in 2016

Executive Leadership Institute Class of 2013

Presented conference papers at Western States Communication Conference; California State University, Fresno Student Conference; Conference for the Organization for the Study of Communication, Language and Gender.

Independent Consultant - Conducting organizational research and training for a variety of public and private institutions.

Partial Client List Includes:

CSU, Fresno Department of Mass Communication and Journalism; US Pool Products (ThomsonTec); Chaffee Zoo; Magnolia Air Conditioning; Back to the Bible Radio Ministries; Anchor Foods; SourceOne IT, Freedom March