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BARRIERS AND SUPPORTS TO NONTRADITIONAL-AGED ADULTS
STUDENTS' SUCCESS IN COMMUNITY COLLEGE

by

MELISSA EDWARDS

A dissertation submitted to the

Graduate School of Education

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

Graduate Program in Social and Philosophical Foundations of Education

written under the direction of

Dr. Alisa Belzer

and approved by

Dr. Alisa Belzer

Dr. Thea Abu El-Haj

Dr. Sue Nash-Ditzel

New Brunswick, New Jersey

May, 2013

ABSTRACT OF THE DISSERTATION

Title

By Melissa Edwards

Dissertation Director:

Dr. Alisa Belzer

Problem Statement

In spite of the many support structures that attract nontraditional-aged adult students to community colleges, research suggests that participation in community college programs still presents barriers to the success of nontraditional-aged adult students that may ultimately affect retention. A study that seeks descriptions of those barriers and supports from nontraditional-aged adults' perspectives as they work to complete a semester adds valuable information about how to effectively help the growing number of nontraditional-aged adult students in community colleges.

Research Questions

How do nontraditional-aged adult students in community college describe the barriers and supports to the completion of an associate's degree and persistence in community college?

Subquestions

1. How do nontraditional-aged adult students describe their experiences with faculty in the classroom, their experiences with the registration process, and their interaction with the college administration for purposes of information, guidance, and other college-level issues?

2. How do nontraditional-aged adult students describe the experiences they have outside of college that affect their college experiences?

Method

To answer these questions, a multi-case study approach was conducted. Eleven nontraditional-aged adult students on campus served as focal students for the case study, which took place in the bounds of 1 semester. More than 800 nontraditional-aged adult students answered surveys about their experiences, 11 students participated in two face-to-face interviews during the semester, and participated in 4 telephone interviews. Eighteen nontraditional-aged adult student volunteers participated in focus-group sessions. Seventeen nontraditional-aged adult students posted their experiences on a private message board. Additional interviews and focus groups were conducted with faculty and staff to augment data.

Significance

Nontraditional-aged adult students are a unique and growing set of students in the community college sector. The characteristics of adults as learners are distinct enough to suggest the importance of a study such as the one conducted here. This study was a qualitative, multiple-case study that sought to provide an in-depth, detailed picture of the barriers and supports for nontraditional-aged adult students from their multiple perspectives and realities. This adds to the knowledge about barriers to success for a subgroup of community college students as well as identifies how nontraditional-aged adult students describe supports that can lead to success in community colleges. The study found that nontraditional-aged adult students at the college in the study faced a plethora of obstacles that were institutional, situational, and dispositional. The

institutional issues could be further subdivided between classroom issues and service access issues. I found that the college had multiple exemplary programs in place to support all of the students and in some cases, those exemplary programs successfully helped nontraditional-aged adults students to persist and be satisfied. However, the nontraditional-aged adult students at the college were diverse and therefore the programs in place did not serve and satisfy all of the nontraditional-aged adult students.

Nontraditional-aged adult students, those who were satisfied and those who were dissatisfied with the college, shared many of the same obstacles. However, the adults were still different enough from each other to call for the institution to use various methods to help the adult students to overcome the obstacles they had in common.

Acknowledgements

This project would not have been possible without the support of many people. Many thanks to my adviser, Dr. Alisa Belzer, who listened to my ideas and read my numerous drafts and revisions and helped make some sense of my ideas and organize them. Also, I would like to thank my committee members, Dr. Thea Abu El-Haj and Dr. Susan Nash-Ditzel, who took time to be available for the proposal and the defense process as well. And finally, I would like to thank my husband, my parents, my children, and other family members and friends who stayed positive and made sure I knew that they expected me to finish this project.

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my sons, Everett Edwards Murray and Ellison Edwards Murray, my husband, Dean Murray, and my parents, Carolyn Edwards and Marvin Edwards.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	v
Dedication	vi
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
Defining Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students	6
Barriers and Support for Nontraditional-aged Adults in Community College	7
Problem Statement	8
Rationale of Study and Research Questions	8
Subquestions	10
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature.....	11
How Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students are Different From Younger, Traditional-Aged Students	13
Adult-Development Theories.....	13
Sequential phases	14
Life transitions	17
Thinking, Social, and Motivational Developments in Adulthood	20
Development from a sociocultural lens	20
Implications for practice	22
Externalized Differences in Adult Learners	23
Late adolescents in college	25
Highlights of differences established.....	27
Barriers experienced by students	29
Institutional barriers	29

Situational barriers	32
Dispositional barriers	34
Lower retention	36
Exemplary Practices in Higher Education That Respond to Barriers for Nontraditional-Aged Adults.....	40
Exemplary Practices that Address Situational Barriers	40
Exemplary Practices that Counter Institutional Barriers	41
Exemplary Practices That Counter Dispositional Barriers	44
Community College Programs That Respond to Barriers for Nontraditional- Aged Adult Students	45
Conclusion	46
Chapter 3: Methods.....	48
Research Design.....	48
Research Site.....	49
Research Participants	52
Selection criteria	52
Recruitment.....	53
Data Collection	59
Surveys.....	59
Interviews.....	60
Student interviews.....	60
Faculty interviews	62
Interviews with administrative staff.....	62

Focus groups	63
Student focus groups	63
Administrative staff and faculty focus groups	65
Document collection	66
Message-board data	66
Institutional research	67
Data Analysis	68
Validity and Trustworthiness of Findings.....	70
Limitations	71
Researcher Role	73
Chapter 4: Findings: Types of Adult Students in Community College	75
Descriptive Survey Data	77
A Typology of Nontraditional-aged Community College Students	78
Everyone helps them.....	79
<i>Roman</i>	80
<i>Bob</i>	82
Struggling with personal challenges	84
<i>Martha</i>	85
<i>Jill</i>	88
<i>Yolanda</i>	91
<i>Melvin</i>	94
<i>Johnathan</i>	96
<i>Tom</i>	101

<i>Ann</i>	104
<i>Linda</i>	107
<i>Tonya</i>	109
Support Issues	112
Conclusion	115
Chapter 5: Analysis, Findings, and Conclusions	116
Instructional Matters and Institutional-System Matters.....	117
A View of Instructional Experiences Through an Andragogical Lens.....	120
Section 1: Instructional Matters	122
The need to know	122
Learners’ experience	128
Learner self-concept.....	134
Learners’ experience and learning concept—Combined.....	138
Readiness to learn (life tasks) and motivation to learn	139
Orientation to learning	146
Process Model and the Practice of Andragogy	149
Section 2: Institutional Services.....	151
Overview of available services	152
Course scheduling.....	153
Student services	154
Support programs.....	155
Counseling: Job Placement and Career Counseling	158
Technology	160

Disposition and Accessibility	161
Section 3: Role-Model Status and Leadership.....	164
Conclusion	167
Chapter 6: Introduction and Summary of the Study, Discussion of Findings,	
Implications for Practice, and Future Research	168
Introduction and Summary of Study.....	168
Discussion of Findings and Answers to Research Questions	170
Classroom Experiences: Differences	171
Services were not accessible and communication was lacking	173
Communication gaps	174
Outside of the college	174
Conclusion	174
Implications for Practice	175
Implications for Future Research.....	178
Conclusion	179
Appendix A: Survey Questions and Consent Form.....	181
Appendix B: Student Research-Participant Interview-Question Protocols	184
Appendix C: Faculty-Interview Protocols	188
Appendix D: Administrative-Staff-Interview Protocols.....	189
Appendix E: Student Focus-Group Questions and Protocols and Consent Form	190
Appendix F: Nontraditional-Age Adult-Students Survey.....	196
Appendix G: Age Distribution of Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students	238
References.....	239

Chapter 1: Introduction

The number of nontraditional-aged adult students in credit-bearing, community college programs in the United States is higher than the percentage of the same type of students in any other type of higher education institution, including universities and business-skills institutions (Chao, DeRocco & Flynn, 2007). Nontraditional-aged adult students comprise 44% of all postsecondary students (Chao et al., 2007). These students are defined as 21 years and older by some researchers and 25 years and older by others. Although most higher education models are designed to serve traditional-aged college students, adult-education researchers agree that adult students have very different needs from their younger counterparts (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Therefore, this shift in the demographics of students attending higher education institutions is significant because those institutions may need to make significant changes to accommodate this phenomenon (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).

Past and present economic factors have caused an increase in nontraditional-aged adults returning to college or enrolling for the first time (Carnevale, 2008; Milheim, 2005; Pulley, 2008; Ritt, 2008). In the first decade of the 21st century, waves of recession caused the workforce to become less stable and were a motivating factor for some of these students to participate in postsecondary education. Although there is an increase in enrollment of nontraditional-aged adult students, scholars have written that the United States stands to fall behind economically without some improvement in the education of its adult population (Carnevale, 2008; Ritt, 2008).

Ritt (2008) wrote, “the U.S. now ranks tenth among the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries in the percentage of young

adults ... with a postsecondary credential” (p. 12). The fastest growing jobs in the new economy will require college or some postsecondary education (Carnevale, 2008; Ritt, 2008). Other research suggests that the increased need for training and additional education among adults is not temporary, and that this trend of nontraditional-aged adults seeking a higher education may continue (Chao et al., 2007; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Ritt, 2008). It is more important than ever for institutions to provide an environment that encourages nontraditional-aged adult students to return to and complete higher education. Scholars have written that community colleges are one of the most attractive options for nontraditional-aged adult students to return to higher education (Chao et al., 2007; Spellman, 2007; Zamani, 2000). Elsner, Boggs and Irwin (2008) wrote, “In order to stay competitive in today’s volatile economy, people are using community colleges to gain practical, marketable employment skills; they are recognizing that lifelong learning is an economic necessity for staying employed or becoming re-employed” (83). In order to stay competitive in today’s volatile economy, people are using community colleges to gain practical, marketable employment skills; they are recognizing that lifelong learning is an economic

The business sector has also identified the community college as a key player in the growth of the economy (Pulley, 2008). “Maintaining the country’s economic competitiveness in a time of globalization will require renewed collaboration between community colleges and the business community” (Pulley, 2008, p. 5). The nation has the goal of increasing the number of adults with postsecondary educations significantly by 2025 (Ritt, 2008). For the United States to meet the standards of leading nations, it has been estimated that the United States needs 55% of the adult population to earn an

associate's degree (Ritt, 2008). The fact that most nontraditional-aged adult students attend community colleges, and that these students have different needs from many traditional-aged students, is significant. Community colleges need information to help serve this population of students effectively because in the future this population is predicted to become an even larger portion of the enrollment than it is now (Chao et al., 2007; Spellman, 2007; Ritt, 2008). Many of the characteristics that are considered the hallmarks of the community colleges are naturally appealing to nontraditional-aged adult students. These characteristics include open enrollment, flexible course offerings (evenings and weekends), and low cost. These characteristics match the priorities of adult learners pursuing a higher education (Ritt, 2008). Though these basic characteristics of community colleges may be attractive to nontraditional-aged adult students, research suggests that among nontraditional-aged adult students, there is still dissatisfaction with the community college experience in several areas, such as service, convenience, and the quality of the classroom experience (Ritt, 2008). Kasworm (1990) wrote that nontraditional-aged adult students receive higher grades than traditional students, but the barriers they experienced caused lower retention rates (McGivney, 2004). The academic success of nontraditional-aged adult students is an indication that they are able to navigate some important aspects of higher education (Kasworm, 1990), but their attrition rates suggest other difficulties. It is necessary for institutions to address these issues to provide a more satisfactory environment for nontraditional-aged adult students. In this way, nontraditional-aged adult students will be able to take full advantage of community college education and have successful academic and training experiences.

Although issues related to the participation of other groups of nontraditional students such as single parents, ethnic minorities, immigrants, and veterans have been studied (Compton, Cox, & Laanan, 2006), community colleges would do well to have information that could help them understand the needs of nontraditional-aged adult students as well (Geigerich, 2006). Community colleges need to understand the barriers to success and effective supports for these students to help them persist and improve retention and degree and certification completion. This study is designed to contribute to this body of knowledge.

The genesis of this study is my informal observations of nontraditional-aged adult students in the community college environment in various community colleges in central New Jersey, where I have taught for the past 11 years. Over the last several years, I have had the opportunity to hear many nontraditional-aged adult students describe their experiences in the community college system. Although these students were diverse in their backgrounds, their levels of responsibility outside of the college, and their academic goals, there were common threads in the experiences they shared with me. I met some nontraditional-aged adult students who seemed to be able to negotiate the community college challenges with few difficulties and whose maturity, experience, and adult savvy frequently helped them outshine their traditional-aged classmates. However, I met several nontraditional-aged adults who seemed to struggle and become discouraged by many of the challenges posed by functioning in an environment that the literature suggests is still designed to best serve traditional-aged students (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Issues included difficulties navigating the correct paths through their programs of choice; challenges with inadequate services provided by advisors, faculty, and other college staff;

and personal challenges that involved children, spouses, and finances. I found listening to the perspectives of these students to be particularly helpful in guiding my classroom practice. Their perspectives also helped guide me to put forth initiatives to establish systems and practices department-wide, division-wide, and college-wide that would better accommodate nontraditional-aged adult students. I believe a more systematic study of their experiences would help further these efforts in meaningful ways, as well as have broader implications for the field.

This study focused on documenting the first-hand descriptions of adult students' barriers to success that they face when trying to earn credits, and ultimately, to graduate in the community college environment. Research shows that the barriers to success in higher education that nontraditional-aged adult students face are situational, dispositional, and institutional (McGivney, 2004; Milheim, 2005; Ritt 2008). These barriers are described in the literature in the following ways: situational barriers result from one's circumstances in life; dispositional barriers pertain to how students perceive themselves and how they feel about their ability to succeed; and institutional barriers are practices in the college or university that impede participation in activities or courses (Milheim, 2005). This study addressed all these areas. Although other studies have tended to identify barriers only through surveys and single point in time data collection, the present study made a unique contribution by seeking to understand, from their perspectives, how students coped with barriers to success as they occurred over the course of an entire semester.

The site of the study, the college where I have taught full-time for nearly 8 years, is a fairly large community college in a Middle Atlantic state. Full-time enrollment is

12,903. There are 3,307 students over the age of 25 enrolled in the college; slightly less than a quarter of the total enrollment. To serve this population, the college maintains a database of currently enrolled nontraditional-aged adult students. This database is available through the registrar for those staff and faculty who wish to communicate with them through e-mail or postal mail. There are also decentralized efforts to serve these students that are initiated at all levels—classroom, department, division, and collegewide—as well as through counseling staff, career-advising staff, and the office of the president. In addition to making available the nontraditional-aged adult student database, the college has recently become the site of the grant-funded Center for Adult Education (CARE), which is available for a limited number of adult students. To be eligible for this program, students must be 21 and older, and have earned at least 31 college credits in the last 10 years. Students eligible for CARE are able to receive one-on-one counseling and financial support as well as other benefits.

Defining Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students

For the purpose of this study, nontraditional-aged students are defined as those who are 25 years and older. Although the minimum ages of 21 and 25 are both used by researchers to classify students as nontraditional-aged, I used the age of 25 because of my experiences at the site of the study. Few of the 21-year-old students I have interacted with over the last 11 years of teaching community college have held typical adult roles, which include childrearing and family responsibilities, long-term employment, and significant financial household responsibilities. However, by the time they are 25, many have begun to take on some adult roles. The research supports this observation with the concept of *emerging adulthood*, which has classified adults over 21 years of age into three distinct

groups. One of the groups, *emerging* adults, which includes adults as young as 21 and as old as 27, is described as not having the same type of responsibilities as those described as middle-aged-adult and older-adult responsibilities (Arnett, 2004). Beyond the consideration of age and adult roles, there are other characteristics that are considered unique among nontraditional-aged adult students. Cross (1981) identified the adult learner as one who is achievement oriented, highly motivated, independent, and in need of flexibility as well as developmentally appropriate instruction. Research supports the idea that age, adult roles, and adult development are all relevant when studying adults in a higher education setting.

Barriers and Support for Nontraditional-aged Adults in Community College

Scholars have written that attempting a community college degree as a nontraditional-aged student is complicated by the expectations, responsibilities, and needs of adulthood (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992; Cross, 1981; Strage, 2008). Specifically, these include the responsibilities of satisfying the immediate needs of their children, responsibilities of being a spouse and an employee, the discomfort an adult feels in the subordinate status of student, multiple financial responsibilities, and limited time to devote to college (Spellman, 2007). As supports, many community colleges offer more flexible course offerings and lower tuition than traditional universities (Boggs 2004). Other examples of supports include effective student-support personnel who help with questions that involve course schedules and academic programs, and sufficient orientation to the school, which may include tours to show students where to find necessary offices and services.

Problem Statement

In spite of the many support structures that attract nontraditional-aged adult students to community colleges, research suggests that participation in community college programs still presents barriers to the success of some nontraditional-aged adult students that may ultimately affect retention (McGivney, 2004; Ritt, 2008; Spellman, 2007). In fact retention statistics at the college for the two semesters previous to the study show this situation repeating itself where retention is significantly lower for nontraditional-age students than it is for the traditional-aged students. During the semester of the study, nontraditional-aged adult students older than 25, had only a 48% retention rate. Traditional-aged students had a 58% retention rate. A study that seeks descriptions of those barriers and supports that could have an impact on this statistic, from nontraditional-aged adults' perspectives as they work to complete a semester, adds valuable information about how to effectively help the growing number of nontraditional-aged adult students in community colleges.

Rationale of Study and Research Questions

In spite of the significant numbers of nontraditional-aged adults attending community colleges, there have been more studies and attention paid to the experiences of other groups of students attending community college, such as minorities, women, and veterans, than to nontraditional-aged adult students (Choy, 2002; Kim, 2002; Kohler, Munz, & Trares, 2007). Although nontraditional-aged students may also be members of each of those groups, the characteristics of adults as learners are distinct enough to suggest the importance of a study such as the one conducted here. This study was a qualitative, multiple case study that sought to provide an in-depth, detailed picture of the

barriers and supports for nontraditional-aged adult students from their multiple perspectives and realities. This study adds to the knowledge about barriers to success for a subgroup of community college students, as well as identifies how nontraditional-aged adult students described supports that could lead to success in community colleges.

A research design that had not previously been used was used to collect the first-hand descriptions of nontraditional-aged adult students' experiences in community colleges. Researching this topic in this way can increase understanding of situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers that limit retention, completion, and transfer rates, length of time spent at an institution, and other factors. Because community colleges are the most sought-after choice for nontraditional adult students, studying the barriers to success for nontraditional-aged students in this setting is appropriate and may be valuable for informing classroom practice and college-wide policies in these higher education settings (Spellman, 2007).

This multi-case study examined a range of experiences in a clearly defined group. This case-study approach, using triangulation, member checking, and thick description to increase the trustworthiness of the findings, increased the likelihood of transferability of the findings to other community colleges beyond the study site. To address the problem statement and the rationale for this study, the following research question and subquestions were addressed through the research design described in the methods chapter of this dissertation: How do nontraditional-aged adult students in community college describe the barriers and supports to the completion of an associate's degree and persistence in community college?

Subquestions

1. How do nontraditional-aged adult students describe their experiences with faculty in the classroom, their experiences with the registration process, and their interaction with the college administration for purposes of information, guidance, and other college-level issues?
2. How do nontraditional-aged adult students describe the experiences they have outside of college that affect their college experiences?

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

In the United States, postsecondary education has long driven individual social mobility and collective economic prosperity. Nonetheless, the nation's labor force includes 54 million adults who lack a college degree; of those, nearly 34 million have no college experience at all. In the 21st century, these numbers cannot sustain us. ... Global economic competition and the rapid pace of technological change are revolutionizing the skills and educational qualifications necessary to individual job success. (Pusser et al., 2007, Abstract)

A variety of factors is contributing to the increasing presence of nontraditional-aged adult students in higher education. For example, economic factors, which include the need for more technological skills in a rapidly evolving technology-driven workforce and the competition for jobs in a global economy that features outsourcing made convenient by new technology, are causing adults to enter or reenter higher education (Chao et al., 2007; Kirby, Biever, Martinez, & Gómez, 2004; Pusser et al., 2007; Ritt, 2008). As a result of these economic factors, which have been burgeoning over the last few decades, the number of nontraditional-aged adult students has now surpassed the number of traditional-aged students in higher education (Chao et al., 2007; Justice & Dornan, 2001; Philbert, Allen, & Elleven, 2008; Porter, 1989; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Educated adults who have postsecondary education are drivers of the economy. When they enroll in postsecondary education, nontraditional-aged adult students typically earn higher grades than traditional-aged students (Chao & Good, 2004; Hoyert & O'Dell, 2009; Justice & Dornan, 2001). However, in spite of there now being more nontraditional-aged adult students enrolled in higher education than ever before, and

those students having great potential for academic success, the retention rate for nontraditional-aged adult students is lower than that of traditional-aged students, and nontraditional-aged adult students are considerably less likely to complete their programs (Chao et al., 2007; Eppler, Carsen-Plentl, & Harju, 2000; National Center for Education Statistics, 2004). Research that seeks explanations for this phenomenon suggests that higher education institutions are failing to serve adult learners adequately in such areas as institutional organization, funding, and institutional accountability systems (Chao et al., 2007). Research is beginning to focus on how to increase retention rates among nontraditional-aged adult college students by identifying risk factors and barriers to their success, as well as effective supports (Chao et al., 2007; Lau, 2003).

To highlight this research, this chapter will be divided into three parts. The first part will identify what makes older adult students different from younger students, and will include three subsections. The first subsection describes how adult development and learning distinguish adults from younger students, and some implications for teaching. The second subsection will discuss research on retention rates as a key difference between older and younger students that is relevant to this study. The third will describe how adult roles and responsibilities distinguish nontraditional-aged students from other students, and their implications for enrollment and retention. The second part of this chapter will describe and explain the kinds of barriers nontraditional-aged students experience as a result of their differences. Subsections here will group those barriers using a key analytic framework frequently invoked in the literature. These are situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers. The third part of the chapter will describe what is already known about exemplary practices in higher education in general, and what

practices some community colleges are already implementing specifically to respond to nontraditional-aged learners. Subsections in this final part of the chapter will focus on exemplary practices that address each type of barrier (institutional, dispositional, and situational), and also on what adults require as a result of their different development needs. This section also highlights how some colleges are already countering low-retention rates among nontraditional-aged adult students.

How Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students are Different From Younger, Traditional-Aged Students

M. Porter (1980) wrote, “it is no secret to student personnel professionals that adult students are quite different ... [from] their counterparts” (p. 4). This section describes research on developmental change and external factors that contribute to these differences. It concludes with a discussion of what these differences imply for practice.

Adult-Development Theories

People change as they age. The kind of change experienced by people after they reach 21 years of age is important in the context of a discussion about education because these changes have a significant effect on how adults absorb information and learn (Baumgartner, 2001; Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). The relevant adult changes that distinguish nontraditional-aged adult students from younger, traditional students involve psychological, cognitive, and sociocultural developments.

Psychological changes develop in adults as a result of both internal and external occurrences (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Two of the ways researchers suggest psychological changes can be understood are through the lenses of sequential phase

development and through life transitions and events. Clark and Caffarella (1999) wrote, “stage/phase theories, as well as those that frame development in terms of life events and transitions, are among the most enduring and influential in the adult development literature” (p. 20).

Sequential phases. Although there are many sequential phase theories, sequential theories put forth by Erickson and Levinson “have probably had the greatest impact on adult education” (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21). Both Erickson and Levinson viewed sequential development as a process that is “hierarchical in nature, building over time and occurring in a fixed order” (as cited in Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Erikson, who is the most influential of all of the stage theorists, however, did not link this process to age (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Clark and Caffarella (1999) wrote that Erikson viewed sequential change as a series of crises occurring over a lifetime, in which people have to make “negative or positive choices” (p. 103). Sequential development viewed through this lens posits that people must make more positive than negative choices to move to the next level of development. Erickson developed an eight-stage model that illustrates “pairs of oppositional outcomes: one outcome positive or healthy and the other outcome negative and thus less desirable” (21). The relevant adult stages in his model are young adulthood, adulthood, and old age (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Erikson, 1982). An example of how this idea is manifested can be seen in Erikson’s first stage of adulthood: intimacy versus isolation (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Erikson, 1982). “The young adult must develop a sense of ‘we’ that transcends previous immersion with the self” (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21). Clark and Caffarella (1999) believed “this is accomplished by establishing one or more genuinely intimate relationships”: experiencing love (p. 21).

Cross (1981, p. 240, as cited in Merriam and Caffarella, 1998), maintained that “if educators are accepting a sequential hierarchical model, educators should help the adult learners by challenging them to advance in their personal development.” Merriam and Caffarella (1998) put forth that one way to do that is to help adult learners “examine their basic assumptions” in life (p. 104). Baumgartner (2001) held that implications of helping adults learners are that educators trying to leverage this perspective in their teaching may lean toward ideas developed in transformative learning literature: critical reflection and discussion. This is because transformative learning is triggered by experience (Boucoulalas & Lawrence, 2010; Brookfield, 1986).

A brief description of transformative learning illustrates its relationship to sequential development theory because it shows how acknowledging stages or transitions through one’s life can be leveraged to challenge one to seek growth. To experience transformative learning, adults embark on learning processes that unfold in multiple phases (Cranston, 1994). They experience problems, looking at their perspectives carefully, “conducting a critical assessment of the internalized role assumptions and feeling a sense of alienation from traditional social expectations” (Cranston, 1994, p. 23). Realizing that they are not alone in experiencing their dilemmas, they look at new ways of behaving (Cranston, 1994). Learners develop the confidence to make changes and behave differently, and move forward by making action plans and then finding ways to acquire the knowledge and skills to carry out those plans (Cranston, 1994). Learners thus experience transformative learning and integrate their new behaviors into their previous world (Cranston, 1994). These steps relate to Erikson’s sequential theory because the

dilemma or crisis faced by the adult will cause the adult learner to make a choice, either negative or positive. The transformative learning will follow.

Levinson is the other prominent theorist in sequential development (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). There are some differences in how Erikson and Levinson viewed sequential development. “Erikson’s focus is within the person, whereas Levinson’s focus is on the boundary between self and society” (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21). Also, although both Erikson and Levinson “maintain that stages of development are hierarchical in nature,” Levinson connected sequential development directly to age (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Levinson and Levinson (1996) established the following as the significant age points to mark the sequences (p. 18).

- Early Adult Transition—Ages 17–22
- Entry Life Structure for Early Adulthood—Ages 22–28
- Age 30 Transition—Ages 28–33
- Culminating Life Structure for Early Adulthood—Ages 33–40
- Mid-Life Transition—Ages 40–45
- Early Life Structure for Middle Adulthood—45–50
- Age 50 Transition—50–55
- Culminating Life Structure for Middle Adulthood—55–60
- Late Adult transition—Ages 60–65
- Era of Late Adulthood—Ages 60 and older

Levinson saw these stages as consisting of a “relatively orderly sequence of periods during the adult years” (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 21). These age-related stages come with various expectations, including behavioral ones. Acknowledging the

changes in the structure of a person's life is the pillar of Levinson's theory of adult development (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Examples of life-structure changes include marriage and family, occupation, friendship, relationship to politics, and memberships and roles in many social settings (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Merriam and Caffarella (1998) wrote that when development is linked to age, many educators try to "link ... age-appropriate tasks and behavior" to "learning activities for adults" (p. 102). Havinghurst (1972), as reported in Merriam and Caffarella (1998), submitted that as people develop naturally and must make developmentally appropriate decisions such as "selecting a mate, starting a family, or starting an occupation," there is opportunity for learning to take place—a "teachable moment" (p. 103). Overall, adults develop sequentially, whether through the aging process or nonage-related phases, they ask themselves more questions, begin to resolve key problems, make transitions, and then make changes in their thinking (Clark & Caffarella, 1999).

Life transitions. One of the other ways to understand psychological development in adults is the life transition framework (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). The best-known theorists in this field are Schlossberg and Bridges (Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Schlossberg maintained that "there is no single predictable, universal adult experience," but rather that there are many experiences that involve transitions (as cited in Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Transitions are "anticipated events, unanticipated events, and nonevents that alter adult lives" (Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 23). Life transitions serve as "benchmarks in the human life cycle" (Danish et al., 1980, as cited in Sugarman, 1986, p. 131). Life transitions are not connected to age, but rather are tied to life events, "individual or cultural" (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 104).

Schlossberg created categories for individual life events: “anticipated or unanticipated nonevents and sleeper events” (1989, as cited in Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 104). Nonevents are events that people may expect, but that do not happen, whereas sleeper events are ones that happen, but people are not sure when they started (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Events such as war, movements, and various types of catastrophes are considered cultural events (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Factors that impact how these life transitions affect psychological development in people include timing (the event is congruent with either personal or societal expectations of when it should happen), cohort specificity (the event may affect only certain generation, or it may affect different cohorts of people in different ways), and probability (normative being high, nonnormative being low). (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 105)

Because of the nature of life events, which “may begin well before the event itself happens and continue well beyond it,” the learning that takes place as result of experiencing life events is not ‘smooth or continuous’” (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998, p. 105). Ultimately, life events are viewed as facilitating people’s experiences of either growth or decline (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Life transitions (individual or cultural; anticipated or unanticipated) can bring on change and growth, which lead to development in adults (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Schlossberg (1987) theorized, “by systematically sizing up transitions and our own resources for dealing with them we can learn how to build on our strengths, cut our losses—and even grow in the process” (p. 75). Another way of understanding how life transitions affect lives is through a theory posited by

Bridges (1991, as cited in Clark & Caffarella, 1999). Bridges's concept consisted of three phases: ending, neutral zone, and new beginning. According to Bridges,

a transition begins with letting go, [when] an individual enters the second phase of the transition process—the neutral zone. The neutral zone is the very core of the transition process. It's the place and the time when old habits that are no longer adaptive ... and new, better-adapted patterns or habits begin to take shape (Bridges, as cite in Clark & Caffarella, 1999, p. 6).

The new beginning is possible after a person has spent time in the neutral zone.

Schlossberg and Bridges believed transitions could not be avoided, but could be controlled or managed, and this facilitates growth (Clark & Caffarella, 1999).

Overall all, “people reach more complex, integrated levels of development through active participation with their environments” (Baumgartner, 2001). Both of the psychological models described—sequential and the life-events transition model—suggest that older students, who are more likely to have faced more of these sequential or life events that are seen to trigger development, are more developed than their younger, less experienced counterparts. This puts older adults on a different developmental level than their younger classmates. Because of the different levels of development, older adults are likely to have different kinds of questions and look at situations from a very different perspective from that of younger students. As a result of development, adults are likely to approach the acquisition of knowledge differently from the way younger students do. They may be more independent and more practiced at learning in general.

Thinking, Social, and Motivational Developments in Adulthood

Another aspect of psychological development involves how older adults think. Thinking patterns change as adults age, and those changes drive intellectual and cognitive growth in adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). Research suggests that adults experience growth in their dialectical thinking (their ability to reconcile complicated and contradictory information to come to conclusions), and their growing awareness of contextual patterns also shapes their development (Kegan, 1994). Growth in dialectical thinking helps older adults increase their understanding of complex ideas in different ways from when they were younger. Also, their deeper exposure to cultural, economic, and political forces also helps them contextualize learning differently from younger learners (Kegan, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Mature adults are more likely to analyze, synthesize, and make judgments about course material, whereas younger students are more likely to believe that they simply need to memorize it (Tweedell, 2005).

Development from a sociocultural lens. A sociocultural view of development explains how social roles also shape the lives and learning of adult students (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Tennant & Pogson, 1995). This developmental perspective is relevant in highlighting the differences between nontraditional-aged adult and younger students because literature on nontraditional-aged adults identifies social roles such as parent, worker, and spouse as significant. The literature on nontraditional-aged students suggests that these social roles make nontraditional-aged adult students different from younger, more traditional students. Although older adult students are occupied with concerns that follow from the roles

mentioned here, traditional students are more concerned about their roles as friends and are more focused on making time for and navigating peer events and social activities (Dill & Henly, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Society places different expectations on people depending on their participation in these various roles, and this in turn affects how adults think about themselves. Older adults are more likely to be serving in the roles of parent, worker, and spouse than are younger adults; this is a developmental distinction between the two groups.

Motivation is also identified as a difference between the way nontraditional-aged students and younger students learn (Justice & Dornan, 2001). Nontraditional-aged adults may be motivated to learn for reasons different from those of younger students. The motivation for older adults to learn is more likely to be intrinsic than it is for younger learners: adults often learn simply because they want to learn (Eppler et al., 2000; Justice & Dornan, 2001). They also have adult roles and responsibilities that are enhanced by additional learning and training. In contrast, traditional-aged students “cite more external motivations for learning such as social relationships or parental expectations” (Justice & Dornan, 2001, p. 236).

There is a relationship between development and learning, and research suggests that adult development has some implications for adult learning, although this field is still developing (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010). Many of the adult developmental models focus on how experiences affect learning: prior experiences, current experiences, and new experiences. Nontraditional-aged adult students’ ability to make connections to experiences makes it possible for those students to integrate new information and use it in a more multidimensional way than younger students (Bye, Pusser, & Conway, 2007,

p. 142). Younger students do not have enough experience to function in the same ways as adults. The older one is, the more experiences they acquire, and this is therefore a significant distinction between nontraditional-aged adults and younger students.

Implications for practice. Although there is little research on the ways educators working in higher education use adult-development theories to guide their classroom practices, there is a set of assumptions, known collectively as andragogy, that can be a useful model in teaching adults enrolled in higher education. The assumptions, drawn from conclusions about adult learning, clinical psychology, developmental psychology, sociology, and philosophy, are that more mature adults (a) need to know why they need to learn something, (b) are self-directed learners, (c) have a wide range of experiences that can serve as a resource for (or a barrier to) learning, (d) are ready to learn based on their roles and responsibilities, (e) have a problem-centered orientation to learning, and (f) have an internal motivation to learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Knowles et al. (2005) suggested that there is an ideal way to set up an adult classroom which is congruent with these assumptions about adult learners. Older adults prefer a classroom that is organized around a “process model.” This is different from the “content models employed by most traditional educators” (Knowles, 2005, p. 115). The differences between these two models are that in the traditional content model,

the teacher ... decides in advance what knowledge or skills need to be transmitted, arranges the body of content into logical units, selects the most efficient means for transmitting this content ... and then develops a plan for presenting these content units in some sort of sequence. (Knowles et. al, 2005, p. 115)

In the process model, the students and teacher take a more collaborative approach to deciding what will be taught (Knowles et. al., 2005). Knowles et.al.(2005) asserted that the concepts embedded in andragogy are flexible; it can be applied in whole or in part, and can withstand modification. This means it can be applied flexibly and that teachers can adapt it to their classrooms as they wish. They can change it to suit their own and their students' needs: "the appropriate starting point and strategies for applying the andragogical model depends on the situation" (p. 147).

Many traditional learning opportunities in college involve direct, teacher-centered instruction, and the teacher is considered by students to have more experience in the area of study than the students. Andragogy, if implemented in higher education, might include teachers functioning as facilitators of learning rather than always offering direct instruction. There would be significant emphasis placed on the experiences the students bring to the course. Students would collaborate with the facilitator or instructor to select the materials and topics to be covered for the semester. Learning activities might include interactive and problem-based assignments. Some traditional methods may even be adapted to meet the needs of older learners: students would be asked what they need to know and lectures could be built around that material (Forrest & Peterson, 2006). In the area of assessment, reflective writing, or peer- and self-evaluations using a rubric, could be used (Forrest & Peterson, 2006).

Externalized Differences in Adult Learners

Although developmentalists seek to understand internal changes that occur in adulthood, other researchers are trying to understand more externalized differences between older and younger students. Researchers have identified older adult students as

characteristically having a minimum of at least 1 year of delay between high school and college, having dependents, being single parents, having full-time employment, being financially independent, being enrolled part time, and having no high school diploma (Chao et al., 2007; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Ross-Gordon, 2011).

The employee role is one that has been singled out as being a significant difference between older and younger adult students because most nontraditional-aged adult students participate in college as “employees who study rather than students who work” (Shugart, 2008, p. 19). Similarly, a 2003 study by Berker, Horn, and Carroll (2003) found that older students see themselves as employees first, and school as a way to enhance that identity by improving their job prospects. This attitude affects their class choices and even the type of class work they prefer: group versus individual. Chao et al. (2007) found that a third of the nontraditional-aged adult population was enrolled in college because their jobs required them to seek additional education, adding another dimension to the difference between nontraditional-aged adult students and traditional-aged students: sometimes adults require the college courses they are taking to remain or advance in their job or career, which may be tied to reimbursement agreements or possible job loss in the absence of required qualifications. Although younger students are generally aware that they need to have a college education to get a job, they are rarely already holding jobs that require them to attend college (Chao et al., 2007). Nontraditional-aged students rarely have just one of the commonly identified characteristics of the older-student group, such as having dependents (children or parents), full-time employment, and financial responsibilities. Rather, the literature

suggests that holding multiple roles simultaneously distinguishes older students from younger ones (Chao et al., 2007).

Another area of difference that is highlighted in the research is that nontraditional-aged students and younger students differ in how they engage with peers. Older adults are more likely than younger students to talk to classmates, friends, and coworkers about their academic work. Although they know fewer classmates, they tend to develop very close relationships with the smaller group (Tweedell, 2005).

Late adolescents in college. As established earlier, students who attend community college can be divided into two age groups: late adolescent students aged 18 to 24, and adult students aged 24 and older (Chao et al., 2007; Keup, 2008; Pryor, Hurtado, Sharkness, & Korn, 2007). Research on the college experiences of late adolescent students, who are traditional-aged college students, and older students, who are nontraditional-aged adult students, is abundant. However, studies that focus on direct comparisons of late-adolescent students with older adult students are scant. In addition to the dearth of research on how these two groups who participate in community colleges are similar and different, scholars also suggest that not enough attention has been given to the study of community colleges in general and to the barriers that all students face in community colleges (Kim, 2002; Wirth & Padilla, 2008). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005, as cited in Wirth and Padilla, 2008), indicated that “community colleges are still significantly underrepresented in the total body of evidence of college impacts” (p. 3). Despite limited empirical information on how the two groups differ from each other in community colleges, the available studies on each group make it possible to make inferences about the effect of these two groups attending the same institution, but having

different needs. It can be inferred that there are differences in the ways the groups experience college instructors, process information conveyed in class, receive information, behave in class, and access the services available on campus.

Perhaps one reason there have been few attempts by scholars to compare the two groups is because distinguishing precisely when traditional-aged, late-adolescent students became adults is difficult, thus making it hard to make firm distinctions between traditional-aged students who are primarily late adolescents and nontraditional-aged adult students (Halx, 2010; Kasworn, 2003). To further confound the ability to parse differences between the two groups, scholars write that on the community college campus, the entire population of students has long been categorized as nontraditional, because the majority of the community college students share various risk factors that set them apart from other students in higher education (Kim, 2002). The list of risk factors used to identify nontraditional students includes students who are 24 and older, independent of parents' support, enrolled part time, lacking a high school diploma, and single parents. A student need only have one trait to be considered nontraditional; thus, a traditional-aged student with only one risk factor is generally classified as nontraditional, like their adult counterparts (Kim, 2002). Kim (2002) found insufficient scholarship, in both number and depth, distinguishing numerous subsets of nontraditional students. "Rather than looking generally at nontraditional students, it is of greater value to examine specific subpopulations. ... Research on specific populations should clearly identify the population within its scope and focus on the unique qualities of the group" (Kim, 2002, p. 86).

Scholars are careful to acknowledge exceptions to the norm in each group. Some young adults are developmentally similar to older adults. This makes it difficult to generalize about the two groups (Halx, 2010). Other scholars established that some traditional-aged, younger college students share various traits with nontraditional-aged, older students (Kim, 2002). Adolescents and adults are different in their developmental progress and their roles in society. Scholars have established that in a college education, late adolescents generally learn through direct teaching and demonstrate more dependence on the instructor (Zarrett & Eccles, 2006). Older-adult students, in contrast, are generally independent learners who wish to draw on their own experiences and even influence the direction of the class (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998). Furthermore, late adolescents are different from nontraditional-aged adults in the ways in which they experience institutional, situational, and dispositional challenges; areas of challenge that are pervasive among all students.

Highlights of differences established. Several key differences between younger and older students were highlighted in Chapter 1. To reiterate, younger students receive lower grades on average than do older students. Younger students are also less-likely to be spouses or parents, rarely have the responsibility of managing the care of older family members, and do not typically hold jobs with a fixed career path. Other differences highlighted in this chapter are psychological, cognitive, and sociocultural developmental differences.

Psychological differences include the ways adults deal with major natural phases and changes in their lives (Clark & Caffarella, 1999; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Younger people have typically not had the opportunity to experience as many life-

changing events; thus, they have different questions and face different dilemmas compared to older students. Cognitively, younger students are less-capable of dialectical thinking and are less-developed in their ability to identify contextual patterns. Combined with less exposure to cultural, economic, and political forces, this characteristic makes students less-able to contextualize learning than older learners (Kegan, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998). Younger students are also less likely to analyze, synthesize, and make judgments about course materials, and instead feel the need to memorize materials (Tweedell, 2005). Socially, younger students are more interested in making friends and having fun than focusing on schoolwork (Dill & Henly, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Furthermore, society has different expectations of young people, and these expectations cause them to think about themselves differently than do older people (Dill & Henly, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 2011). Another social characteristic that divides younger and older students is the quantity and quality of life experiences. Lack of experience is a significant difference between young people and older people (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010). Experience affects learning because it influences the ability to integrate new information and use it in multidimensional ways. Less experience limits this ability (Boucouvalas & Lawrence, 2010). Additional areas already highlighted include differences between older and younger students' motivations to learn. Older adult students tend to be self-motivated (Eppler et al., 2000; Justice & Dornan, 2001), whereas younger students are mainly motivated because of pressure from their friends or parents (Justice & Dornan, 2001).

Another significant distinction highlighted is that younger students think differently about employment than do older students. School is more frequently a secondary priority for older students, and is considered a means to advance in their

careers; employers often encourage or require older students to take courses (Chao et al., 2007). Finally, adults hold multiple roles as parents, spouses, and employees, and these roles distinguish them from younger students. Additional areas that were not discussed in Chapters 1 and 2 are that younger students experience learning barriers that are either institutionally, situationally, or dispositionally differently from older students.

Barriers experienced by students. All college students experience challenges and may encounter barriers to their success in higher education. However, the characteristics of nontraditional-aged students make them vulnerable to a different set of barriers than younger students, even when those barriers may be classified in the same ways. Barriers to success for students are generally described as situational, dispositional, and institutional (Cross, 1981). Because nontraditional-aged adults live in different situations, respond to the institution differently, and have different ways of thinking of themselves, the problems they experience in each of those areas are distinct from the problems experienced by traditional-aged students in the same areas (Ritt, 2008).

Institutional barriers. Institutional barriers are those practices and procedures that make it difficult for students to participate successfully or exclude or discourage students from participating in organized learning activities (Cross, 1981). Adults need institutions to be flexible and responsive because their time is circumscribed by the needs of their families and employers, and even their ability to travel to or access a course, whereas younger students frequently build their lives around their school-related demands (Ritt, 2008). With their limited time, some critical areas in which nontraditional-aged students experience institutional barriers revolve around class schedules and formats, and limited access to professors, campus resources, and activities

at times when they are available (Fairchild, 2003). When there is not a sufficient menu of course times or modalities (night classes, online classes, weekend classes), when faculty office hours are limited and inconvenient, and when campus activities are not offered at times that are convenient to people with full-time jobs and children, barriers are created and nontraditional-aged students are at risk of not being able to complete an academic program (Pusser et al., 2007).

Another type of institutional barrier that affects nontraditional-aged students arises when institutions do not offer logical and convenient course sequences for program completion or lack the proper institutional alignment with other institutions for efficient transfer of credits. Most adults need to achieve their educational goals as quickly as possible (Lumina Foundation, n.d.), but colleges often fail to ensure that courses are available in the proper sequence or that schedules allow students to take the courses they need for their programs when they are ready to do so; this can slow progress and frustrate nontraditional-aged students (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).

Another discouraging time-related institutional barrier for nontraditional-aged students is that many students are required to take several noncredit developmental courses before they can start their program work. Although developmental courses are intended to provide an opportunity for students to develop skills that will aid in their eventual academic success, they have been identified as barriers to some nontraditional-aged students because they cost the same as other courses and take a significant amount of time to complete, sometimes up to a year (Chao et al., 2007; McGivney, 2004). This delay in progress can have an impact on the motivation (not to mention finances) of any student, but with older-adult students, this frequently causes them to give up because of

the perception that they are running out of time and cannot commit to a year of developmental courses when they have immediate goals (Chao et al., 2007).

Furthermore, the traditional teaching style has been identified as a barrier (Chao et al., 2007). Scholars write that nontraditional-aged adult students do not respond well to a traditional lecture format or to being evaluated with tests that ask students to do no more than repeat what has been taught (Chao et al., 2007). This has been identified as an ineffective method of engaging adults because adults generally do not like to be passive learners (Chao et al., 2007). Passive learning is incongruent with the principles of andragogy and may be ineffective for an adult population of learners (Knowles et al., 1998).

Financial aid systems also present a unique set of institutional barriers to nontraditional-aged students. Even though older adult students usually make more money than younger students, their responsibilities, such as having dependent children (some of whom might be in college too), elderly parents (who do not support them financially and may need some financial support themselves), and significant debt (mortgages, car loans) complicate their financial situations in comparison to those of traditional students. Also, financial aid does not serve students well if they take time off to handle their competing responsibilities or if they enroll part time, which is typical of many adult students (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Research suggests that the current financial aid system was not designed to account for adult-student challenges or the range of ways they might need to progress through higher education (Hart, 2003).

Younger students experience different institutional barriers. When younger students are not able to receive proper course advisement, the results may be less

problematic because they often have less-immediate goals connected to completing courses than do older students. Other kinds of institutional barriers may also generally be the same, but point to different implications for younger and older students: Younger students are perceived to have more time ahead of them, and therefore setbacks are not as significant as they are to adults (Wirth & Padilla, 2008). There is a lack of urgency regarding career information, as younger students are rarely already in a career and have some years before they will be expected to begin one. Also, because younger students are generally not as assertive as more mature adults when seeking information, a college's limited methods of communicating information about services may encourage these students to be more active and take more responsibility in gathering information to meet their needs. For older adults, in contrast, the limited availability of information may simply be seen as a college's lack of sensitivity to students who are already responsible and do not need to learn to take responsibility; instead, they need the college to anticipate their needs, and then find various ways of providing information to students about the availability of necessary services (Kim, 2002).

Situational barriers. As mentioned earlier, situational barriers are those challenges that come from one's situation or environment at any given time (Cross, 1981). Adults' situations change as they age. Adults over 25 are more likely to be parents and have dependents (such as their own parents), have a spouse or a partner, work a full-time job that provides them with needed health benefits and a salary on which others may depend, and even have civic obligations (Chao et al., 2007; Giancola, Grawitch, & Borchert, 2009; Keith, 2007; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). These multiple, significant responsibilities may serve as barriers to success when they compete with a younger

student's resources (time, energy, and money) (Chao et al., 2007; Giancola et al., 2009; Keith, 2007; Sorey & Duggan, 2008). Those life demands (or responsibilities) are enough to cause significant challenges for nontraditional-age adults, but in addition, research suggests that nontraditional-aged students frequently lack family or any other kind of support for attending college. This contrasts with traditional-aged students, who are barely viewed as an adult, and who are often sent to school by family and rewarded or held accountable for success in college by family or other supportive networks (Howe & Strauss, 2003). The nontraditional-aged student's responsibilities can cause stress and may affect performance (Giancola et al., 2009), and if those conditions are exacerbated by family matters such as sick children, transportation problems, or job loss, this lends additional situational risk to students' possible success and persistence (McGivney, 2004), often exacerbated by insufficient personal-support networks.

Situational problems experienced by younger students include problems with transportation, or being underprepared for college. The latter problem stems from situations that predate college, and is different from the preparation issues experienced by older students; in many cases, older adults are underprepared because of the time that has elapsed between when they graduated from high school and when they begin college, whereas traditional-aged students have left high school quite recently (Hagedorn, Perrakis, & Maxwell, 2007). Other situational barriers for younger students include a lack of support from parents or friends, which is not an issue for older adults because the people in their lives are spouses, children, older family members or coworkers; lack of support from one's spouse or employer is different from lack of support for one's peer group or parents (Hagedorn et al., 2007). More mature adults rarely look to their parents

or friends for approval in the same way that younger students do, because their developmental levels have made them more autonomous (Mezirow, 2000).

Dispositional barriers. Dispositional barriers are barriers pertaining to how students perceive themselves and how they feel about their ability to succeed (Milheim, 2005). Students need to feel comfortable and confident in a college setting to succeed and persist. When students struggle to maintain comfort and confidence, they face dispositional barriers related to attitudes and self-perceptions about themselves as learners (Cross, 1981). Although it is difficult to measure and define dispositional barriers comprehensively, research suggests that nontraditional-aged students think of themselves differently from traditional-aged students. Adults sometimes enter college with the mentality that they are imposters (Brookfield, 1999), with a “sense that they have neither the ability nor even the right to become college students” (Howell, 2001, p. 2). Valadez (1993) wrote that they may also find themselves feeling disappointed because they have unrealistic expectations of college, and this affects their perceptions of themselves as learners. They hold stereotypes regarding teachers, expecting teachers to be “all-knowing experts who pour wisdom into the heads of their students”; this perception causes problems when they learn that what is expected is for students to “ask the right questions rather than find the right answers” (Howell, 2001, p. 2); the change may cause them to “feel confused, frustrated and sometimes even cheated” (Howell, 2001, p. 2). Researchers have identified adjustment difficulties as a problem that plagues adult students *returning* to a schooling environment. Traditional-aged students who come directly from high school are less likely to experience this type of disorientation (Carlin, 2001). Adult students also may feel intimidated upon their return (Carlin, 2001). This

discomfort is compounded by some of the direct contact that nontraditional-aged students have with traditional-aged students, because older-adult students may be afraid that they cannot compete well with younger students and may also be concerned about fitting in with them (Carlin, 2001).

Some studies suggest that traditional-aged students have numerous positive dispositional qualities compared to nontraditional-aged students. Scholars characterize these younger students as both unique and promising. They are considered intelligent, enthusiastic, group oriented, ready to respect authority figures, driven to succeed, technologically competent, and likely to respect the identities of others (Keeling, 2003; Keup, 2008; Newton, 2000). However, scholars say younger students possess negative dispositional qualities as well. They may be followers and lack leadership ability; they may not be self-aware, and lack sociopolitical passions (Keeling, 2003; Keup, 2008; Newton, 2000). There is a gap in the literature in explaining how these traits affect traditional-aged students in college.

Younger students seem to have more challenging emotional issues that are connected to their college attendance than do older students (Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004; Pryor et al., 2007). They have difficulty dealing with typical college pressures that can manifest as test anxiety and difficulty studying, as well as handling pressures specific to young people such as homesickness, the first experience of romantic heartbreak, and living away from home for the first time. Scholars attribute these difficulties to the fact that the younger generation has been parented differently from previous generations resulting in less resilience than older students (Urry, Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011). They have often developed in a more sheltered environment and received greater

protection from their parents than previous generations of young people (Howe & Strauss, 2003; Urry, Nelson & Padilla-Walker, 2011; Wirth & Padilla, 2008). Younger college students often manifest significant mental fragility and vulnerability to depression, debilitating anxiety, and a tendency toward substance abuse (Kitzrow, 2003; Pritchard & Wilson, 2003). Younger students tend to have closer relationships with their parents than older adults, and closer than even college students in previous generations (Keup & Stolzenberg, 2004; Olinger, 2003; Pryor et al., 2007; Urry, Nelson, & Padilla-Walker, 2011; Wirth & Padilla, 2008;).

Finally, younger students are constantly trying to “find” their path (Hill, Burrow, Brandenberger, Lapsley, & Quaranto, 1999). This search can markedly affect how they choose their classes and approach the completion of their programs. They often do not consider college an immediate accomplishment, unlike older adults who have specific reasons to take courses or pursue particular programs (Hill et al., 1999). Younger students focus more on achieving financial success in the future, and are not as concerned about learning as are adults (Howe & Strauss, 2003). Wirth and Padilla (2008) developed a guide to success for younger students, suggesting that these students develop a purpose for attending college and take responsibility for their attendance. The fact that they may have to be led to this idea is a characteristic that sets them apart from older adults in college.

Retention and nontraditional-aged adults. Although there are many studies on college retention, many studies focus on race and socioeconomics as significant contributing factors rather than age. “Only a few studies investigated the retention of degree-seeking nontraditional/adult students on campus” (Brown, 2002, p. 67). Other

studies focusing on nontraditional students do not make clear distinctions between students who are of traditional age, students who are of nontraditional age, and students who are labeled “nontraditional” due to characteristics other than age (Brown, 2002). Being over 25 is one factor that usually places a student into the “nontraditional” category (Brown, 2002), but it is not the only one. Also, students do not need to possess all the usual nontraditional characteristics to be considered nontraditional; they may have just one (e.g., age) and still be considered nontraditional (Brown, 2002). It is important to understand who is being included in nontraditional retention statistics because those statistics are not always based on specific characteristics of the population of nontraditional students. Defining too broadly students who are considered nontraditional when studying their retention rates is problematic: these students are being grouped together in ways that are not meaningful, presenting challenges when studying how best to provide services for their diverse needs (Brown, 2002). There are important distinctions between nontraditional/traditional-aged student and the nontraditional/nontraditional-aged students, and those distinctions could have implications on retention.

In addition to there being problems finding retention research that separates nontraditional students by age, there is limited information on retention rates for nontraditional-aged adults in community colleges. Scholars suggest that the retention data provided by institutions such as U.S. Department of Higher Education’s National Center for Education Statistics does not provide a complete enough picture of retention to help colleges target efforts to improve retention rates among various demographics on campus (Community College Retention Hits Its Stride, 2005). Although the data are limited, there

may be a difference in retention rates between nontraditional-aged adults and traditional-aged students. Nontraditional-aged adult students are less likely to remain in college than younger students, according to the few studies conducted on characteristics of students who withdraw from college (those who do not graduate or transfer to another higher education program (Brown, 2002; Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Although nontraditional-aged students are the fastest-growing demographic of students enrolling in college, there is difficulty retaining those students (Brown, 2002). A longitudinal study by the National Center for Educational Statistics published in 1995 found that nontraditional-aged adults were more likely than traditional-aged students to leave college in the first year (as cited in Brown, 2002). In a more recent, large multicampus study by Sorey and Duggan (2008), attrition (the institutional term for withdrawing) was higher for nontraditional-aged students than traditional-aged college students. Nontraditional-aged students had an attrition rate of 20%, whereas traditional-aged students had a 10% attrition rate. Although the Sorey and Duggan study did not propose explanations for this finding, the authors concluded that predictors of institutional retention differ for traditional-aged and adult community college students, and that more research is needed to understand what makes adult students more likely to leave college (Sorey & Duggan, 2008).

Brown (2002) wrote that there was some evidence that academic integration plays a role in the retention of nontraditional-aged adult students. “Academic integration includes such variables as degree utility, goal commitment and career decision-making, self-efficacy and cumulative grade point average, and institutional commitment” (Brown, 2002 (70). Cleveland-Innes “hypothesized that the effect of academic integration for

nontraditional students and traditional was much higher, especially since non-traditional students face so many more handicaps as they counteract the difficulties of inadequate role preparation and role overlook” (1994 as cited in Brown, 2002, p. 70). Other literature also addresses the matter of nontraditional-aged students, but some of it narrows its scope even further to those students who are somewhat older than even the average nontraditional-aged students; older than 56. Andom (2007), writing about nontraditional-aged adult students in the older age range, aged 55–79, wrote that older students are likely to leave college because some professors seem to have a negative attitude toward older students and because of lack of funding or transportation. Watters (2003) found that issues that impact nontraditional-aged adult retention at community college include problems with the timing of class offerings (daytime versus nighttime) and students’ perception of the overall quality of the experience at the college.

Some research focused on successful retention practices, including exemplary programs, but scant data describes their results. Although these strategies are in place at many 2-year colleges, it is not clear how well they are working. Some literature reports finding a sizable gap between students who plan to graduate and those who actually do, suggesting that what colleges think works may not help retain and graduate students. *The Degrees: Promising Practices for Community College Student Success* outlines 13 strategies that may increase retention and graduation rates, including fast-tracking remedial education, providing students with experiential learning, and requiring students to attend orientation (Community-College Study Asks, What Helps Students Graduate, 2012). These strategies are not limited to nontraditional-aged students, although some

sources have identified those strategies as especially helpful for adult students (Lumina, n.d.).

Exemplary Practices in Higher Education That Respond to Barriers for Nontraditional-Aged Adults

In spite of research that suggests the “policies of the higher education system continue to favor financially dependent, 18–21 year olds who enroll full-time” (Chao, DeRocco and Flynn, 2007, p. 2) scholars suggest exemplary practices that may be effective in overcoming barriers for nontraditional-aged adults in higher education. The literature on successful practices in higher education can be viewed through the lens of how these practices successfully address situational, institutional, and dispositional barriers faced by nontraditional-aged adult students. These practices include accessibility, flexibility, and enhanced financial support, and are being tried in community colleges and some 4-year institutions.

Exemplary Practices that Address Situational Barriers

It may be more challenging for institutions of higher education to help students overcome situational barriers that include family, job, and financial responsibilities than any other type of barriers, but programs like on-campus childcare facilities are beginning to be offered at some colleges, making it possible for adult students to attend classes more conveniently when they have young children (Pusser et al., 2007). There is little literature on exemplary practices that address situational barriers of nontraditional-aged students; however, some of the practices that help counter institutional barriers (discussed below), such as more convenient times and methods to take classes and take care of

campus business, can actually help older adult students counter situational barriers as well.

Exemplary Practices that Counter Institutional Barriers

One important way colleges can address institutional barriers is to offer classroom instruction and services that are convenient, accessible, and flexible for older students. Offering a more varied class schedule in various formats helps adult students overcome some institutional barriers (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Some postsecondary institutions are extending the number of course formats available by offering independent learning options, which require a commitment to making learning opportunities available to as many students as possible and making sure that there are few barriers related to access, time and space, and class delivery methods. Some of the open program models include satellite classrooms and distance learning centers” (Lumina Foundation, n.d.; Scarino et al., 2007; Vangen, 1998). Additional options include open-entry, open-exit maximum flexibility courses that allow students to leave and reenter their courses as their schedules allow (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Also, institutions have recognized how difficult it is for older-adult students to go to multiple locations, at various times, and deal with many staff members to fulfill basics requirements. In response, several institutions are implementing a “one-stop” service: a single building on campus where students are able to enroll, receive registration advising, register for classes, and speak to financial aid counselors (Brown, 2002). Another initiative designed to combat the difficulty that older-adult students encounter in finding a linear, sequential, fast path toward credential completion is a concept called “stackable credits” (Wonacott, 2008), which allows students to earn

credits for the same degree at various community colleges, adult career centers, and workforce investment boards (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).

Financial aid generally does not consider the needs of older adults because of various policies such as the requirement for aid recipients to be enrolled full-time, and maximum-income requirements, which do not consider the financial responsibilities of older students. At this time, however, there is a movement toward gathering more information about adult students in order to make better-informed decisions about their needs for aid. Some institutions are making more aggressive efforts to help adults receive aid by traveling to them to provide counseling and offering more hours of availability to serve all students better (Hart, 2003). The financial aid system is also moving toward creating better incentives for continuous enrollment by supporting adult students at lower-course credit loads (Lumina Foundation, n.d.). Noy and Heidkamp (2012) wrote that there are several state policy reforms that “revolve around reforming financial aid to better meet the needs of adults”(p. 15). Examples are New Mexico’s Affordability Act, “which provides needs-based scholarships, and Washington’s Opportunity Grants, which provide flexible financial aid to assist low-income students complete workforce programs by providing assistance with tuition and other low costs of schooling” (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012, p. 15). Other revisions to financial aid involve eligibility, which is an issue because part-time students may not be eligible for financial aid and most adult students attend part time (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012). There are also reforms to prevent adults’ higher incomes from disqualifying them from aid (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012). There are efforts to cover expenses for students who need money for shorter training courses and who don’t fit into the usually traditional aid calculations (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012). Another financial aid

strategy designed to aid older students is the practice of flexible funding for life expenses, such that funding would help adults address needs such as transportation for family members (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012).

Related to financial aid are initiatives to help students fund their education through other methods. Noy and Heidkamp (2012) explained that states have rolled out additional programs directed towards adults to help them finance their educations. Two programs they described are the Life Long Learning accounts program in which workers and employers create accounts that are “employer-matched, portable, employee-owned accounts” and another program called Pathways to Advancements, a “policy academy [that encourages] cross agency teams of state policymakers to expand postsecondary access and attainment for low-income adults” (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012, p. 12). Finally, some strategies include controlling costs such as those of textbooks and tuition (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012).

Some colleges are working to enhance academic supports for nontraditional aged students. They are identifying at-risk adult students and connecting them to available college resources (Askham, 2008; Braxton, Hirschy, & McClendon, 2004), such as providing students with faculty mentors (Askham, 2008; Braxton et al., 2004). Key departments, like mathematics and English, identify students who may be eligible for special services such as short, intense, heavily staffed developmental courses known as “bridge programs.” Bridge programs offer excellent alternatives for adults who need developmental coursework, helping adults develop necessary skills for academic success in less time than is usually required, which is particularly critical for adult students (Askham, 2008; Braxton et al., 2004). Other course formats that help accelerate course

completion for credit courses and developmental courses are modularized programs. These programs divide courses into modules, grouping career-pathway courses into small units forming a required sequence. Condensed courses may be offered over just a few days or a couple of weeks (Lumina Foundation, n.d.).

Peer-counseling programs, funded by colleges for targeted groups, and college-review processes help determine what might assist students. Adult students are counseled properly to ensure they take the courses that will enable them to graduate or finish their programs expeditiously (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012). Some states advocate using the experience of students in “prior learning assessments (PLA) [instrument], [which can] help adult learners receive credit for learning acquired through the workplace, corporate or military training, volunteering experience, or noncredit courses (Noy & Heidkamp, 2012, p. 16).

Exemplary Practices That Counter Dispositional Barriers

Colleges are attempting to do a better job of helping students conquer their dispositional issues that affect their self-concept as students, with multiple psychologically and socially oriented services. One of the strategies that addresses the struggles that adult students face regarding motivation, confidence, and fitting in is the practice of hiring staff with “strong motivation and advising skills” (Brown, 2002, p. 73). These staff members also offer older adult students preenrollment counseling, which can better prepare students for higher education (Brown, 2002). Related to the efforts colleges and universities are making to boost the confidence and motivation of nontraditional-aged students is the effort to make sure that students also have access to career counseling and internship placement, because adults frequently attend college specifically

to improve their employment outlook (Brown, 2002; Ritt, 2008). To motivate and instill confidence, colleges are establishing adult learning communities, linked to courses organized around interdisciplinary themes with a common cohort of students (Hegler, 2004). Although adult learning communities may be helpful to all students, they could especially support adult students (Brown, 2002), helping help with social engagement and academic support (Chao et. al., 2007; Hart, 2003; Hensley & Kinser, 2001); both keys to overcoming dispositional barriers.

Community College Programs That Respond to Barriers for Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students

Community colleges have always had the greatest number of nontraditional-aged students enrolled, and these institutions are also the most likely entry point into higher education for adults. Community colleges have tried to implement practices to address the barriers faced by nontraditional-aged adult students and increase retention (Chao et al., 2007; Largent & Horinek, 2008; Levin, 2000). With a mission to serve the underserved, for decades community colleges have offered an environment conducive to retaining nontraditional-aged adult students by offering low-cost tuition and fees, providing flexible course offerings in time and place, and focusing on programs and curricula that support occupational- and technical-skills acquisition (Chao et al., 2007; Largent & Horinek, 2008; Levin, 2000).

The open-enrollment policy, which improves access and is one of the hallmarks of the community college system, is one of the attractive aspects of the community college system for adult students. Community colleges help nontraditional-aged adult retention through their commitment to making school convenient for commuters, because

they are primarily nonresidential schools. The commuter-school aspect of community colleges provides incentive for community colleges to aggressively explore and market various ways of delivering courses, an excellent method of countering the barriers related to time and access that many adult students experience (Chao et al., 2007; Dougherty & Townsend, 2006).

Research suggests that community colleges are currently trying to offer opportunities to develop skills for the 21st century and to succeed in a global economy by offering programs that teach new, in-demand skills to prepared students to enter high-wage jobs (Levin, 2000). A focus on skills that can be used immediately in the job market is critical for adults because of their need to benefit from their educational experiences immediately (Ross-Gordon, 2011). Community colleges are also known as the institutions that are most experienced in providing career education, developmental education, community education, and foundational liberal arts courses in preparation for transfer to 4-year colleges and universities. Weaknesses in those areas in higher education in general have been identified as being particularly frustrating for nontraditional-aged adult students (McPhail & McPhail, 2006).

Conclusion

There is significant quantitative research showing that the successful completion of degree programs by nontraditional-aged college students is important to the labor pool, global competitiveness, adults' personal achievements, and the future of higher education. The literature indicates that the age of the average college student is increasing. However, adulthood makes these students academically vulnerable because of the roles they hold in society, as well as their responsibilities and unique adult challenges.

Their attrition rates in higher education evidence this. The literature suggests that because of the maturing student population, the unstable economy, and the rapid pace of technology innovation, postsecondary institutions need to focus on and improve their capacity to retain nontraditional-aged students. College campuses (especially community college campuses) could be well-suited to serve the nontraditional-aged student population, but they fall short for many students.

Scholars have sought to understand the obstacles to the success adult students encounter as a way to understand what needs to happen on community college campuses to better serve adult students and encourage persistence. This work has tended to focus on higher education in general and used qualitative methodologies, but has not looked carefully at the experiences of nontraditional-aged students on community college campuses. The present study adds to this body of research by offering detailed and nuanced descriptions of how a diverse group of nontraditional-aged students describe their experiences in community college, especially in areas that have an impact on their retention and success. A multicase study adds to the growing body of research on satisfaction, retention, and barriers to satisfaction and retention, and is significant because of the present need to understand how to make adjustments in community colleges to accommodate the increasing number of adults attending them.

Chapter 3: Methods

Research Design

This study used a multiple-case-studies approach. Case studies are “an exploration of a bounded system of a case over time through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information rich in context” (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). Yin (2010) wrote that case studies are used “to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena” (2010, p. 4). The case-study approach was appropriate for addressing the research questions in this study because there were few previous studies that provided an in-depth view of the complex issue of persistence from the point of view of the nontraditional-age adult student, and no studies at all for students enrolled in community college, a common postsecondary launch for older students.

A student-centered, detailed query of student experiences in the classroom and in the broader institution, and of issues outside the college that impact the college experience revealed information that could not be captured in a quantitative study and that answered my research questions. Additionally, a case study was an appropriate qualitative approach for my study because I studied a group of people in a particular instance (Creswell, 1998). A case study is also exploratory in nature (Creswell, 1998); therefore, the case-study approach was suited to answer my research questions, which sought descriptions of the *instances* of adults over 25 years old functioning as students in higher education (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). My research questions asked that adults describe their experiences as nontraditional-aged adult students who were attending

classes in the community college environment (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). The questions were also seeking descriptions from *individuals* (Creswell, 1998, p. 61). These are characteristics that define case studies and are congruent with addressing my research questions (Creswell, 1998).

I was seeking descriptions that would help me understand what adults thought were challenges and how institutional, situational, and dispositional factors created challenges to the success and satisfaction of adults in a higher-education setting, specifically, in a community college at the time of the study. The ways adults were challenged emerged from the telling of their experiences in trying to persist as college students, in spite of a multitude of adult responsibilities and obligations. The case-study approach was also the most appropriate research method because it provided a detailed description of this phenomenon.

Case studies can use the following methods to gather research: surveys, interviews, nonparticipant observations, focus groups, and collections of documents to provide background information. My study used the majority of these data-collection strategies to develop findings and address the research question and sub-questions. The details of each are described following a description of the research site, and participant recruitment and selection.

Research Site

The site of the study is a community college, located in Central New Jersey, that serves a densely populated, diverse county. The college had an enrollment of 12,903 students taking credit-bearing courses. Full-time students made up 57.5% of the student body, and 42.5% were part-time students. Although the average age of students at the

college was reported to be 20.3, during the 2010–2011 academic years (the period when data collection was completed), there were 3,037 students over the age of 25. This enrollment meant that nontraditional-age adult students constituted 25.6% of the total student body.

The college has three campuses. The main campus is centrally located in an area that serves a population diverse in income and ethnicity, whereas the other two campuses are located in the heart of two urban centers in the county. The college offers classes Monday through Friday as early as 8 a.m. and as late as 10 p.m. All Saturday classes are held before noon. Over the last few years, the college has increasingly offered online classes, although the college did not have a full degree program online at the time of the study. According to the strategic plan, the college has a goal of providing a full online degree program and has a campus-wide distance-education committee that has been working on that goal for several semesters. The college has 100 degree and certificate programs, both academic and professional, including nine non-degree programs.

The retention rates for nontraditional-aged adults at the college are lower than those for traditional-age adult students, according to the statistics provided by the institutional research specialist of the campus during the semester of the study. The institutional research specialist also provided statistics that indicated that, on average, nontraditional-age adults have slightly higher grade-point averages than traditional-aged students. Students under 25 years old have a average cumulative grade-point average of 2.27, whereas students 25 to 45 have a cumulative grade-point average of 2.43, and students 46 and older have a cumulative grade-point average of 2.51.

The college has several social organizations sponsored through the Department of Student Activities and funded through student fees. At the time of the study, there were almost 100 clubs, including recreational clubs, honors organizations, media clubs, and a nontraditional-age adult-student club: The Better Than Ever Club. This club, though a student organization, is considered by the college to be a program the college provides to support nontraditional-aged adults, according to an upper-level administrator.

The college administration has recently initiated at least one special program to serve its older students. This program is called CARE, and serves adult students 21 years and older who have attended college in New Jersey within the last 10 years and have earned at least 31 credits. The program provides one-on-one advising to help students plan their classes and programs. In addition to course advisement, the program offers workshops on writing resumes and cover letters, job searching and networking, and job-interviewing skills. Other benefits available through CARE include a \$25 waiver of the application fee, one \$300 book voucher per semester, payment of student fees, some free educational supplies, a streamlined admissions process, and other personalized student services. Through e-mail and direct-mail recruitment, the college reaches out to eligible students to encourage them to participate in the CARE program. Information on the main college website invites eligible students to e-mail the CARE coordinator, to attend an information session, or to make an appointment to come to the CARE office. The program, which is state-funded, was established in 2010. Because this program is only for nontraditional-aged adult students, it does not include participation from most adult students on campus because most adults on campus are not eligible. Students must have been enrolled at the college the semester the program started or must have registered in a

subsequent semester to qualify for CARE benefits. Adults who have attended the college for several years consecutively up until 2010 or before 2010 are not eligible. The college has an additional database that includes nontraditional-aged adult students aged 25 and up, but the benefits and support for those nontraditional-aged adult students are decentralized and not standardized.

Administrators described the philosophy at the college as the one-college approach, providing the best practices and services, with the idea that each student will be adequately served if all students have access to exemplary services. These services, which are expansive in comparison to traditional college services, would be offered for enough hours to accommodate all students and be offered in ways that serve many types of students. Ideally, this approach would require that the college build the college mission and services on a broad base of student needs.

Research Participants

Selection criteria. This study identified case-study participants by using a purposive sample selected from a pool of volunteers. I selected 11 nontraditional-aged adult students who had any of the nontraditional-aged adult-student characteristics—being married, in a long-term relationship, or engaged; rearing children; committed to a long-term job; significant financial responsibility; or owning a permanent residence—all traits that have been identified by scholars as highlighting the differences between older and younger adults and children (Cross, 1981). None of these characteristics was the focus of the study, but students with any one characteristic or a combination of them—as part of the profile of a nontraditional-aged adult student—were appropriate participants to

address the research questions for the study. All 11 of the students I selected remained in the study for the entire semester, the conclusion of the study.

Recruitment. To recruit research participants for the study, a wide net was cast. To that end, a survey was developed (see Appendix A) and then sent to all students in the college's nontraditional-aged adult database. The survey was a major recruitment-tool strategy. I distributed the surveys through e-mail, using the online survey tool SurveyMonkey that enabled students to receive and return the surveys to me via e-mail. More than 3,000 students received the survey. I sent out up to three reminders for students to return the surveys. The recruitment strategy was designed to help me have access to the maximum number of students so I could increase the chances of acquiring an adequate number of volunteers to participate in the study. I needed five or more volunteers to participate.

One of the challenges in conducting a study with nontraditional-aged adult students as research participants was keeping them in the study for its duration. Nontraditional-aged adult students sometimes do not remain enrolled in college continuously for several semesters because they experience challenges that prevent them from returning for a subsequent semester; it was difficult to find students who had enough time for the study. Because the group of students I was seeking as volunteers for the study was characterized by limited time, due to job- and family-related issues, it was ideal to maximize the number of students who could participate in the entirety of data collection by making the data-collection period brief— one semester long. The goal was to have five to eight research participants. However, I recruited more students than I

needed for the study in case some students did not continue as participants. This was one way I worked to make the study as trustworthy as possible.

It is possible that a larger number of students participating in the study could have provided a more detailed description of the experiences of nontraditional-aged students, because nontraditional-aged students have a range of characteristics, experiences, and challenges. With a more participants, however, I would not have been able to collect the data to provide an adequate analysis in only 15 weeks. Yin (2010) wrote that a small number of cases is appropriate with sufficient numbers of data sources involved in the data collection; and even one case, if adequately detailed, can provide valuable insight into a phenomenon. Given my data-collection plan, five to eight cases seemed sufficient to provide detailed answers to my research questions. In addition, the goal of tracking students' experiences over the course of the semester required that participants be identified quickly at the beginning of the semester. It would have been difficult to recruit more than eight students in a timely manner to begin all data collection within the first few weeks of the semester. Also, because students were generally busy, even though I intended to take as much responsibility as possible for data collection, some students may have dropped out of the study or may not been available for portions of the data collection. To that end, I recruited 11 volunteers to increase the chances of being able to complete the study with the number of participants I described in my methods section, which was a minimum of five and a maximum of eight.

After using the strategies to have contact with as many potential research participants as possible, I initially contacted the more than 400 students who had expressed interest, through the survey, in participating in the actual study. I explained

what was involved in participating, and invited them to participate as interviewees or focus-group participants. As part of this process, I informed the students that college faculty and staff members would not have access to names of any students who participated. As replies came in, I e-mailed the students who expressed interest in participating, and continued until I had 11 who were available to be participants in the interviews or focus groups. All participants signed a consent form.

In addition to recruiting student participants, I acquired background information on the cases by interviewing a range of relevant college faculty and staff, such as counselors and career advisors, who interact with nontraditional-aged students regularly. I interviewed staff members, counselors, or career advisors with whom I was able to make contact and discuss the study. To recruit them, I e-mailed all the staff in the relevant departments (counseling and advising). These e-mails gave the staff information about the study and asked them to consider participating in in-person interviews and/or a focus group. I made appointments to interview any willing staff members with the goal of interviewing at least one and no more than two in each department I contacted. I also sent questions to the institutional research specialist who could provide student demographic, participation, and achievement data.

Last, I interviewed 16 faculty members. They were recruited by asking student participants to provide names of their instructors and also by sending a mass e-mail to faculty members to explain the study and ask them to participate. I explained to student participants the goals of collecting information from their instructors and then asked them to identify one to four of their instructors they liked and with whom they were having difficulty, for me to interview. The instructors were not to know that any of their students

were participating in the study. I also asked the students why they were recommending each of the particular instructors so I could know which ones were the liked and disliked faculty members, and why. Of the faculty members I interviewed, only one was identified as disliked by the students, and this was because this faculty member's teaching methods were considered too rigid and lacking in stimulation. That instructor was from the computer-science department. Some of the other faculty members were liked. The other faculty members who were identified as disliked by the students did not agree to be interviewed, although they were not aware that students had identified them as problematic. Because all the faculty members suggested by students did not agree to be interviewed, some of the faculty members who were interviewed were those who were interested in the topic and who responded to my mass e-mail requesting faculty to volunteer to be interviewed and did not have any of the students in the study in their classes. The faculty members interviewed were from the following departments: English, history, science, communications, computer science, business, mathematics, and psychology. The faculty members were either full-time faculty members, or served a combination roles as faculty members and coordinators, directors, or upper-level administrators.

Many adult students take classes in the evenings and on weekends, largely encountering adjunct faculty whom I did not interview. Although the instructors interviewed did not teach significant numbers of nontraditional-aged students during the semester of the study, their experiences were insightful because they had all been at the college for several years and had taught some nontraditional-aged adults each semester. Most had a decade or more of teaching experience at the college. These instructors had

numerous, substantive experiences with adult students. The administrators whom I interviewed had also been at the college for several decades, and some had served in multiple roles at the college as students, faculty members, and administrators. The administrators were more likely to have encountered large numbers of nontraditional-aged students during the semester of the study because they interacted with them in their administrative capacities, and they were usually teaching part-time as well. Because their administrative duties were during the day, they taught at night or during weekends—the times when many of the nontraditional-aged adults attended classes. Although many of the nontraditional-age students took night classes and had adjunct instructors, there were also many who took classes during the day and had full time faculty as their teachers. The 11 focal students who participated in the study represented students who took classes across the entire schedule offered by the college: days, evenings, weekends, and online.

Table 1 describes the students who participated in the study. The 11 focal students were interviewed 6 times each. There were 5 focus groups with 18 participants overall. There were 16 faculty members interviewed during six focus groups. Seventeen students posted a total of 25 posts on the message board established for the study, and 860 students answered the recruit survey. Out of the 860 survey participants, more than 400 students volunteered to be contacted to participate directly in the study through the message board, focus groups, or interviews.

Interview Participants

Table 1

Name	Age	Employment Status	Marital Status	# of Children	Length of time Enrolled at the college	Miscellaneous
1. Linda	30	Employed full-time	Divorcing	2	6 semesters	
2. Tonya	38	Employed part-time	Married	2	3 semesters	
3. Roman	56	Employed full-time	Married	2	7 semesters	
4. Bob	46	Unemployed	Married	2	7 semesters	Considered himself a homemaker and stay-at-home dad
5. Yolanda	43	Several part-time jobs	Unmarried	0	6 semesters	
6. Melvin	56	Unemployed	Divorced	0	3 semesters	Received disability
7. Ann	29	Unemployed	Married	0	2 semesters	Received unemployment
8. Tom	29	Employed part-time	Unmarried	0	9 years	
9. Martha	45	Unemployed	Divorced	3	1 semester	Received disability
10. Jill	51	part-time-employed	Divorced	0	4 semesters	Only worked occasionally worked as a bartender for a friend
11. Jonathan	27	Unemployed	Unmarried	0	2 semesters	

Data Collection

The data collection took place during one semester. A semester of data collection was appropriate because it allowed each of the participants to experience the entire phenomenon of being a nontraditional-aged adult student in a class or several classes, at least one time, during the data-collection period. For this study, data were collected using a Survey Monkey tool that was sent to the students by the registrar. There were also in-person and telephone interviews, and demographic student-background information was gathered by the institutional research officer and provided to me. Focus groups were held in meeting rooms on campus, and an online message board was available for student posting, starting September 2011. Student surveys were sent during the last week of September. Survey responses were returned from 860 nontraditional-aged adult students. There were 3,600 in the adult-student database, which made the nontraditional-aged adult participants slightly greater in number than a quarter of the enrollment at the college during the semester of the study. In response to a question on the survey asking for volunteers, more than 400 students volunteered to participate in the study, which meant they agreed to be contacted to participate in interviews, in focus groups, or on the online the message board. All 11 interviews were completed by December 16, 2011. The focus groups, with more than 16 participants, were completed by late November. The message board remained available for students to join and use; however, the data from the 17 participants were not collected from the message board until December 16, 2011.

Surveys. Although the primary purpose of the surveys was to recruit nontraditional-aged adult-student volunteers for the study, the surveys also provided data

for the study because the survey asked for general information about the experiences of trying to persist in college. Responses were received from a significant number of nontraditional-aged adult students. In addition, the survey asked them if they would be interested in participating in a study on the topic of the challenges of being a nontraditional-aged student in college. The survey responses also served as data that helped in validating the analysis of the case studies.

Interviews

Student interviews. I interviewed a select group of student research participants in person and by phone to collect detailed descriptions, in real time, of their experiences at the college. Each of the student research participants was interviewed twice in person. Those interviews took place on campus or at another location that was convenient for the participants. I offered to interview students in whichever location was most convenient for them. Those locations included their homes, local libraries, and restaurants. My goal was to try to conduct the first interview as close to the beginning of the semester as possible and to conduct the second interview as close to the end of the semester as possible. I was able to adhere to my schedule successfully. I conducted 11 interviews in the fifth week of the semester and 11 interviews in the 12th week of the semester. Telephone interviews with the 11 interview students also adhered to my goals and were conducted in Weeks 7, 9, 11, and 14. There were also 11 extra telephone interviews during the winter break, on December 23, to discuss whether the students were going to transfer, register, or graduate successfully.

Each interview lasted one to two hours. The in-person interviews consisted of 10 standardized, open-ended questions divided into five sections (see Appendix B). The

overall purpose of the interviews was to meet the students, understand what they were seeking from the college, and learn what types of experiences they were having at the college as they attempted to meet their goals. Both interviews helped me develop insight about the students and learn information about their experiences. The purpose of having the interviews at the beginning and the end of the semester was to have an opportunity to see how the experiences in the classes and the broader college environment affected the students and impacted their successes or failures at the college. Each interview was audio-recorded. I also took field notes to record my perceptions based on each participant's body language and voice tone, as they pertained to their experiences in the classroom. The audio recordings were transcribed.

I conducted four telephone interviews with each participant. The reason I did not do more was that the interviews started a couple of weeks later in the semester than originally intended. Also, the telephone interviews usually went on for much longer than 15 minutes, and the in-person interviews were also longer than intended. I found that I received a great deal of information in each call and face-to-face interview. Trying to fit in additional telephone interviews would have been counterproductive to the study and waste the limited time of my volunteers. Interviews took place between the first and last in-person interviews, and lasted from 15 minutes to an hour. I scheduled the telephone interviews with each participant to occur approximately every 2 weeks. These interviews included three standardized, open-ended questions (see Appendix B). In the short phone interviews, I asked participants to discuss their most recent college-related high points and low points, and asked them to describe new developments and changes that occurred

since we had last spoken. I asked for permission to tape-record the calls. With their permission, I did so. Each recording was then transcribed.

Faculty interviews. I interviewed instructors to provide another source of data that produced a fuller picture of adult students. The faculty members could describe experiences, both positive and negative, that occurred in their classrooms. Having some descriptions of the classroom environment from the perspective of the teachers and the students could provide some insight into the instructional environment for adults at the college. The faculty members could describe experiences and interactions with adult students that corroborated some of the descriptions of classroom experiences or interactions with faculty provided by nontraditional-aged adult students. I asked faculty members how they helped and supported nontraditional-aged adult students. I also asked them about their perceptions of nontraditional-aged adult students. Those interviews lasted 30 minutes to 1 hour, and took place throughout the semester at the convenience of the individual faculty member. Also, talking to these staff members helped inform and prepare me for the interviews with the students, because staff members provided their perspectives of nontraditional-aged adult students' experiences in classes during that semester. The interviews with the faculty members provided corroborating data that was useful in providing detail and description for the study. There was one interview with each participating faculty member. The interview was divided into three topics that covered his or her observations and experiences of working with nontraditional-aged adult students (see Appendix C).

Interviews with administrative staff. I interviewed five counselors and one career-advising staff member at the college to learn more about what support and

resources were available for nontraditional-aged adult students, as well as what challenges these students were observed to have at the college. These data added detail and description to the case study. These staff members were asked five standard, open-ended questions. The topics covered in their questions were their general experiences with nontraditional-aged adult students. They were also asked to describe the challenges presented by interacting with these students in the community college environment, and last, they were asked to describe some of the more positive aspects of working with these students (see Appendix D). The interviews with staff members lasted about an hour, and were recorded and transcribed.

Focus groups. The purpose of a focus group, which is essentially a group interview, is to get a number of opinions from people in a natural and nonthreatening environment (Creswell, 1998). Because they are conducted in a group setting, focus-group interviews are interactive and dynamic, and, therefore, may elicit significant description and diverse perspectives. The focus-group sessions I hosted were tape-recorded, and I took notes during sessions.

Student focus groups. Student focus groups met five times during the course of the semester, in Weeks 5 through 9, one each week. I originally planned to have about three focus groups, but when I sent out e-mails asking for focus-group volunteers, I was encouraged by the response to set up additional groups. I thought more focus groups could enhance my data. The timing of the focus groups was based on being able to get from three to six students together to answer the questions. The students who were asked to participate in the focus groups were those who responded to the survey and included their e-mail addresses, with the agreement to participate in a study about nontraditional-

aged adults. There was also one student invited to a focus group who was recommended by one of the counselors interviewed for the study. The case-study students were also invited to participate in the focus groups. I had from six to eight students participating in each of the five focus group sessions I held.

I held the focus groups on campus. They were scheduled during one of two college blocs of time on Monday midmorning and Thursday afternoons, when there are no classes scheduled, and also at night after 6 p.m. At all focus groups sessions, I offered refreshments to encourage attendance. I informed students about the focus groups by e-mailing them. I asked students to respond or verify their attendance. Because the focus group students responded, I was able to gauge the number of focus groups to hold and minimize a possible waste of time that could have occurred if I scheduled focus groups and nobody attended. Also, when the students responded, I was able to send them reminders, because I had their names and e-mails. Last, having their names and e-mails allowed me to look at their original survey answers and learn their ages and other information they provided through the survey. This provided me with more insight into their discussions and later allowed me to understand details about them that helped create the categories that emerged. The purpose of the student focus groups was to gather additional or corroborating descriptions of the phenomenon that the case-study students described in their initial interviews, as well as themes that emerged from early data analysis. Focus-group participants were asked seven standardized, open-ended questions (see Appendix E). The groups lasted 1 hour, the sessions were recorded, and the recordings were transcribed.

Administrative staff and faculty focus groups. The administrator and instructor focus-group sessions took place during the first three weeks of the semester. Each focus group session was recorded and transcribed. I also took field notes during each focus-group session. I held three focus groups to accommodate the schedules of staff members who were invited to participate. The faculty and administrator focus groups were combined because most administrators who participated were also faculty members. The focus groups lasted one hour, as faculty and administration had extremely limited time to devote to a focus-group study during or after the workday. All dates had been planned to be within the first seven weeks of the semester. The first three weeks of the semester are ideal to hold any meeting involving faculty and staff because that is when they are the least busy. Also, holding them early in the semester allowed me to reschedule more focus groups later in the semester, when some were poorly attended. There were some “focus group” sessions that had fewer than three people; although the information was useful, there was less opportunity for participants to interact and provide the data intended to come from a focus-group discussion in which participants influence the flow of the conversation with their answers to the questions.

In the introduction to the focus group for faculty and administrative staff, I asked participants to discuss the most challenging and serious issues they faced regarding adult students. I also asked them to describe any experiences they had working with adult students. The areas I covered included how they viewed adult students and in what ways they interacted and worked with adult students differently from younger students (see Appendix F). The purpose of the focus-group interviews for the administrative staff and instructors was to provide corroborating or additional information about what is available

for nontraditional-aged students. The interviews also were designed to encourage the group participants to discuss their observations about some of the difficulties facing nontraditional-aged adult students in their courses or who require their services.

Document collection

Message-board data. Students who indicated interest in participating in the study were asked to sign up for a message board, and several writing prompts were posted throughout the semester. The prompts asked students to describe institutional, situational, and dispositional challenges through open-ended questions designed to encourage them to provide detailed examples. I used a message-board system that was set to automatically e-mail students reminders and encourage them to respond to the questions and posts by others. Students were able to use anonymous screen names on the message board, although they did not always do that. I also posted messages to encourage a vigorous discussion. There were 17 posters on the message board. Although the message board allowed students to be anonymous, as the owner of the site, I was able to view e-mails and some names embedded in e-mails. This allowed me to identify the posters. It also allowed me to match them with their original surveys. It appeared that the students on the message board were not also interview and focus-group participants. In addition to me being able to independently discern who participated on the message board through their e-mail identities and names, interview and focus-group participants expressed to me that they had time to participate in only one aspect of the study: the interviews, a focus group, or the message board. The posts on this message board were collected as data to strengthen the validity of the study. I used these data to provide triangulation and better

understanding of the experience of being a nontraditional-aged student in the college, and to strengthen data collected through interviews and focus groups.

Table 2 displays the data collection methods along with details about the numbers of students and faculty involved in the study. The 11 focal students were interviewed 6 times each. There were 5 focus groups with 18 participants overall. There were 16 faculty members interviewed during six focus groups. Seventeen students posted a total of 25 posts on the message board established for the study, and 860 students answered the recruit survey. Out of the 860 survey participants, more than 400 students volunteered to be contacted to participate directly in the study through the message board, focus groups, or interviews.

Described Data Collection Strategies and Numbers of Participants.

Table 2

Data Collection Method	Who participated	How many participated
Focus Group	Nontraditional-aged students	18
Focus Group	Faculty	16
Message Board	Nontraditional-aged students	25
Interviews	Nontraditional-aged students	11
Surveys	Nontraditional-aged students	860

Institutional research. I asked the institutional research specialist to provide a range of descriptive statistics on nontraditional-aged adult students and traditional-aged students. The specialist provided information about their retention rates over the last two

years, divided into three age cohorts: under 25, 25 to 45, and 46 and older. The specialist also provided information on 5-year graduation rates and grade-point averages for the same three age cohorts.

Data Analysis

The data I collected included: initial, interim, and end-of-semester interview data from 11 students; data from 18 focus-groups students; message board posts; descriptive statistics about students from the recruitment survey; interview data from faculty members who were not necessarily the instructors of the students in the study, though some were; interview data from staff members who had dealings with adult students, and from administrators and the institutional research specialist. The distinction between staff members and administrators is that staff members were support staff in various offices across campus. These support staff frequently had to interact with students on the behalf of administrators. These staff worked as administrative assistants in every office across campus. To analyze the data from these sources, I used a data-analysis method suggested by Creswell (1998).

First, after reviewing all the data, I created a second set of notes that summarized the ideas in my data (Creswell, 1998). This was in the form of what Creswell called “memos or reflective notes” (1998, p. 140). I wrote about the challenges of the students and reflected on whether those types of challenges were situational, institutional, and dispositional. I also wrote about aspects of the college that were especially positive for students. I reflected on what made those experiences positive, considering the effectiveness of exemplary practices and services. I also listened to each taped interview several times, even after transcribing them, to feel more comfortable and familiar with

my data, and to be able to really *hear* the data when writing, rather than just referring to written notes. After reading the data again in the form of these notes, I reduced the data to themes that could be turned into a short list of categories (Creswell, 1998).

Creswell (1998) suggested starting with a short list of categories and expanding as necessary while analyzing the data (1998, p. 142). I expected “issue-relevant meanings to emerge” in the categories I created (Creswell, 1998, p. 154). This meant that I thought that the experiences described by the adult students would relate to current literature that identifies the experience of adults in college, either by showing consistency or enhancing current ideas, or by contradicting prevailing ideas. I used the available literature to support this list of categories, based on the types of issues previously identified as obstacles to and support for nontraditional-aged college students in the literature. Research describing institutional, situational, and dispositional experiences of college students provided three broad categories in which I could place my nontraditional-aged-adult-student descriptive data. I used the category “aggregation,” which is to “seek a collection of instances from the data,” because my goal was to be able to find theme-related obstacles to and supports for community college success, as perceived and experienced by nontraditional-aged adult students (Creswell, 1998, p. 154; Cross, 1981).

I looked across the cases for common as well as contrasting themes in the data of the focal students who participated in the study. I used the data collected from the other research participants to confirm (or disconfirm) the themes I generated from the primary data. I then described the cases. The 11 cases and corroborating descriptions from the case-study students and the message-board posters were combined to form four types of adult students attending the college. I identified these types by using “inductive analysis”

(Thomas, 2006). Using this approach to analysis, I read my “raw data” in detail to “derive concepts, themes, or a model” (Thomas, 2006, p. 238). I paid attention to how the students described their feelings and reactions to the challenges at the college. I also looked at their ages and their personal situations. I paid careful attention to what types of situations or obstacles they felt compelled to describe using multiple examples that occurred over multiple semesters or in several classes different classes. Looking at what experiences were most important to the students and their feelings regarding these experiences, helped me derive a typology more nuanced than the long established situational, institutional, and dispositional typology. Dividing the students into types helped show the diversity of the adult students on campus and extended the student descriptions beyond categorizing students’ individual experiences into the long-established, preexisting descriptions of barriers and support: situational, institutional, and dispositional. The types I developed illuminated and amplified how various types of adults were affected differently by the barriers and support at the college. The descriptions of the types of students were followed by a chapter that described how the various types of students experienced the college negatively and positively. Their experiences were viewed through the frames of instructional and institutional experiences.

Validity and Trustworthiness of Findings

Creswell (1998) suggested that qualitative researchers use at least two validation methods to increase the trustworthiness of findings. Because Creswell (1998, p. 203) described triangulation, member checking, and thick, rich description as “reasonable and easy to conduct,” I used those three validation methods. To carry out a member check, I

asked the case-study students to read the data collected about their experiences. They were able to tell me whether my perceptions of their experiences were accurate. The interview and focus-group data provided enough information for me to write about my findings by using thick, rich description, which can allow “the reader to make decisions regarding transferability” and strengthen my findings (Creswell, 1998, p. 203). Because my data included multiple interviews from multiple perspectives (students, staff, faculty, and administrators), I could provide a multidimensional picture of the experiences of adult students. My narrative included descriptions from students and others across campus. The information from these other sources on campus added background and depth to the context of the study. I also used the information collected from the college-student data, student interviews, faculty and staff interviews, focus groups, and surveys to find “convergence of information” (Creswell, 1998, p. 213) as a method of triangulating the data.

Limitations

The Survey. Because of the unexpected volume of responses, the questions asked in the survey were a limitation to the study. My original plan was to use a variety of methods to recruit students for the study. I created a survey and planned to hand it out to students across campus personally. I had hoped to get about 30 volunteers; 5 to 8 participants for the study, at least 10 students for the focus group, and 10 to 20 students posting on the message board. Instead, when I informed the college of my dissertation topic, they offered to input my survey into the college’s Survey Monkey account and send it to all 3,700 nontraditional-aged adult students across the campus. Because such a massive number of surveys were sent via e-mail, more than 800 students

were able to conveniently respond. More than 400 students volunteered to participate, and they provided their e-mail addresses through the survey. I was able to quickly and efficiently contact more than 400 nontraditional-aged candidates in my initial search for focal participants who fit the criteria I had predetermined before the study started. If I had realized that I was going to have access to every nontraditional-aged student on campus via the college's resources, I would have taken better advantage of that resource and asked questions in the survey that were more closely linked to my research questions. Because I didn't, I had a great deal of data that I could not use because the questions did not work to provide detailed information about the students and their experiences. With over 860 people willing to take time to answer the surveys, it was unfortunate that the information gathered by the surveys was so limited.

Observations. I did not observe any adult students in their classrooms. Had I done classroom observations, it might have added another dimension to my data. I would have been able to report more first-hand observations about the experiences of the students had I been in some of their classrooms observing them during the semester of the study. Observing them in their classrooms also may have helped me with my analysis of their experiences.

Adjunct Faculty. I did not interview any adjunct faculty members but this was only a minor limitation to the study because some of the students involved did have adjunct instructors as their teachers. This was not a major limitation because experiences students described regarding adjuncts did not differ from the experiences they described regarding full-time faculty.

Researcher Role

I am a professor at the college that was the site of the study, and a graduate student at Rutgers the State University of New Jersey. In these roles, there were at least three areas in which I may have brought bias to the conduct of this study. Because I had been an employee at the research site for nearly eight years, I was acquainted with many of the staff members whom the students discussed. I needed to try to set aside conclusions I had drawn about the college and the staff to conduct the study with an open mind. I also needed to be careful not to identify with the professors too closely and bring a biased perspective to how I analyzed the data on how professors interacted with and served students. I may not have been able to eliminate all of my bias in favor of how faculty and staff served students, because I was aware of the faculty and staffs' points of view. I needed to keep in mind that my relationship with staff, faculty, and administrators may have been completely different from relationships that students had with staff, faculty, and administrators; their cooperation with me over the years was unrelated to how well they served students.

On the other hand, I believe my experiences as a faculty member may have been helpful, because I was aware that there were differences in how faculty, staff, and administrators acted toward their colleagues in comparison to their students. I was not able to select professors to interview, because I interviewed any available volunteers and was not able to avoid faculty, staff, and administrators with whom I had professional relationships. Additionally, my experience as an older, adult graduate student may have caused me to identify with the students in the study. This tendency may have biased the way I collected, analyzed, and interpreted the data. I needed to ensure that I separated my

opinions about the difficulties of attending a higher education degree program as an adult from the data I gathered in the study, and not consider my own experiences in the analysis. It is helpful for me to consider the differences between graduate school and undergraduate studies, and compare the differences between “needing” an associate’s degree or bachelor’s degree, versus choosing to pursue graduate education. This may have diminished my student-oriented biases, because I have never experienced the “need” for additional higher education during adulthood. In spite of the differences between undergraduate and graduate school, my experience as an adult student probably still biased my role as a researcher. In contrast, an advantage to this was that it helped me comprehend the scenarios students described more clearly than someone who has never attended school as an adult. This enabled me to write a more accurate analysis of the cases.

Another issue is that because I am familiar to the faculty and staff (whether they have met me or not), they may have had certain expectations and assumptions about me. These may have had some impact on how they interacted with me and answered my questions. There may also have been an assumption that because I am a full-time faculty member, I already knew the answers to the questions that I was asking and my interviews were just a formality. It may have discouraged some faculty and staff participants from providing as much information as I would have liked. To counter this, I prefaced my interviews with faculty and staff by stating my goals for the interview and asking them to try to disregard the fact that they knew that I had experience working with the population.

Chapter 4: Findings: Types of Adult Students in Community College

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a description of the various types of adult students at the college and how their experiences impacted their efforts to succeed in college. Various types of students had a tendency to react to the same obstacles in different ways. Developing a typology to group similar students into categories can illuminate aspects of the adult college experience that could help deepen ways of thinking about serving nontraditional-aged adults in college. In the next chapter, the descriptions of how the nontraditional-aged adults experienced college are extended by describing what they encountered while they were attending The College during the semester of the study. This chapter is divided into two main sections. The first provides some descriptive statistics about the student population and nontraditional-aged adult-student retention levels there. The second section describes four types of adult students that emerged from the data collected from the 11 case-study-interview participants, the more than 18 students who participated in the six focus groups, and the 17 students who posted on the message board. As described in Chapter 3, these typologies were developed using inductive analysis. Starting with the premise that the college provides supports and create obstacles with regard to institutional, situational, or dispositional barriers, I developed a typology consisting of four types of students based on analysis of the data to highlight how different types of adult students experienced the same “institutional, situational or dispositional” factors in community college (Milheim, 2005). More specifically, I divided all of the descriptive student data from the 11 focal students into three categories: situational, institutional, and dispositional. Once all of the students’ descriptive data was organized according to aspects of their experiences that were situational, institutional, or

dispositional, I looked across the data to see what commonalities emerged among the students. As the categories emerged, I looked at the additional student data available (focus group, message board, surveys, and even faculty and administrator interviews) to see what kinds of experiences these groups described that were similar and different from those of the 11 focal students. The typology I developed emerged primarily from the analysis of the experiences of the 11 focal students; the additional data was used to enhance the validity of the types that emerged among those primary student participants. One caveat about the typology is that none of the students fit into any one of the types completely or perfectly. However, I placed them in the categories that I thought fit them best based on the aspects of their experiences that they described in their interviews as most salient and significant. In order to highlight the connection between the types of students and how their dispositions and experiences as adults affected their reactions to the institutional, situational, and dispositional factors, this section also includes some general descriptions of the ways each type of student experienced institutional, situational, and dispositional barriers and supports. Although this section is intended to provide an overview of the types of students at the college, after each type description, the detailed stories of students in each of the categories is included to create a fuller picture of the types of nontraditional-aged adult students. In this section I also included scenarios they described that illustrate each identified type. This section also highlights the main issues that affected adult students off campus to provide an even richer picture of the challenges faced by these students.

Descriptive Survey Data

The original surveys reaped significant data about the perceptions and experiences of a number of nontraditional-aged adult students at the college. This survey, which included a request for volunteers, ultimately provided all volunteers for the interviews and focus groups. This section provides information about what was learned about the students through the survey data.

The 861 nontraditional-aged students who answered the closed and open-ended survey questions revealed a set of students who were in school to make changes in their lives, professionally and personally. A table detailing the findings from the survey is available in Appendix F to show the nontraditional-aged adults students by age, as well as the percentages of each response gleaned from the closed-ended questions, and the detailed answers to the open-ended questions. The issues that emerged from the survey were consistent with information gathered from the focus groups and interviews.

The survey provided some insight about the motivation of the students to attend the college. The survey responses indicated that the students were in college due to a sense of self-direction, motivation, readiness to learn specific skills, or to acquire a college degree. The recurring answers from participants pertaining to their professional goals were that they either needed or wanted to change jobs due to a tremendous dislike of what they were doing, a need to earn more money, or a feeling of insecurity about maintaining their current employment over time. Sometimes, their employment had started to conflict with needs they had developed as they gained more responsibilities in life, such as becoming parents or needing to help take care of others in their families.

Survey participants also said they were motivated to go to school because they wanted to become role models for their school-aged children.

Respondents revealed that they had high expectations about what they could acquire immediately after attending or graduating from the college: a better job; a promotion; a career change; their own business; and the ability to communicate well in their local communities including in their children's schools or in the local political arena. Most survey participants were part-time students, and the majority of survey respondents worked full time. The part-time status of most students may be connected to the fact that respondents described work as having a major impact on their abilities to be college students. Their status as working adults conflicted significantly with attending college. This was consistent with responses in the survey that indicated that work and family were in tremendous competition with nontraditional-aged adults' ability to attend school.

A Typology of Nontraditional-aged Community College Students

The primary method of placing the students in the typology was based on how they identified their greatest supports and barriers and how those supports and barriers related to the institutional, situational, or dispositional supports and barriers identified in the literature (Cross, 1981). The four identified types of nontraditional-aged learners that emerged are students who felt well supported, students struggling with personal challenges, students who are young and restless, and students who encountered but were able to ignore non-supporters. The students who struggled with personal challenges were divided into two subtypes: Currently Challenged and the Controlling Challenges.

The most illustrative data that helped generate and illustrate the types of students came from the focal participants because the number and quality of interactions we had provided the opportunity for them to share multiple aspects of their experiences and to go into greater detail about them. I had limited interaction with students who participated as focus group members and so, although the focus group participants' experiences corroborated the experiences of the focal students, I did not speak to focus group participants enough to use their data to develop any additional description to inform the typology. These data served more to validate than to deepen or extend the typology. The message board data was also limited in its usefulness because message board posters typically posted only one or two times in the course of the study. The information from the survey was not detailed enough to inform the development of the typology. The survey participants were mostly asked to answer multiple choice questions, of which the most useful answers were only somewhat helpful in validating the typology. The open-ended questions on the survey provided limited information about challenging situational issues, which only confirmed that those situations were issues for many nontraditional-aged adult students. Those situations included conflicts with work and school as well as childcare challenges. The survey did not provide any detailed descriptions of students.

Well Supported Students. Some students had a great deal of support in the form of spouses, children, and parents. These students had challenges, but their positive experiences far outweighed their negative experiences. These types of students were financially stable and either employed in relatively well-paying professions or occupied in fulfilling activities such as voluntary homemaking. They had spouses who cheerfully functioned as primary breadwinners. These types of students were happy and excited to

attend the college. They were complimentary about the school and their experiences. These students were aware of barriers that existed at the college, but any difficulties seemed to be counterbalanced by the other aspects of their extraordinarily stable and well-supported lives. These students claimed to face only minor institutional barriers. Their situations in life caused only minor inconveniences to their school experiences. They believed that problematic situations had solutions, as long as they made the correct choices to access those solutions. Their dispositions seemed to be major factors in their success as students at the college.

Roman. I met Roman for our first of five interviews at Barnes & Noble at about 8 p.m. on a stormy October night. After sitting in the café of the bookstore for a few minutes—wondering which of the older men sitting alone was Roman—I called him on my cell phone. I learned that he was sitting in front of the Barnes & Noble in his car relaxing.

“[I’ll] be right there. I am sitting right in front in my car,” he said. A few minutes later, a tall, bearded, thin man with wispy, gray hair, wearing a flannel shirt and carrying a copy of *The Wall Street Journal*, strode over to where I was sitting at a small table with my notebook and tape recorder. “Melissa,” he said. He had a raspy, high voice with a thick Eastern European accent. “I want to talk about this American education.” Roman already had a master’s degree in computer science from a college in Romania.

Roman was 56 years old at the time of the interview. He was a part-time student majoring in business. He was married and had two sons, aged 18 and 20. One son was in his last year of high school, and the other attended a local university. Roman had a full-time position at a bank as a computer engineer, and his wife also worked. He only took

night classes and had been attending the college for seven semesters. During the semester of the study, he was taking two courses. His goal was to become a certified public accountant. One experience he described having, during the semester of the study, was that the textbook being used in his accounting class did not have an answer key and the teacher of the class did not provide the answers to the problems. This was frustrating to him because his goal was to be able to use all of the information from his courses for practical purposes. He did not understand why he would be asked to solve a problem and not be able to see the answer eventually.

Roman decided to ban together with his classmates to create a petition requesting the removal of his accounting instructor. The chairperson of the department terminated the instructor and apologized to the class. The way he worked with his classmate to solve the problem and how the Business Department Chair responded to take care of the situation was consistent with the positive way he spoke about many of his challenges and his tendency to problem solve in order to overcome any obstacle. He felt as if everyone was basically on his side. He expressed great satisfaction with the faculty and the administration of the college regarding his overall experience.

He described himself as being quite comfortable and he was having such a good experience that he believed that he should have started college in 1996 when he first immigrated to the United States, but he was glad to be in school finally after the long delay. Roman was supported by the unlimited time his family provided him to study and his secure financial situation. His sons did not require his direct supervision. He described his wife as willingly giving him the time he needed to study and attend class. The idea of Roman attending classes folded neatly into his life and into the lives of his

family. He said simply that when it came to his family making time for him to study and get his school work completed, they had no choice.

Roman is a good exemplar of this category because he had an extraordinarily, stable personal life through which he could marshal support for his efforts to succeed as a student. Roman did not mention any dispositional or situational challenges. His attitude and disposition were actually particularly helpful in aiding him to overcome any institutional obstacles that he was experiencing during the semester of the study.

Bob. I met with Bob for our first interview on a Monday afternoon in October at a café behind the college. He was a tall, burly man with a head full of brown and gray low-cut curls. He strolled in wearing shorts and a sweatshirt, although it was a chilly, blustery fall day. He was extremely upbeat and seemed quite excited to be part of the study, although initially he seemed to be unable to name any challenges he was experiencing as a student at the college.

Bob was 46 years old and married, with two children who were ages 9 and 12. His wife worked. He was not working, but described himself as a stay-at-home-dad rather than unemployed, although he had only taken the homemaking role when he was laid off from his job at a shipping company a couple of years prior. He had been in the nursing program for seven consecutive semesters and planned to graduate the following year. He selected the rigorous nursing program at the college because he wanted to make a career change. During the semester of the study, he was taking one 12-credit course.

Bob has had strong support from his wife in her attitude toward his studies. Because he was laid off and the couple still had young children, it was necessary for Bob to obtain stable and lucrative employment. Bob and his wife agreed that sacrifices were

necessary to meet this end. His wife worked overtime to take care of the family financially. Bob was a stay-at-home dad, but in addition to his status as a student, his father had agreed to live with him and provide time for him to study. Bob said that everyone in his family treated his goal to become a nurse with respect and they all made their high expectations clear. He said this helped him stay focused and motivated him to study harder. During the semester of the study, Bob described feeling extremely fortunate to have the support of his classmates and instructors. "They are some of the most wonderful people I have ever met," he said when describing them. He seemed to be nearly as appreciative of the support of his classmates and instructors as he was of the support of his family. He made no distinction between older or younger students when discussing their helpfulness and support in the nursing program. During the semester of the study, Bob described almost no challenges until the last couple of weeks of the semester when he received a low test grade. He said that he had not studied hard enough and then he reluctantly acknowledged that his parenting responsibilities outside of school prevented him from being able to score as well on that test as he would have liked. He said that he should have asked his wife for help and his failure to do so had caused the low test score. "She would have been glad to help," he said. He acknowledged that he was going to need to ask his wife for help the next time he was in a similar situation. His realization that in the future he did have the option of calling upon his strong support system to help him, demonstrated his upbeat, optimistic disposition regarding attending college and overcoming the challenges that may have continued to be present.

Bob was another good exemplar of this type because, like Gregory and some of the other students in the study, he had an extremely supportive family who seemed to be

invested in helping him feel generally supported in any of his endeavors and school was no exception. Many students, both women and men, who were satisfied at the college, described having family dynamics similar to that of Gregory and Bob.

Struggling with personal challenges. Students who fit this type struggled with personal challenges such as depression, substance abuse, illness, and unemployment. By enrolling at the College they wanted to reinvent themselves, and they were counting on the College to help them facilitate that process. These students frequently majored in programs that related to their personal challenges. For example, some recovering alcoholics were pursuing degrees or certificates in substance abuse counseling programs. Students with major health problems would sometimes major in nursing. Despite their difficulties, these students were optimistic about reaching their educational goals but critical of the college. They described themselves as both assertive and aggressive when faced with situations they considered barriers to their goals. This type of students seemed to be so aware and in control of their numerous personal problems that they were experts at keeping what could be situational and dispositional barriers from interfering with their school lives. They were, however, aware of areas in which the college was not serving their needs and were easily able to discuss institutional barriers that could be remedied to facilitate their success. The ways in which this type of student experienced institutional obstacles was not always consistent. Therefore, this type was further subdivided in two groups. The first subgroup includes those who experienced challenges because of the vulnerabilities related to their mental and physical health during the course of the study: Currently Challenged. The other subgroup had similar mental and physical

vulnerabilities, but their most pressing challenges were under control during the semester of the study: Controlling Challenges.

Currently Challenged. This group included Martha, Jill and Yolanda. Each of these students struggled with their personal challenges during the semester of the study and those challenges had significant impact on their academic success.

Martha. Martha was deeply involved in her daughter's school situation due to a traumatic bullying experience that had lasted for nearly a year. She wanted to earn a degree, so she could get involved in local politics and become a change agent in her daughter's school system. I met with Martha for the first of five interviews in my office on an October morning. She wore a navy blue windbreaker and carried a heavy book bag. She was an energetic and cheerful woman with a bubbly and contagious laugh. She wore her shoulder-length, shiny brown and red hair in a stylish bob. Her makeup was applied meticulously, giving her dark-brown skin a smooth glow and helping her appear much younger than her years. Much of what she said about her reasons for coming to college had to do with obligations she felt toward her three children.

Martha, a 45-year-old, "happily" divorced mother of three, was attending the college as a political science and business major. Martha's three children, one girl and two young men, were 11, 20, and 28. Martha affectionately described her youngest child as a "Disney kid" who was happy, innocent, and simple. Martha was not working because she was disabled and received disability payments. She had survived a major car accident that permanently damaged a disc in her back, and she had recently been diagnosed as having multiple sclerosis. She also suffered from severe chronic depression. This was her first semester at the college, and she was taking 12 credits. Near the end of

the semester, she had to drop one course to avoid failing it. Symptoms of her depression caused her to miss classes and fall too behind to catch up. Decades before, when she was 18 years old, Martha explained that although she began to attend college, she quickly withdrew. She had given birth to her first child in her last year of high school. Although she had the support of her mother and an excellent babysitter, the responsibility of taking care of a child, working nights, and being a student took its toll. She then attended and graduated from a technical school, but she said it had always been her ambition to earn a college degree. She said she enrolled in college several times, but every time she got started, a major life-changing event would occur, and she would end up leaving school after earning only a few credits.

Martha enrolled in college this time because of the negative experience her daughter was having at school. Martha had relocated from a different town the year before. When her daughter started attending a new school, she became the target of threats from other children.

There were children going up to my daughter daily telling her that they were going to stab her with a pencil. They called her all types of names. [My daughter] became ill ... because of the stress and missed 45 days of school.

After going to the principal and the superintendent about bullying in the district, Martha started to make some progress. She became part of a committee in the school that was formed to address bullying among the student population. Martha said she began to see how, with more education, she could be a political force in the community and affect change. "I don't know how I am going to get there. I cannot explain the steps, but I can

tell you how it is going to end. I am going to be in the position to affect change,” she said. The desire to be politically active was the push she needed to enroll in college again.

During the semester, despite Martha’s strong, fighting spirit, she had some difficulties because of depressive episodes and physical pain. She referred to these maladies as “getting sick” when pinpointing situations during the semester that were impacted by her illness. For example, toward the end of the semester, she was earning a poor grade in her Western Civilization course. Although she had already dropped at least one other course, she did not wish to drop the Western Civilization course. She explained that, “Because I had gotten sick, I was behind. I told him I did write the paper though and I could not understand why he took so many points off. It turns out he thought I had not read the book when he read the paper. I went to his office and told him everything that was in the book about Hypatia and we cleared it up and I will rewrite the paper for a better grade...” Martha reported that the instructor neither seemed interested in helping her nor did he seem to take her seriously when she reached out at the end of the semester. Actually, due to her illnesses, Martha had missed multiple classes toward the middle of the semester and because of this, she was not completely clear on the requirements of the paper. She had relied on her interpretation of what was on the syllabus to write it. Unfortunately, there had been additional information about the assignment provided during the classes she missed. She had never informed the instructor or the college about her depression or pain management issues. She did not have any accommodations on record and she felt her professor did not believe that she was serious or sincere about his class. This perception could have been due to her excessive number of absences and lack of communication about why she missed the classes. Although Martha did acknowledge

that she was sick during the semester and had missed classes, she did not attribute her poor academic performance to her absences. Instead, she said that the teacher was sub par and less than engaged in his job. This type of scenario, which was one in which she expected her instructor to be more understanding, consistently presented challenges to Martha throughout the semester. She said she felt that the college should have been more understanding of her personal situation and respected her seriousness as an adult when dealing with her absences or problems with her work.

Martha fit into this category of Currently Challenged because her physical and mental health problems, combined with her confusion about college policies and protocols (or lack of them) created challenges for her. She focused significant parts of the description of her experiences on ways that she felt that the college was limited in accommodating her personal health struggles.

Jill. Jill said she had been through a tremendous amount of trauma in her life, which included two house fires in which she lost everything, including her pets. She had also lost her mother to cancer within the last few years. She has Crohn's disease and had recently experienced a bout of depression. Finally, when she lost her job the year before, she made what she considered a life-changing decision. She decided to become a nurse, and the nursing program at the community college was her best option for doing so. I met Jill for her first interview on a rainy October night at 8 p.m. in the café of a large Barnes & Noble. She arrived first.

Although we had only met through e-mail exchanges and over the telephone, she spotted me right away. "Melissa," she called in a firm, confident voice, waving at me from the table enthusiastically. We joked for a few seconds about how we had been

anxious about being able to pick each other out in a crowded bookstore and then began to discuss her experiences in school. She was still wearing her hospital scrubs, and she was sporting a trendy, brown- and blond-streaked spiky hairstyle. She launched almost immediately into a story about her day and bemoaned a policy in her academic department. She was outspoken.

Jill, a 51-year-old divorcee with no children, was an unemployed, full-time nursing student. Although she had taken a psychology course a few years ago in an attempt to get over depression caused by the loss of her mother and the trauma of surviving the two fires that destroyed her homes, she did not consider herself a returning student. She had matriculated into the program two years before when she came to the campus during a late-summer enrollment period. She said she sat with an adviser and told him that she wanted to study in the health area. He said, “Spanish is a good start.”

“That happened to be a class that was open at the time,” she explained.

She did well in Spanish, and a friend advised her that if she liked school, she should continue with college because it would enable her to change her life in a couple of years. The friend warned her that if she didn’t complete her college education, she would stay the same for the rest of her life. Jill decided to change her life. She took the placement examinations and then enrolled in some required developmental courses. After passing those courses, she was able to begin taking credit-bearing courses toward her major.

During the semester of the study, Jill experienced tremendous stress and her Crohn’s disease flared up. She said she was “medically advised” to drop her stress level immediately by dropping a course. She dropped one of her courses before the middle of

the semester and was able to get her Crohn's disease back under control. This was something that concerned her. Because she was in the highly competitive nursing program, she felt she could not afford to drop courses. She worried that the rigid schedule of hospital clinical requirements, her class workload preventing her from being able to sleep enough at night, and the inability to tend to her dietary needs related to the Crohn's disease due to class attendance requirements, could affect her ability to be successful in the nursing program.

Jill fit into the type, Currently Challenged, because of her serious physical health issue that had the potential to surface at any time when she was experiencing stress. She felt that she could manage her health in most other aspects of her life, but the challenges of being a nursing student had an impact on her physical health during the semester of the study as described. Jill was one of the students who might have also fit the "well supported" category because, although she described herself as independent and self-sufficient, she also described herself as having the strong support of a long-term boyfriend and her sister, whose partner had even encouraged her to pursue nursing. She said that her boyfriend was always willing to try to provide her with a gas card, believing that her funds were limited, but she strongly discouraged him from giving her any financial help. Because her boyfriend lived in another state and her sister also did not live near—although she credited them with trying to support her—she did not focus on the support that they provided and actually said that, day to day, she felt isolated and unsupported. She was so resistant to accepting or acknowledging their help, that it would have been difficult to identify her as the "Well Supported" type. She provided few

examples of feeling supported and helped by anyone in comparison to the multiple examples she gave about how her isolation affected her experiences at the college.

Yolanda. Yolanda had been in and out of jail because of drugs and drinking. Because of her success in school, the inmates at her former jail learned about her experiences from the administrators at the jail, who brought in news of her accomplishments and talked to inmates about her changed life. The other inmates were being directed to view her as a role model, and because of her example, some of the inmates learned that it is possible to change. She wanted to earn an alcohol and substance abuse counseling certificate and then continue on to earn a bachelor's degree.

I met with Yolanda for the first of our five interviews in my office on campus on a Friday afternoon in early October. She wore a dark-colored, comfortable-looking pair of sweatpants and a black hoodie. She had long, bright, blond hair divided into two thick braids and a ready, wide smile. Yolanda's throaty, deep laugh accompanied each of her vignettes, whether she was describing her history of drug and alcohol abuse or how she had been on the honor roll for the several semesters leading up to the study.

At the time of the study, Yolanda was a 43-year-old full-time student studying in the Certificated Alcohol Drug Counselor certificate program and taking additional courses to apply toward an associate's degree. She learned about the college in 2008 when she was employed by a catering service that delivered meals to one of its inner-city satellite campuses. She said she had developed relationships with some of the faculty and administrators there and had started asking them questions about how to get into college and what type of funding was available. They were extremely encouraging and helpful. Eventually, she learned that she could qualify for many funding sources at the college

that would enable her to afford to attend. Around that time, she was laid off from her delivery position, and she used that as an opportunity to enroll in the college part time. After two semesters, she started taking a full load of classes in fall 2009.

At the time of the study, Yolanda's goal was to complete the Certified Alcohol and Drug Counselor certificate and then continue to earn college credits and eventually transfer to a nearby university as a junior. She was due to complete her certificate at the end of the semester, and she was already taking courses toward her associate's degree. She also planned to earn a bachelor's degree in counseling or social work and then pursue a master's degree. She said her goal was to stay in college for the next several years.

She was unmarried and had no children. During the semester of the study, she had just started working a new full-time job and also held two part-time jobs. She had struggled financially at the beginning of the study, and during the course of the weeks that covered the period of time when our interviews were conducted, she revealed that she was starting to lose hours at her full-time job, which affected her day-to-day life tremendously. Her full-time job was as a receptionist and sometimes as a counselor in the office of a psychologist who ran a counseling practice. One of Yolanda's part-time jobs was working as a drink taster, a job where she sipped drinks and reported her impressions of the taste. She also worked as a handy woman, which meant that she cut grass, cleaned gutters, painted houses, shoveled snow, and did other manual labor in spite of the fact that she had a bad back. She said she had once been a full-time handy woman, but her problems with alcohol abuse, various addictions, and stints in and out of jail had caused her to quit the job and seek treatment. Also, having been incarcerated prevented her from working consistently. She lived alone and said that every night she fell into bed in her

one bedroom apartment. She had moved into the apartment in early September, and she had not had a chance to unpack even one box. As a former alcohol and drug addict, she had “messed up” many times, she said. Now she was determined to get through school. “I dropped out of [high] school [but] I told my mom, you are going to see me graduate from something!”

During the semester of the study Yolanda faced several challenges because of her medical situation. Because she had no full-time job, she had no medical insurance. Getting the medical attention she needed presented a challenge because of her financial situation. Finally, when she was able to have the surgery she needed at an outpatient clinic, she reported that she experienced a complication that kept in her bed for several days and she ended up missing several days of class. Yolanda said she approached her math teacher to learn about what types of options were available to her in light of her illness and subsequent absences. She was already struggling in his class before her absences. She said he laughed and asked what she wanted him to say. Yolanda described feeling frustrated and angry that he did not understand that she merely wanted the answer to her question. She said that she felt like her complicated situation was not understood or respected and he treated her less professionally than was appropriate for the seriousness of her situation. Yolanda ended up failing math and some other courses, which she anticipated would delay her program completion by at least one semester.

Yolanda fit into this category because her ongoing financial situation put her in peril. Some of her personal choices caused her to need medical attention. Even in our last conversation, post semester, she described losing more income and trying to figure out ways of buying her books for the next semester. She also talked about her vehicle

breaking down and leaving her dependent on friends and family for transportation. Her personal situation stood to continue to challenge her and make her vulnerable while she was in school.

Controlling Challenges. Melvin and Jonathan fit into this category because although both described significant personal challenges that they had experienced, during the semester of the study, they both managed to work around their personal challenges to achieve satisfactory outcomes.

Melvin. Melvin wanted to help other people conquer depression because his depressive condition had driven him to attempt suicide two years prior to the study. He was enrolled in a program at the college that would enable him to earn his associate and bachelor's degrees at the same time in drug and alcohol counseling. I met Melvin for the first of five interviews in the lounge area of the College Center, a large building in the center of campus that housed a plethora of student services, including the cafeteria and the student-activities offices. It was midmorning in early October on a Wednesday during the fall semester. He was wearing a crisp, green windbreaker and carried a rugged leather backpack. He had a neatly trimmed beard, wore silver-framed glasses, and had brown hair, substantially mixed with gray. He was cheerful and organized.

During the interview, when his phone rang, he answered it and then immediately pulled his calendar out and wrote an appointment down. "I *have* to do that," he said. "It keeps me organized." Later, after he had revealed a complex and difficult past, he said that his tight organization staved off stress, which for him was a life or death matter.

Melvin, a returning student who had earned a bachelor's degree in business in 1978, was a childless, 56-year-old, full-time student who decided to start his life over

after years of being a chronically depressed alcoholic, experiencing disappointment from a failed marriage, enduring burnout from a high-pressure position in the insurance-sales industry, and surviving a suicide attempt. During the time of the study, he was unemployed, and his plan was to earn credits at the community college toward both an associate and bachelor's degree in psychosocial counseling. Melvin said he wanted to help other people, as numerous counselors and social workers had helped him after he survived his suicide attempt.

He has been at Middlesex for three semesters, two of which were full time.

During the semester of the study, Melvin did not describe any challenges. He earned a 4.0 g.p.a. that semester, although he said that he had actually experienced a depressive episode for a few weeks during the semester of the study. He said he was relieved to realize that he could manage college around his predictable, depressive episodes.

Melvin also might have fit into the Well Supported type because he had significant social service support including social workers and a psychologist due to his mental health issues. The mental health professionals supporting him were described by Melvin as being fairly diligent and thorough in upholding their responsibilities toward him. During our interviews, he received calls from these supporters. They were setting up home visits to check on him and asking how he was feeling. However, he was identified as the "struggling with personal challenges" type because although he described being supported by these professionals in some ways, he seemed to feel as if the support of these professionals was not particularly helpful in assisting him with pursuing his educational goals. Although I was aware of the support these professionals were

providing because he shared this information during his interview, he seemed to be more focused on his independence in the process of attending the college than on the extensive professional support system available. Another reason I felt that he needed to be in the Struggles with Personal Challenges type instead of Well Supported was because he had recently been released from an outpatient psychiatric facility, he was heavily medicated, and he had survived a suicide attempt only two years before the study.

In spite of his personal challenges, his disposition was extremely positive and he was upbeat about his experiences at the college.

Jonathan. Jonathan was the youngest of the students in the Struggling with Personal Challenges type and like Melvin, he had his challenges under control. He described a constant struggle with depression, perfectionism and procrastination, but he said he wanted to change the world, build things, and express himself. He had already failed out of a top college. After that, he had tried to “make it” without a college degree by working as a freelance web designer, but he was back in school, retracing his original steps, trying to develop the focus and discipline to complete “something” so that he could move on with his life. I met Jonathan in my office late in the morning on a blustery, October day. He was wearing a hooded, multicolored ski jacket and carrying a sturdy backpack that was quite full. He looked extremely youthful, with a long swatch of shiny, straight black hair falling over one eye. Although our interview was intended to last about an hour, it lasted more than two hours. The conversation with Jonathan was lengthy, but talking to Jonathan was easy and pleasant. He was a self-proclaimed philosopher and had decided that the best way to move forward in life was to acquire a community college degree.

Jonathan was a 27-year-old mathematics major and the oldest son of two Filipino immigrants. He had two younger brothers, both of whom attended a local university. Jonathan had decided to quit working and concentrate on school full time. Prior to that, he had worked several freelance jobs. He had taken out loans to finance the completion of his education. He said that one thing he did not like to discuss with other students was his financial situation. He said that by the time he finishes college, he will owe \$136,000 and only have a bachelor's degree, whereas others who spend that type of money on their educations would be PhDs or MDs. Jonathan confessed that it was possible that he was underestimating his debt. The size of the debt was due to paying for the high tuition at a prestigious college but not earning any credits, as well as later on having multiple false starts in classes that he dropped when it was too late to receive refunds. He explained that he had failed from the program at the prestigious college for no other reason than because he enjoyed procrastinating by spending most of his time talking to other students and professors about mathematics, when he should have been studying and doing his homework. He had also enjoyed walking around the cosmopolitan city where his former school was located, gazing at landmarks and talking to people on the streets. He said during one of our lengthy interviews, "Most people would do that in a beautiful city – right?" His reason for attending college this time was to complete something. His inability to focus and complete tasks was something he had struggled with for several years. He was now trying to conquer this problem through his attendance at the college.

During the semester of the study, Jonathan had some minor struggles because of his procrastination and perfectionism which had actually started the semester before the study. He said that he needed to complete an English paper in a class in which he had an

incomplete. He admitted that he could not make himself write what he said was a basic and simple research paper. He described revisiting the writing assignment frequently and agonizing over it. He was reluctant to talk to the professor because of anxiety and because so much time had passed. Also, in the same interviews where he perseverated over how difficult it was for him to manage his time given his multiple, extended family responsibilities, and school work, he also shared information about videos he was watching “for fun.” He said, “I’m trying to learn Japanese...this method is the ‘start on the wrong foot’ method. I listen to Japanese all of the time no matter what I am doing, any Japanese and I am learning it...” He said he had no concrete plans or reasons for learning Japanese. He admitted to not having enough time to get everything completed and sometimes even sleeping in his car, yet he provided me with numerous web addresses to esoteric self-help gurus and said he watched them in his free time and suggested that I watch them as well. Ultimately, in spite of his habits, he did manage to have a fairly successful semester by his own estimation.

The Struggling with Personal Challenges type was the best fit for Jonathan because although he was the same age as the students who fit into the young and restless type, Jonathan did not fit into the type because his behavior, attitude and disposition were different from the other younger adults in the study. He was much more interested in conquering his personal, dispositional issues than other young nontraditional-aged students. He seemed to have some difficulty navigating the institution because of his disposition and found the challenge of conforming to the requirements of the institution to be his greatest obstacle. It did appear, however, that his efforts to curb the affects of his habits were helping him make progress and that he was moving toward realizing his goal

of completing an associate's degree. *His goal was* to finish his degree, but he was giving himself a great deal of latitude in terms of time and so he was not manifesting the same type of restlessness and impatience as the other, younger adult students.

Young and restless. At the younger end of the spectrum of nontraditional-aged adult students are those who are less than 30 years old. Several of these students returned the survey, posted messages, or participated in focus groups. The students in this category are quite different from each other, but they seemed to have similar purposes for attending the college and similar reactions to some community college phenomenon. These students had their purposes at the community college in sharp perspective. They all realized that attending community college was an important prerequisite for any potential additional higher education. They did not want their efforts to be slowed down or interfered with by other students or by the institution. They had little tolerance for conditions or incidents that might cause a delay in their progress. They revealed this by talking about their immediate and urgent plans for life after graduation and also by complaining about the counterproductive behaviors exhibited by younger students, which they said negatively impacted their experiences. Some of the students also complained about their instructors. The issues that younger adult students struggled with most were dispositional and situational issues, although this group did describe some institutional challenges.

The behaviors of the traditional-aged college students were described as major obstacles by the younger nontraditional-aged adults. They felt that poor classroom behavior interfered with the potential benefits of their courses on several levels. Although these younger nontraditional-aged students had the ability to recognize the dysfunctional

student behaviors of students even younger than them, they had difficulty containing and managing their own irritation with the behaviors when they infringed on class time. This affected their abilities to function at the college. As younger, nontraditional-aged students struggled to navigate their own college experiences, their youthful, intolerant temperaments allowed the behaviors of traditional-aged students to serve as barriers. During interview sessions and in focus groups, these younger, nontraditional-aged students perseverated over how their proximity to the younger students was holding them back in college. They said it affected how the teachers taught the courses and even had a negative impact on their learning when they had to participate in group projects with younger students. They said that the younger students did not commit themselves to class work and projects as they should, which caused nontraditional-aged adult students to do more work to earn the grades they needed. The younger nontraditional-aged students were eager (restless) to leave the community college environment because of these types of issues. They attributed the traditional-aged students' behaviors strictly to the fact that they were young, dependent on others, such as parents, and not internally motivated to attend college. They observed that because of the financial support that younger students had from their parents, typically, they could not value the college experience quite like the nontraditional-aged students who are paying their own way. These types of observations and thoughts about younger students were something that older nontraditional-aged students managed differently, taking a more proactive approach to their challenges with traditional-aged adults.

Younger nontraditional-aged students also described unique situational barriers because they were fairly young and still striving to stabilize their adult personal lives with

new marriages, fresh engagements, new jobs, or parenting young children. This set them apart from traditional-aged students but in many ways also set them apart from the older students because older nontraditional-aged adult students in the study had more experience with those issues, even if they were attending school for the first time.

Tom. I met Tom for our first meeting in the student newspaper office in October. I had become acquainted with him over the summer when he joined the newspaper staff; I was in charge of that program. Although he was always around the newspaper office, his role on the staff was limited to being a *hang-arounder*—a term affectionately used by staffers to describe students who associated with the staff in the newsroom as so-called staff members but who did not contribute significantly. Tom could often be found in the newsroom, headphones on, working on his homework and watching short videos on YouTube. He also enjoyed debating with students on the newspaper staff. He used the newspaper office (open from 7:30 a.m. to 10:30 p.m., five days a week; it is one of the few cozy places on campus, with three couches and a homey, living room décor) as his social anchor, a resource, or even a home away from home on campus. As an example of his comfort level, once during the semester of the study, when he ran out of minutes on his cell phone, he tried to use the newspaper phone lines to call universities all over New Jersey to apply for the spring semester. He was not involved much with the newspaper during the semester of the study, but before the semester started, he wrote a few stories even though he claimed to hate writing. He also recruited a couple of younger students to work for the newspaper. His interactions with the students were contentious at times because of the experiences he was having in the classroom. In one of his interviews, he said that the experiences he was having with the younger students in his classes were

revealing his weaknesses, and he found working with them to be extremely frustrating and irritating.

“I need to learn how to say no and be firm,” he said. That semester, Tom found himself the team leader for a project in his business marketing class. The behavior of the younger members of Tom’s team provoked him. Tom became angry at the student as the semester progressed.

The work he submitted was horrible. The teacher said that I was allowed to fire people from the team, but I didn’t have the strength to implement that harsh decision. I wanted to because these kids are just ridiculous. I need to learn how to [be stricter].

This was an example of how his youthful temperament and frustration with the younger students in community college caused him stress and caused friction, even when he had the best of intentions.

Later, as an expression of his frustration, Tom argued with the same student about the student’s work ethic and clothing style and yelled loudly at him in the middle of a crowded parking lot, saying that the student was going nowhere in life. This incident suggests the level of frustration that Tom was experiencing as a *young*, older student. When he wasn’t angry, Tom was a prankster, frequently making cryptic jokes and teasing other students. He had a marvelous dry wit, which he practiced often with his younger classmates, who seemed to have a difficult time understanding him and sometimes seemed unsure of whether he was making fun of them.

Tom was a 29-year-old business major and the oldest son of two blue-collar Argentinean immigrants who had not attended college. His two younger sisters had

already graduated from universities and were working in professional jobs. During the semester of the study, Tom worked part time and attended college full time. He had been attending college off and on since 2002. Since 2009, Tom had been an honor student and was now in his last semester before graduating. His motivation to complete college emerged from a relationship with a woman he had met in 2009. After meeting this woman and eventually deciding that he wanted to marry her, he said that he had decided that he needed to graduate from community college and transfer to a reputable university so that he could earn a bachelor's degree and provide his future wife the kind of life she deserved.

During the semester of the study, Tom's greatest frustration seemed to be with the pace of other students and how that affected his progress. For example, he spoke negatively about students with whom he was working on a group project in his business class. He was disturbed by their lack of initiative, irresponsible behavior, and poor work quality. He perseverated over how the "kids" at the school were getting in his way and he needed to get out of the "lax environment" they were creating. He was self critical because he did not know how to make the students in his business class group do their work and it worried and angered him because he thought it might affect his grades and jeopardize his chances of getting into an excellent university the next semester. He even pondered whether any of the students he was encountering would ever be able to obtain employment. He would sometimes do impersonations of what their first job interviews might sound like, imagining them giving shallow and insipid answers to interview questions. "When the employers ask them what they have to offer, what are they going to say? Will they say that they play Angry Birds and text on their phones?" Because I saw

him spending time with other students in the newspaper office, I also saw him lash out at younger students and sometimes break out in impromptu lectures about how valuable his time was and why others needed to cooperate or be more reliable in their dealings with him. He manifested a sense of restlessness that seem to be tied to his perception that as an adult student still trying to complete his degree, he did not have time to waste. He had immediate goals. He said wanted to progress as rapidly as possible because he had the feeling of already being behind and he regretted the time he had wasted earlier in his life.

Tom was a good fit for the young and restless type because of his fairly straightforward, but urgent short term goals revolving around his desire to be married, start a family and ultimately have a reasonable employment situation. When he felt younger students were interfering with his goals, he felt significant frustration and impatience.

Ann. I met Ann in my office at the college for our first interview in mid-October. She wore a gray wool coat, as it was a chilly October day. Her long brown hair was worn straight. She said she hoped that she was adequate for my study because, although she was a nontraditional-aged student, she was still in her 20s and she imagined that there were adults with more complicated, adult-like stories than hers.

Ann was a 29-year-old newlywed who had been attending college part time at night for two semesters. She had been unemployed for nearly a year and was collecting unemployment benefits. Her supportive police officer husband was working many hours of overtime to close the gap in their income caused by her unemployment. Because he was so busy, she was struggling to figure out when to cook, clean, rest, study, and attend college courses each evening. Ann was in school to complete prerequisites for a nursing

degree. She said she was confident that she would be accepted into a reputable nursing program after completing prerequisites at the community college.

Ann was extremely conscious of how she used her time. She provided detailed descriptions of the exact ways in which her time was wasted during the semester of the study. She was aware of the number of minutes another student spent asking an inappropriate question during class or the insistence of a teacher on reading a textbook to the students instead of teaching the subject. Both examples were incidents that happened during the semester of the study. She described, with contempt, how the students in her class constantly asked for study guides and the same instructions from the professors several times. They also asked for extra credit frequently. She said that this behavior from the younger students really tried her patience. She felt that even if this type of behavior was to be expected at a community college, it was extremely difficult for her to tolerate because she already had a bachelor's degree from a large local university and could not recall a time when any of her professors at the university offered study guides or extra credit. When Ann listened to students "whine" and ask for unnecessary support from the professors, she felt angry and irritated because she believed it interfered with her own learning and wasted her time, which was limited. This irritation illustrates well what she was experiencing as an adult student enrolled in community college. The other major complaint that Ann had was that during the semester of the study, one of her teachers refused to accept her doctor's note excusing her from class. She had actually had an emergency appendectomy and had to be in the hospital for several days. As a consequence, she missed a quiz. When she went to the teacher with her doctor's note so that she could take the missed quiz, the teacher refused to allow her to take the quiz. Ann

went to upper-level administrators to gain permission to take the quiz and was told that she could take the quiz and furthermore, that there was a policy at the school that stated this. Although she resolved the problem successfully, Ann was quite irate about the experience regarding the teacher and the quiz because she felt that having to go through several levels of administrators just to take a quiz was an unwise use of her limited time. She was anxious to get out of the college, but not without completing her goals. The fact that she was a recent post graduate made it difficult for her to tolerate what she described as the “immature” behavior of the younger students in community college and a lack of respect and professionalism from some of her teachers.

Ann fits well into the type Young and Restless because of her age and her lack of patience with her environment. Although there is no question that her husband supported her, this was not something that she spoke about much in the course of her interviews and so I did not place her in the Well Supported type. Her greatest challenges came from her disposition and how the behavior of other students and some of her instructors acted upon her disposition.

Ignoring Non-Supporters. Some students believed that other people were trying to hinder their success, yet they were undeterred. These types of students felt that there were people in their lives who were actively seeking to prevent them from completing their higher education. In some cases, the obstructionists were family members, but sometimes this problem extended to coworkers who tried to get students reprimanded or fired from their jobs to prevent them from studying at work during their breaks and less busy times. These students were very determined to complete their programs, but the energy they used to deflect the negative attacks on their educational goals affected them,

although it did not seem to reflect in their grades. These students struggled most with situational issues that stemmed from the difficult relationships they had with others. They were fighting for their educations and were quite determined to prevail. They also described some situational issues that seemed to escalate their institutional challenges. Nearly every institutional problem they had could have been remedied if people in their lives had made choices to help them rather than hinder them.

Linda. I met with Linda one mid-October weekend in my office at the college. She was wearing a red pea coat, and her long, brown hair was pulled into a tight, no-nonsense bun. She was only 30, but she seemed quite motherly, reaching out to adjust my tape recorder as I opened my notebook. She said it was important for her to make time in her busy schedule to meet with me because she wanted to make sure I had enough volunteers to conduct this study, which she had learned about when I had sent the mass e-mail survey to the nontraditional-aged adult students in September to explain the study and call for volunteers.

Linda was a 30-year-old mother of two in the process of divorcing her husband of more than 10 years. During the semester previous to the study, he had become violent toward her because of her commitment to school. Her children, a boy and a girl, were ages 4 and 10. She was taking classes part time and hoped to get accepted into the nursing program. She had been attending the college for six semesters. She had been working as a full-time medical assistant for more than 10 years. She said the reason she decided to go college was because one day after her boss overheard her talking to a patient, he said, "You know what? You need to go to school. You have way too much knowledge of this field to just remain a medical assistant." The doctor gave her a college

application, a check for the application fee, and asked her to send it in the next day and tell him when she heard from the college. She said without that aggressive push, she might not have enrolled. Her goal was to get into the nursing program by fall 2012, which was one year after the semester of the study. She had a 4.0 grade point average and was working hard to keep it, so she could get accepted into the highly competitive nursing program at the college. She wanted to earn an associate's degree at the college and then continue her studies at a university, so she could earn both bachelor's and master's degrees. She was taking two classes during the semester of the study, but each semester before that she had taken three classes. For Linda, getting into and completing the nursing program was a key part of her plan to get out of the one-bedroom apartment she had moved into after her divorce. She said she wanted to raise her children in comfort.

During the semester of the study Linda described many problems with other people being less than supportive or trying to sabotage her. As a result her marriage ending, one of her children was giving her some difficulty and acting out in ways that prevented her from focusing on school work. Also, although she appreciated that her mother babysat her children, she was quite irritated that her mother would leave as soon as she walked into the house without giving her even an extra moment of childcare. She felt that her mother did not understand that Linda needed to spend time away from home to study. The fact that her boss originally provided her with a registration form and a check to pay her fee and practically ordered her to follow through on the offer, was less significant to her than the situation that had evolved during the semester of the study in which several coworkers were making comments in meetings about how the job was not school and that nobody should have their books open at any time, whether they are on

break or at lunch. The feeling, described by Linda, of needing to fight other people for each minute of study time was significant because many adult students in focus groups had these same complaints, which made encountering, but being able to ignore non-supporters, a salient adult student experience that needed to be highlighted.

Linda fit into this category well because she described the need to deflect negative behaviors toward her studying as being her most significant obstacle. As mentioned, the worst offenders were her ex-husband, her mother, and her co-workers.

Tonya. I met Tonya in mid-October at her quaint red-brick home in a quiet neighborhood about 15 minutes from the campus. We were able to conduct two of the five interviews sitting comfortably at her cherrywood kitchen table as her 3-year-old son napped. All our interviews had to be scheduled around her two children's nap or school schedules.

Tonya was a 38-year-old, part-time student who was married with two children. She had been attending the community college for three semesters. She had never attended college before. The semester of the study she was taking only one basic computer course. Each of the other semesters she had taken two courses. She worked part time for her husband, who owned his own business. She also taught some dance classes and a Zumba exercise/dance class at a local gym. Tonya was majoring in liberal arts dance; her ultimate goal was to earn a bachelor's degree in dance and eventually own her own dance studio or teach dance in public school. She was also considering pursuing a master's degree in dance. Although she did not have a college education, she had already been teaching dance at various studios for 20 years.

In spite of her success as a dance teacher, she had wanted to attend college for the last 10 years. However, she did not know how to start the process. She finally decided to start college when she heard one of her friends discussing the process of applying for financial aid for her college-aged daughter. Tonya started asking her friend questions about the process and came to the conclusion that she would also be able to attend college with the help of financial aid. Tonya struggled with fitting classes into her schedule because her husband wanted her to commit herself entirely to their house, their small children, and helping him with his business. She said she decided to pursue school in spite of those challenges.

During the semester of the study, Tonya described feeling frustrated because her husband would not help her with her math, though she felt that he was excellent in math. She had to seek outside tutoring from various people. As a mother of two young children, the lack of support from her husband was the most significant obstacle to her college experience. In her last interview she was in tears as she acknowledged that her husband had finally decided that he no longer wanted to be married to her.

Tonya fit well into this category because her biggest challenges were related to barriers created by the people in her life, especially her husband. She seemed remarkably calm and motivated, but during her time as a student, her husband had been aggressively demanding her full attention and trying to force her to make a decision. She decided that she was going to continue with school in spite of the threat of divorce. "I need more for myself," she said.

Below there is a table that includes a description of the typology, the characteristics included in each typology, and the participants who fit into each type.

There are more students in the Struggling with Personal Problems type than any other.

However, I am reluctant to draw any conclusions about the significance of this because my data collection method may have skewed the results. I took available volunteers from a large pool of students. It is only by chance that my schedule permitted me to interview the students who ultimately became the focal students. With only 11 focal students, it is possible that any of the categories would have been disproportionally represented. Table 3 describes the types of students, their characteristics.

Types of 11 Focal Students

Table 3

Type	Well Supported	Young and Restless	Struggling with personal problems	Ignoring non-supporters
Some Characteristics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Supportive • Positives outweigh negatives • Family • Supportive Friends • Supportive Classmates and Administrators • Upbeat attitude • Financially stable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Impatient with classmates • Frustrated with campus bureaucracy • Interested in moving on extremely quickly • Clear, immediate goals 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Substance abuse • Physical Health problems • Mental illness • Financial problems • Several personal setbacks in the past • Assertive about problem solving 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Relatives who did not value the students decision to go to college • Difficult co-workers • Strong resolve to continue with school
Students	Bob, Roman	Tom, Ann	Martha, Jill, Melvin, Yolanda	Tonya, Linda

Support Issues

The previous section described a typology of adult students attending the community college. Those types are illustrated through the introduction of the 11 specific individuals who were interviewed multiple times during the course of the study. These descriptions are focused through the lenses of the institutional, situational, and dispositional conditions that functioned as barriers and supports to the students.

Another way of understanding the experiences that contribute to what adults bring to their college experience is to highlight the types of conditions the students faced outside of the college. The conditions these adults faced outside of school could serve as either barriers or supports to their college experiences, but either had an influence on their participation. The conditions that surfaced primarily involved social and financial support. One of the major themes that cuts across the cases is how their relationships with their families affected adult students. Some students had combative or dysfunctional relationships with spouses or ex-spouses that resulted in them feeling that they were being sabotaged in their efforts to carve out study time, attend classes, or finance their studies. Struggles with family were common among many of the married students because, for most adults, resources were finite and many spouses did not want to stretch finite resources to support an adult who wanted to take time out of “adult” life to pursue college. This was highlighted in the examples of Tonya and Linda. Linda’s husband threw her books out the door and tried to destroy them because he did not want her to continue in college. Tonya’s husband decided he wanted to divorce her because of her dedication to school, and she felt he made it a point not to help her with anything related to school. Another example is when Tonya said her husband was quite proficient in

mathematics, but when she needed help on some basic mathematics problems, he refused to help her, and she had to find time and money to work with a tutor. Ironically, she was also able to get help from her husband's father.

In contrast, there were students whose spouses or adult children were not only supportive of the nontraditional-aged students, but were either responsible for suggesting that the student attend school or made changes or major sacrifices in their own lives for the adult students to be able to focus and concentrate on their obligations as students. Those very supportive situations were mainly described by students who were middle-aged women, married, middle-aged men, gainfully employed immigrants struggling with the English language, or adults of any age who had forgone their educations or careers to spend time as homemakers. One focus group student from India said that her 22-year-old son was instrumental in registering her at The College because he wanted her to earn a degree and also have the opportunity to improve her English. Although she lived in a large extended family and had many household responsibilities, her family adapted, made their own meals, and shared the housework while she was in school. Another focus group student, also a middle-aged woman with a college-aged daughter, said that her husband and daughter were supportive and understanding. Her usual chores were put on hold as she pursued her degree. "Dinner is not a problem. In my house, right now, it is catch as catch can," she said. This was also the situation for some of the financially stable men who described situations in their families in which the spouses, children, and sometimes even their parents were pooling resources to help them successfully attend and complete community college.

Another theme that surfaced was loneliness. This was a dispositional issue that was related to issues away from school. Loneliness, in contrast to the issue of having family and friends involved, generated frustration for some students because they felt isolated and without support. Some adults said that not having anyone to turn to during stressful times in their studies had a tremendous effect on their college experience. For example, Jill, who lived alone (except for her dogs), said it was hard for her to cry on the shoulder of a dog. "At least when a child crawls into a lap, that person has that human touch to keep them going," she said. Students who described this issue were usually the single, middle-aged, childless adults who assumed that if they had a close family, they would be able to depend on them for help and support in times of need or stress.

Lastly, adults talked about work and how it caused them to face difficult choices. Students who were not employed full time sometimes had to make the decision not to take on some available part-time assignments because they knew they could not adequately perform the work while attending college classes. Tonya said that she had the opportunity to teach an extra Zumba class, but because she was taking courses at the college, she decided not to, even though it would have helped her family. She said that this kind of decision caused her distress and anguish. "Sometimes I think about not teaching that extra class and it bothers me because I am giving up that income," Tonya said. Some students found that their full-time jobs were not flexible enough to allow them to comfortably attend school. They described problems that ranged from having to miss classes because of working overtime to not being able to get out of work in time to eat a nutritious dinner before heading off to sit through a two- to three-hour night class on a campus that only offered vending machine food after 2 p.m. each day. The three themes

that were primarily about family or finances, could be classified as situational and dispositional supports and barriers.

Conclusion

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the types of nontraditional-aged students who attended the college and illustrates both the diversity and the similarities of adult students in this population. The data illustrate several qualities that are unique to adulthood. These qualities include; persistence; parenting responsibilities conflicting with class and homework; career jobs conflicting with courses and homework; and threats to financial stability, which are challenging when one is fully adult and has few safety nets. The chapter highlights the significant characteristics and experiences that nontraditional-age adult students share and can draw attention to the idea that nontraditional-age adults are a distinct and identifiable group on campus who may specific needs that are also distinct. The establishment of nontraditional-aged adults as an identifiable group is extended in Chapter 5, looking at the multiple ways in which this group experienced the college that could be attributed to their adult characteristics. The themes that emerged from the descriptions of how nontraditional-aged adults experienced their participation at the college are described in detail in Chapter 5. Also, findings were generated about how nontraditional-aged adult college students described the obstacles and supports to their success. Their significant experiences can be described in the two major categories of instructional experiences and institutional-system experiences.

Chapter 5: Analysis, Findings, and Conclusions

The previous chapter focuses on who the nontraditional-aged adult learners are and what they bring to the community college, by creating a typology. These types seek to show both the diversity and the commonalities of adult students attending the college. In addition to developing profiles for types of adults at the community college, the experiences of the types of students are also analyzed through the lenses of institutional, dispositional, and situational issues. Also, to provide more depth to the identities of the adult students in the study, Chapter 4 includes a description of the challenges and supports involved in participating in community college that students experienced outside the college environment. These descriptions highlight nontraditional-aged adult experiences featured in the descriptions of the various types of students. The end of the chapter summarizes the information provided by more than 800 students who participated in the recruitment survey, which begins to reveal a set of observations related to barriers and support students experience at the college. Those observations support the themes that emerged in the study, and are identified in this chapter.

Chapter 5 focuses on how adult students, with their various adult characteristics, perceived the classroom and their experiences in the broader college context. It also includes additional survey data that support the descriptions of the students of their experiences. Chapter 5 describes these perceptions by moving from the descriptions of the types of adults at this community college outlined in Chapter 4 to discussing the types of experiences they described and identified as barriers to or support for their college experiences. The descriptions of the adult students' college experiences in both chapters imply ways these students are different from their younger counterparts at the college.

The ways in which these adult students say they felt different and ways they say that the actions of others toward them showed that there were obvious external differences.

Awareness of these differences and reactions by others to the differences of adult students affected their experiences at this community college. The data suggest that students thought these differences sometimes created obstacles to their success, although there were also a few differences that they described as positive and advantageous.

These two data chapters together provide the answer to the research question: “How do nontraditional-aged adult students in community colleges describe the barriers and supports to the completion of an associate’s degree and persistence in community colleges?” This chapter provides answers by describing the experiences of adult students at the college in the areas that emerged as most challenging to students and in the areas that offered adults the most support. These descriptions are placed into categories that highlight areas in which adult students’ experiences distinguish them from others’ experiences at the college.

Instructional Matters and Institutional-System Matters

Observations about aspects of their classroom experiences and the policies and procedures of the college dominated the discussions I had with students during the interviews and the focus groups. Surveys responses also indicated concerns about policies and procedures at the college. Additionally, nontraditional-aged adult students described behaviors of younger students to highlight problems they were having in the classroom environment and in other spaces across campus. The categories *instructional matters* and *institutional-system matters* emerged from grouping data into topics that were similar and consistent. These categories will be discussed in two sections. The first section,

instructional matters, will discuss the students' experiences pertaining to instruction at the community college. Although students were asked to describe positive and negative aspects of their experiences, nearly all students in the study described negative aspects of their classes, with few descriptions of positive experiences that had any relationship to their adulthood. Given that the preponderance of their descriptions of their experiences in the classroom were negative, it is helpful to turn to adult-learning theory as a way to explain this phenomenon. Although there are many ways to understand and analyze adult learning and education, I use the framework of andragogy. This model includes at least three ways of understanding the needs of adult learners: the six adult-learner assumptions; the adult-classroom model (process model versus traditional-content model); and a framework for andragogical practice. In addition, andragogy draws on multiple theories and strategies, and is popular and widely known by many adult educators because of its flexible application (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

When one compares students' descriptions of their classrooms with the needs implied by the six assumptions about adult learners posited by andragogy, this comparison illuminates a possible explanation of why adult students, in this study, perceived classroom experiences to be deficient at the community college. Additionally, looking at the andragogically based process model and principles of andragogy in practice will provide more depth to the analysis of the experiences of students in community college classrooms (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

The second section of this chapter will discuss students' experiences with the *institutional systems*. This section will include adult students' descriptions of their interpersonal experiences with the college staff. Although the college has many policies

and procedures that are aligned with the exemplary practices established in the literature as critical for the community college student population (historically serving nontraditional students), many adult students described their experiences with the institution as problematic. They said the college's policies and procedures significantly conflicted with their obligations as adults. Accessibility to services emerged from the data as a main obstacle. Adult students described multiple ways in which services and resources fell short of accommodating the needs of students who were adults foremost and students second. The accessibility of services was oriented toward those who were able to make school one of their main priorities, with competing commitments being secondary. Research suggests that more traditional-aged students (18–22) are rarely employed in “career”-related jobs and are less likely to have child care issues (Shugart, 2008; Chao et al., 2007; Horn & Carroll, 1996; Ross-Gordon, 2011). This suggests that those traditional-aged students are more likely to be able to take advantage of the many available services at times when most adults are working. The fact that younger students were 75% of the student population at the college may have masked the fact that the adult students were not being adequately served by the resources available and that they may need additional or at least differently provided support. Analyzing the descriptions of adults' experiences through the lens of adult-role literature, which identifies the complex and multiple roles of adults in our society, explains how some of the institution's policies and procedures could be more effective if enhanced to serve the needs of older students.

A View of Instructional Experiences Through an Andragogical Lens

This section uses the six assumptions of andragogy, identified by Knowles in 1980, to discuss the experiences of adults in the classroom. Knowles et al. (1998) defined the six assumptions of andragogy in the following ways:

- The Need to Know: Adults need to know why they need to learn something before undertaking to learn it. ...
- Learner Self-Concept: Adults have a self-concept of being responsible for their own decisions, for their own lives. Once they have arrived at the self-concept, they develop a deep psychological need to be seen by others and treated by others as being capable of self-direction. They resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them. ...
- Learner's Experience: Adults come into an educational activity with greater volume and a different quality experience from that of youths. By virtue of simply having lived longer, they have accumulated more experience than they had as youths [or when they were younger]. But they also have a different kind of experience. This difference in quantity and quality of experience has several consequences for adult education.
- Readiness to Learn (Life Tasks): Adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and to be able to do in order to cope effectively with their real situations.
- Orientation to Learning: In contrast to children's and youths' subject-center orientation to learning (at least in school), adults are life-centered (or task-centered or problem-centered) in their orientation to learning. Adults are

motivated to learn to the extent that they perceive that learning will help them perform tasks or deal with problems that they confront in their life situations. ...

- Motivation to Learn: Adults are responsive to some external motivators (better jobs, promotions, higher salaries, and the like), but the most potent motivators are internal pressures (the desire for increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, quality of life, and the like). (1998, pp. 64–68)

Knowles et al. (1998) also suggested that there is an ideal adult-classroom model, suggesting that adults are more comfortable with a classroom organized in the “process model,” in contrast to the “content models employed by most traditional educators” (p. 115). The differences between these two models is that in the traditional content model

The teacher ... decides in advance what knowledge or skills need to be transmitted, arranges the body of content into logical units, selects the most efficient means for transmitting this content ... and then develops a plan for presenting these content units in some sort of sequence. (p. 115)

After 20 years of experimentation with implementing the concepts of andragogy in practice, Knowles et al. (2005) formulated the following conclusions regarding how to practice andragogy that reflect its flexible nature: andragogy can be applied in whole or in part, and can withstand modification: “The appropriate starting point and strategies for applying the andragogical model depends on the situation” (p. 147).

The six assumptions of andragogy, the process model, and andragogy in practice, provide a clear set of principles that educators of adults may use to create learning opportunities for adults that are respectful of how adults differ from younger learners.

The students who participated in the study, however, presented examples of instructional experiences in which the lack of attention to these needs and principles was pervasive. The nontraditional-aged adults described experiencing a concatenation of challenging experiences as their problems seemed to overlap: Their adult needs as learners were dismissed; the classrooms were content centered; and their instructors seemed to lack flexibility in their approach to managing their classes. Nontraditional-aged adult students described these experiences as making them feel uncomfortable and interfering with their abilities to learn in the community college environment.

Section 1: Instructional Matters

The need to know. Some adult students said their “need to know” was challenged in their classrooms. Knowles (1980) wrote that the assumption about the need to know sees adults as bringing their own learner priorities to the task. Either they already understand why or know what they need to know about something, or “they will invest considerable energy in probing into the benefits they will gain from learning it” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 64). In the case of students not quite knowing how information fits into their plans, it is important for the instructor to be able to facilitate the students’ understanding of why they need to know something (Knowles, 1980). In the case of adults attending a community college in pursuit of college degrees or certificates, adult students have limited time to attend classes and finite financial resources; they determine what they need to acquire from the institution in the limited time and resources they have available (Chao et al., 2007). If they do not know already, they need to be assisted in finding a connection between what is available at the college and what they need and can use to move forward or develop—immediately (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Adult students do not go into classrooms merely to earn credits (Chao et. al., 2007), although many of the students in the study said that earning credits was important to them to meet their larger goals; adults go to class ready to acquire what they need (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

The students in the study described many situations in their classrooms that challenged them to participate and engage, although the need to know was not clear to them. They reported that the need to know was not established by the instructor. The importance of establishing the need to know was discussed by some of the faculty members as well. Some faculty members in the study noted that one of the overriding concerns of nontraditional-aged students in their classrooms was how to connect course material to practical application and a desire to understand how it relates to other topics and ideas. “[Non-traditional aged students] will immediately start asking questions to map out an entire understanding of a topic, whereas the other students never ask questions except the day before the test, and it is always ‘what is going to be on the test?’” reported an instructor who teaches both law and math at the college. Students reported having the impression that their teachers were often not prepared to answer their questions or extend their lessons. Some adult students said they sometimes asked why a particular type of material was being used or whether it was significant, but answers were not provided to them. There were also questions about why a particular subject was addressed from a particular angle or why the information presented about some subjects was so limited. Students said when the reasons they needed to learn specific information were not obvious to them, were not made clear by the instructor, or seemed arbitrary, they felt frustrated; they believed the course might be a waste of time and money.

The adult students expressed frustration when instructors dismissed their questions aimed at making connections. They reported that instructors responded with comments like, “That will not be on the test.” It appeared as if faculty has an expectation that students would not ask questions. When it happened, it seemed as if they were not practiced in responding. Several faculty members talked about how their traditional-aged students do not typically engage or ask questions and so when they have an adult in their class who is full of enthusiasm and curiosity it causes them to have to teach differently and sometimes it seems disruptive. Observations from the instructors and descriptions of the students about this matter would seem to suggest that the instructors are not used to students with this type of curiosity, because even though this need is typical of nontraditional-aged adult students, most traditional-aged students in the class don’t have this type of behavior. These two different types of students could present a challenge to the instructors’ approaches. Students said they believed their teachers did not seem to understand when adult students were signaling that they “needed” to know why they were learning something, and that this concern sometimes transcended whether that “something” would be on the test. Some students said that the need to know and ask questions about subject matter being covered in class was treated as a hindrance by teachers. These situations sometimes engendered resentment and affected the experiences of the single class period. At other times, these situations affected their attitude about the entire semester. Some students gave examples that suggested that these types of situations could negatively affect their relationships with the instructors and make them feel dubious about the abilities of all instructors or employees at the college. They questioned teachers’ abilities, and sometimes concluded that administrators and staff

were disingenuous. They described a feeling of general skepticism about the intentions of the college stemming from these classroom interactions. They felt they were not being taken seriously by instructors. They strongly believed they should have been taken seriously because their time and resources were limited. Adults said that they believed the college should have been more aware of that fact that they were selling the adults a service. If the college was not able to understand or accommodate adults needing to know how information and activities fit into a bigger knowledge picture, then the college was not adequately serving adult students.

Interview participants gave detailed examples of how they believed their need to know was undermined. Ann, an interview participant, provided an example of feeling that the need to know is sometimes undervalued. In her case, it was that she expected information in the class to be applicable in some way to her goals. At the time of the interview, she was tentatively planning to become a nurse. Ann said that the incompetence of one of her instructors infringed on her need to know relevant and useful foundational information in her area of interest. One of the reasons she gave to support this assessment was her feeling that during the semester, one of her instructors used instructional time as a platform to discuss personal observations that could not be directly tied to the psychology course in which she was enrolled. Ann struggled to understand why she needed to know the information presented in class, and the teacher made no effort to draw correlations between what she was teaching or saying and any academic or practical use of that information. One of the more egregious examples of this was when her psychology instructor discussed the age at which she thought it is too late for a woman to have a child. This was particularly troubling to 29-year-old Ann because the

professor said women should not give birth after 30. Ann, a newlywed, had unexpectedly gotten laid off a few months prior to the semester of the study, causing her to put off any plans to start a family because her husband was already working many hours of overtime as a police officer to support the couple's frugal lifestyle in a small, modest apartment.

Ann said, "When are you supposed to have a baby? You go to college. If you don't meet someone in college, you need to have time to meet and get married. I'm almost 30, and I cannot afford to have a baby right now." Not only did she not find any educational value in the teacher's comments, Ann was also offended by the comments and questioned a classroom situation in which her desire to acquire higher education was exploited by a professor who did not teach her information she needed to know, but rather seemed to use the class as an opportunity to espouse disjointed, disconnected, and irrelevant opinions. Ann did not feel that the psychology class was an appropriate forum for the instructor to voice her opinions about these controversial matters, because those topics were unrelated to the course she was teaching. Ann questioned whether the instructor's opinions about those issues advanced Ann's knowledge of psychology. This type of concern was echoed by the counseling staff who said that nontraditional-aged adult students frequently came into their offices complaining about off-task behaviors of their instructors and suggested that these behaviors wasted their time. "We have students who will come in confused and angry because they feel that they are sitting in a class with instructors talking about their cat or their dog, and they are saying why am I spending my time and my money listening to this?" one of the counseling staff said.

Another way the instructor made Ann question the importance of the information being provided in the class was when the instructor flipped randomly through the

textbook in front of the students—seemingly trying to decide what to teach during the class period. Ann said that there seemed to be no attempt on the part of the instructor to follow the syllabus she had handed out, which Ann assumed was developed by the psychology department and written to comply with a standard undergraduate psychology curriculum. This led Ann to further question the importance of the information that was being provided in the class. In addition to receiving what Ann described as random, unplanned lectures, she also said that the quizzes and tests were unrelated to any material covered during the lectures. Although Ann ultimately received an excellent grade in the class, she said that she felt unfulfilled in the class because the instructor did not clarify the objective of the material being covered or help the students make subject-related connections with any of the information she provided in her disorganized lectures. Despite earning a good grade in the class for the sake of her grade-point average, Ann was dissatisfied because she did not have a clear understanding of why she needed to know the material being covered in the class, making her experience less valuable.

In spite of *needing to know* being a significant learner need, the community college required that students take classes that did not always relate directly to the information students would need to address their goals, and, according to the adults, the college took no apparent responsibility to help students understand why they were taking classes. Because one of the missions of the community college is to provide the general-education requirements for undergraduates wishing to earn liberal arts degrees, there are a plethora of subjects that students must take to accomplish that goal. It is unlikely that students can *need to know* about all the subjects required, but it is the role of the facilitator to assist students in becoming clear about what they need to know (Knowles et

al., 2005). A few of the students who participated in the focus groups talked about some classes that they enjoyed thoroughly, but those, ironically, weren't courses that supported their majors; these students described being able take something valuable away from *any* class. Sometimes, even if they reported that the instructor was not effective, they would describe finding useful information in assigned or unassigned readings in their textbooks or websites provided at the end of the chapters. In these cases, the students were able to determine how the classes served their goals and find ways they needed to know the material and how it could be integrated into their lives or goals. This assimilation of material was positive for those students. These were primarily the students who were taking courses at the college for personal growth and enrichment, and who weren't sacrificing money or struggling with family in order attend courses. These were the "everybody helps me students."

Learners' experience. As already established in the adult-development literature, the quantity and quality of experience adults bring with them to the learning context set adult students apart from their younger counterparts on campus. Andragogy holds that experiences are what should provide the foundation for learning in adulthood (Knowles et al., 2005). However, these experiences could lead students to draw any conclusion, correct or incorrect. Experiences can sometimes help students be more successful in college, but experiences can also lead students to faulty conclusions and create barriers in classrooms. The efforts of some students to integrate their experiences into the classroom are sometimes less than constructive for instructors and other students. Students and instructors do not always know how to use students' experiences to enrich the classroom environment. Ideally, an adult-oriented learning environment will include methods of the

faculty integrating the experiences of the students, building on those experiences when presenting material or facilitating instruction. Students in the study said that often instructors demonstrated rigidity in their instruction that left no room for the input of students. There were students who said their extensive experiences in particular areas contrasted so starkly with the type of information available in their classes, that discontinuity prevented them from learning in the classroom. When they compared their previous knowledge, gleaned through experience, to what was being shared in the classes, they determined that the classes were incomplete or incorrect. Students described traditional lecture environments in their courses that made it difficult to share their experiences as an asset to the classroom.

This inability to give input was a problem that was apparent to both students and faculty members, although faculty members were overwhelmingly positive when talking about their experiences with older students for a variety of reasons, including the benefits of the students' experiences. In spite of the tremendous praise heaped on adult students by instructors, the instructors acknowledged that there were situations in which the experiences of the students caused friction in the classroom. A fairly young history and sociology professor who was interviewed for the study highlighted how experience played a role in making some students in class more difficult to instruct. The instructor found that middle-aged students frequently had strong opinions about historical events or societal issues that had occurred in their lifetimes. At times, older students insisted on trying to convince other students in the class that the textbook information, the point of view of the professor, or the perceptions of younger students did not have value—or that they were wrong, based on the fact that the older students had lived through the period

being discussed. Some controversial topics included affirmative action, unions, the economy, or even unemployment: all subjective, sensitive, and personal topics. The professor said that many times, the determination of an older student to represent his or her experiences as the only reality caused a breakdown in the classroom environment, making it was more difficult to successfully provide multiple perspectives on various topics. It may have been because the experience of the older student left him or her convinced that they had solid rationales for their conclusions, but Knowles et al. (2005) wrote that experiences can lead to both correct and incorrect conclusions.

The example of the professor may suggest that a better understanding of how to use experience in the classroom may enhance mixed-aged classroom environments. Many other examples provided by students and by faculty suggested that using adult experience in a community college classroom may have been difficult or not intuitive. The challenge of the instructors may have been to simultaneously respect the wisdom and knowledge of the adults, but to also try to redirect or enhance that knowledge in a way that was respectful of the adults and the other students in the class. Although adult students were always the minority in a class, the friction caused by one or more adults could have a marked impact on the environment in the classroom, causing conflict for the adult students, the instructors, and the other students.

Some adult students who were interviewed as part of this study acknowledged that some nontraditional-aged adult students relied too heavily on personal experiences to understand their classes, although they never believed they did this. One adult student said:

In the one class we have this woman, an adult student, who cannot stop talking about her son and what happened to him. ... My son this, and my son that. ... No matter what we are trying to learn about, she has a story about her son that she thinks had something to do with it. We don't care about her son. We need to really learn the material. Her experience with her son does not mean everything. The professor never tells her to shut up, maybe because she is older, and he doesn't know how to deal with that. ... He just has her talking and talking—wasting our time.

Even though adult students noticed when other older students were overwhelming the class lectures by talking about personal experiences, they still felt that their own experiences needed to be heard in the classroom. Several students described themselves as knowing more than the instructors, because they felt they came to their classes with experiences that led them to conclusions that were more valuable than the “textbook” information their instructors provided. The students said there was no effort on the part of instructors to learn from students' experiences, which sometimes caused the students to feel undervalued in the classroom.

The adults in the study seemed to have two ways of looking at how experiences should be used in the classroom. Adult students described some classes as being hijacked by other adult students who seemingly felt compelled to relentlessly try to connect their experiences to the class lectures. Other adults said that the college needed to find a way to provide them with credit for bringing and sharing their experiences in a classroom context. They said they wanted their experiences to be something they could submit in the form of assignments that could be graded and evaluated. Knowles et al. (2005) wrote

that “experiential techniques ... that tap into the experiences of the learners, such as group discussions, simulation exercises, problem-solving activities, case methods, and laboratory methods instead of transmittal techniques ... and peer-helping activities” (p. 66) could be helpful in an adult classroom. However, students did not describe any classroom environments that valued, much less used, their experiences in the classroom.

A more dramatic example of how having extensive experience influenced a student’s classroom experience was in the case of Yolanda, a former alcoholic and substance abuser who had spent a great deal of time in jail and in criminal-rehabilitation programs. She was taking a criminal-justice class during the semester of the study. This class was particularly frustrating for her, because she did not feel that the instructor was willing to accept her experience as an asset to the class. She wanted to be able to contribute to the class by providing a realistic idea of the criminal world, and she found that instead she was listening to lectures that seemed ill informed and superficial. She had a number of friends and professional mentors with whom she kept in contact and went to for help with her classwork. Yolanda said she found herself challenging her professor a number of times, because the professor’s information *and* the textbook information conflicted with information she learned on the streets, and with the information in the professional manuals of her mentors.

Yolanda also found herself annoyed by how the professor entertained conversations about television shows like “CSI” as part of the class discussions, which other, younger students referenced constantly because of their limited experiences with the subjects covered in class. “All of these kids just watch ‘CSI’ and these crime shows now, and they bring up all of these examples, and I’m like, no, that’s not it! That’s only

on television.” What she perceived as the professor’s superficial, limited knowledge of the subject, about which she was experienced, knowledgeable, and passionate, had a negative impact on her relationship with the professor. She wanted to have a more authentic experience in the class. She said that she actually revealed much of her background to the professor, and she also shared with the professor some of the information she got from other sources in an effort to influence the material and the way the professor was teaching the course.

After several tense classes, Yolanda started to feel as if the professor disliked her. “I asked other students [if they thought he disliked me] just to make sure it wasn’t just me, and it wasn’t; they all noticed,” she said. Yolanda brought a wealth of experience and knowledge to this course, but it was difficult for her and the professor to leverage her experience to benefit her in the class. In spite of her knowledge of the subject, she received a C in the class. She was angry because she felt that she should have been allowed to bring a different point of view or a different level of information to the class. Her experience pushed her to feel the need to have some control over how the material was being fashioned for the classroom setting. It was not allowed, and this caused her to withdraw on some levels.

Although many of the students described challenges with how their level of experience was not respected by instructors in classroom, there were some instructors who said that they noticed that adults were trying to bring experience in, and those instructors described strategies they used to leverage the experience of the older students. One example seemed simple, but seemed as if it would have been quite effective. “Many of the adults want to go beyond the textbook. They have had several experiences in real

life that they think contradict my answers on the weekly quizzes and tests I give. I tell them that if they get something wrong and they can explain why they think that their answer is correct or logical, based on their experiences, I will give them the points. In some classes with several adults, this has turned into the highlight of the week because we go through these questions out loud, and the adults are able to bring their experience to the whole class,” said one of the social science professors interviewed in the focus groups. This is an example of how the experience of older students could be successfully leveraged into a class, even with several traditional-aged students.

Learner self-concept. Knowles et al. (2005) wrote that adults’ concept of themselves as learners is one of self-direction, which leads adults to want to have some amount of influence and control over their own learning. College can be a site of conflict between the adult students’ needs to self-direct and the presumed purpose of being in school (Knowles et al., 2005). Adults “resent and resist situations in which they feel others are imposing their wills on them” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 65), and the adult students who participated in the study gave many examples of classrooms where they felt this way. Several adult students in the study said they were frustrated when they tried unsuccessfully to influence instructors who were not conducting classes in ways that were fulfilling in presenting topics and student evaluations.

Martha provided an example of being frustrated with her inability to have input in how one of her classes was taught. She was not successful in getting an instructor to change the approach to the instruction of Java. Although Martha had limited experience with computers and had no intention of working with computers in the future, she still had strong feelings about how her programming class was taught. Martha said the

professor read from PowerPoint slides, posted the PowerPoint slides online, and then when he was asked a question about the material simply told students to read the posted PowerPoint slides again instead of answering the question. Martha believed the instructor should have had students write codes on the board and correct them when they had errors so that the students could understand and learn from common programming mistakes. She also felt that if he were not willing to do that, he needed to at least be able to sit down with students to teach more about PowerPoint slides during his office hours instead of telling students to review his posted PowerPoint notes. Finally, she did not feel that it made sense to ask students to memorize codes for examinations, especially because many of the students had merely copied the codes from each other to receive credit for their homework.

Martha went so far as to try to foment a small revolt against the professor's teaching style and evaluation system through an email campaign with her classmates. During her interviews, she shared the emails that many of her classmates were sending her about their stress in trying to work through the programming class with what they considered minimal teaching and guidance. She acted as a spokesperson for these students with the professor. Martha said she brought her concerns and suggestions to the professor at least twice during the semester. She said that although the professor was kind and had a nice personality, she was disappointed that she could not get the professor to adjust the classroom teaching in these critical ways. Martha said that the class caused her emotional distress because she was so frustrated by the way the instructor refused to *teach* the class and because the instructor was not willing to take her suggestions regarding what would be more effective.

Ann also gave an example of being uncomfortable with how her instructor was presenting information and really wanting to change the way the information was being presented. She was much less proactive than Martha and made no attempt to discuss her feelings with her teacher. But in her interviews, she was very outspoken about wanting the teacher to be more directed to adult learners or to be more rigorous in how the teacher presented information in general. Ann believed that the teacher was not challenging the students to engage in class in ways that were required of college students. Ann wanted a classroom that required more analytical processing. She thought that the teacher had low expectations and was teaching on the high school level. Ann wanted to have a more interactive classroom in which the teacher could provide a forum for students to contribute to learning through group work or other forms of participation. "She was giving us handouts and getting us to write the answers from the handout directly on the test a couple of weeks later. It was ridiculous," she said. Ann wanted to be challenged, and she wanted to share that with the teacher, but she did not know how to articulate it. Ann's self-concept affected her experience in the class, because she was already a college graduate and could not bear to be a student in an environment that she found to be so below her expectations. She did not see herself as a student who needed to be coddled or spoon-fed college-level information.

Ann said that the younger students really seemed to appreciate the method of teaching in the class. They asked for more of the same, she said. This observation was also made by several instructors who said that they noticed that younger students frequently just wanted to find out what they would be tested on and only right before the test. This is something that Ann, who already had a bachelor's degree, felt was a

difference between her self-concept as a learner and that of the younger students. She attributed her age as the reason for being a minority voice in the classroom and for her lack of appreciation for the teaching methods. She was not much older than some of the other students and had vivid memories of being in their mind-set and having their learning self-concept when she was an undergraduate. The younger students “were asking for study guides, even though they already had the answers” from taking notes read directly from other study guides, Ann said. Although she was sure she did not feel comfortable in that classroom environment, she was unsure of exactly what the instructor could have done to make it a more appropriate college learning environment. In her previous experience as a younger undergraduate college student, she had not been as sensitive to the teaching styles of her instructors.

A different type of example of a student feeling that her self-concept as a learner was being abused came from 51-year-old Jill. Although Jill’s example transcends the individual classroom situation and applies to the departmental level of college control, it illustrates how adult students feel when they believe “others are imposing their wills on them” (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 65). Jill is in the highly ranked, competitive nursing program at the college. When she questioned her department chair about her options for transfer after graduation to earn a bachelor’s degree in nursing, she was told she would automatically be accepted in one specific program in the state if she decided to continue. Jill was assured that this was all that she needed to focus on if she wanted to move forward in nursing. She was told this as she was given a “cookie cutter” slate of courses to take that would make her transition into the other school seamless if she transferred after graduation. Jill acknowledges that in her current situation, the local school is

convenient and close; however, she was angry that the school was trying to make decisions for her.

Who is [the college] to decide what my choices should be if I want to get a bachelor's degree? [The school they suggested] is conveniently located for me now, but I don't want my choices to only be some local college. What if I want my choices to be the entire United States?

Jill's indignation is an example of how adult students react when the college did not consider the learner's self-concept in discussing available options with a student. This is a problem even if the interference is meant to be a service.

Learners' experience and learning concept—combined. Some students described classroom experiences that suggested students perceived a connection between their classroom experiences and their concept of themselves as learners. Many students told an instructor that what the instructor was trying to convey was incomplete, ineffective, or not extensive enough, but felt that the instructor did not give weight to the adult's experience as a learner (whether that student had formal education or not). They hoped that professors would accept the criticism that their presentation of the information was inadequate; however, this was not generally what students experienced.

Jonathan, a former webmaster, described a situation in which his extensive experiences with general computer programming compelled him to be critical of how the instructor was handling instruction in a course. He said the instructor insisted that the best way to learn Java was to memorize the code. Like Martha, Jonathan said that this was an ineffective way to teach coding in a college course. He said he already knew the code and was quite excited studying it. Jonathan found it quite discouraging that the instructor

tested students on memorizing the codes and suggested that the instructor approach instruction differently. Jonathan asked that the instructor not require memorization of the codes, but rather facilitate more discussion of the significance of the code. He noted in his interviews that his lack of success in convincing the instructor was particularly frustrating for him, affecting his willingness to attend class and participate.

Readiness to learn (life tasks) and motivation to learn. Sometimes when students cannot focus on learning, it is because they do not feel that the educational task is immediately relevant to their lives (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

When adults take on adult roles and responsibilities, it can create needs for learning that adults strive to address (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). They seek learning opportunities that address those specific roles or developmental phases. Knowles et al. (2005) wrote that “adults become ready to learn those things they need to know and be able to do to cope effectively with their real-life situations” (p. 67). Readiness to learn is related to being able to use a new skill that one is learning almost immediately, thereby being ready to learn material to be successful in an immediate goal.

There were some students who described themselves as previously having had competing obligations that shifted their focus from school for years at a time, even though they had always had a desire to be educated. They were either waylaid by other life activities from starting school for some years, or withdrew from college, or tried various majors, or took one or two courses with no concrete plans for matriculation. They reported putting college aside because of factors that involved their finances, child-rearing responsibilities, marital obligations, employment, or other demands on their time. They were in college at the time of the study because eventually the need to pursue a

college degree became enough of a priority to ready them to focus on making the necessary adjustments—even though it was still challenging. Until they were ready on multiple levels, they were not ready to invest the time or the energy in education or learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). While several focal students and interview students talked about readiness and motivation, open-ended comments from the survey participants about why they were in college suggested that there were many students enrolled in college because of a readiness to learn and various personal motivations. This was gleaned from them saying that they were in college because they needed to make changes in their lives due to shifting circumstances; some said they wanted to change careers and be better providers for their families.

Yolanda and Melvin, both heavy substance abusers, were adults who seemed to be motivated by a readiness to learn. They were both in school to receive certifications that would enable them to help people who were substance abusers. Their decisions to go to school were directly related to their enrollment and involvement in psychosocial rehabilitation programs such as jail, rehabilitation, and outpatient clinics. They were in recovery and now felt compelled to be officially qualified to become counselors to aid others in recovery.

The case of Tom provides an excellent example of an adult being able to be a successful learner when ready, although his case also has the hallmark of a student who was successful because of internal motivation. Tom said that he had never been ready to focus on college until three semesters previously, although he had tried unsuccessfully many times to go through the motions and be a student at the community college. He had attended the college off and on for nine years. He had changed his major more than once.

He had also been put on scholastic probation and then “failed out” of the college at least once. During the semester of the study, however, he earned a 4.0 for the third semester in a row. This was because more than a year before the study, he had met and decided that he wanted to marry a woman who had already graduated from college and who was now a business professional. This is very much in line with how the andragogical assumption about readiness to learn can impact an adult student (Knowles et al., 2005). In this case, Tom viewed his girlfriend and some of her family members (her father was a successful engineer) as “models of superior performance,” who set a new standard for him and helped him become ready to accept classroom learning (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 67). He said:

I used to think girls were for fun, good times . . .

When I met my girlfriend and she told me that we could not go any further in a relationship unless I got a degree and I could meet her expectations in terms of working hard and being responsible and supporting her, I thought to myself, when will I ever meet a girl like this—this level of girl? I have been determined to do this since then. It is all for her and my need to get through this and become that professional man that she needs me to be . . . to deserve her and to be able to provide for her.

Tom said that because he understood that he wanted his role to be the head of a family with his girlfriend as his wife, it was now clear to him how to focus and be successful in school. From that realization and newfound readiness, his experience pursuing an education had changed substantively.

One caveat to his discussion about his readiness was his assertion that it is nearly impossible to truly appreciate a college education unless you have hit rock bottom and can see yourself failing in life. He said this to compare his current approach to college with his previous approach, and provide a commentary on his observations of how the traditional-aged students in his classes treated their educations. Tom was less than impressed with the attitude of many of his young classmates and admitted to feeling contempt toward the younger students who openly demonstrated a lack of focus. “You can tell when people are here because their parents are paying for it.” He did not exclude adults from the same criticism. “You can even tell when people are here because their job is paying for them to be here. They don’t really value it,” he said.

Craig, another student in the study who was part of the focus group, described a similar awakening and coming to a point of readiness. At 25 years old, he was one of the youngest students who volunteered for the study. During the time when he would have been a traditional-aged college student, he had been going through several crises as he and his parents were in the process of abandoning each other, and he was forced to strike out on his own to work and live. He said that because of these circumstances, he could not focus on school and the immediate need to earn income captured his attention and energy. He said that one day, a couple of years prior to the semester of the study, he had an epiphany at work and realized how little money he was making and how few choices he had without a college degree. He also felt that he was being exploited by his bosses because of his situation. He came to college to get a degree because he thought it would get him out of a life of working as an unskilled laborer. Informal and independent career research helped him understand the value of earning his college degree. In the semester

of the study, Craig was also making nearly perfect grades. He was ready to learn. This example relates to the internal motivation that adults feel, helping them be successful as learners.

Knowles et al. (2005) argued that most adults are internally motivated. “They are responsive to external factors like better jobs, promotions, and higher salaries,” but they are more interested in “increased job satisfaction, self-esteem, and quality of life” (p. 68). This viewpoint suggests that efforts to explain to them why they need to come to class or convince them of how they can benefit from education are unnecessary. By the time they make it to the classroom, it is likely that they have already decided that they want an education and have determined what they need to do and what adjustments they need to make. In an educational environment in which there is significant coercion to try to manipulate the behavior or attitude of students toward education, adults are unlikely to respond and interventions may even intrude on their self-concepts. With a majority of the students in their classes needing some form of external motivation, there is bound to be some conflict, because adults will need to tolerate instructors’ well-meaning, but for them, misguided attempts to help them become focused and motivated. What can block effective motivation as a way to persist and succeed are the external factors with which adults struggle, such as lack of accessibility to resources, time management, and classes that do not stimulate them through adult-education strategies. Some of the students in the study who had the strongest internal motivation acknowledged that those issues were their greatest obstacles as well.

Tonya and Linda encountered situations in which instructors seemed to practice behaviors that limited access to learning. They believed that perhaps instructors were

trying to get the attention of the younger, less motivated students, but for these two women, the behaviors were hindrances to their experiences. Tonya is highly motivated to attend college. She is fulfilling the hopes of her deceased father and wants to increase her credentials for a job she had been doing for 20 years, for her own satisfaction. She had gone to great lengths to arrange to attend school, although she had a school-age child and a toddler. She had an A average, but what infringed on her strong internal motivation to succeed in college, which might actually have deterred students with less internal motivation, was when a teacher did not respect her seriousness as a student. She found herself in the class of a professor\who was notorious for locking the door a minute after the class was scheduled to begin and refusing to allow *late* students to come into class. The professor also told students that they weren't allowed to go to the bathroom during class, although it was a three-hour course.

This is a professor who basically went off on students for trying to come in one minute late or go to the bathroom. He made several students cry with comments on their papers and sarcastic verbal reprimands in class. I asked myself, "Is this what I finally came to college for? I came here to be treated like this?"

Tonya remained in the class with the professor for the entire semester and said that the professor started to act more reasonably as more students withdrew from the class. "He changed his entire personality after many students dropped the class and he could see who took the class seriously." She tolerated what she described as the hostile and demeaning behavior the professor exhibited toward the class population because she had already used significant personal resources to start attending college and did not feel she could withdraw from the course because of the instructor's negative behavior. She

empathized with other students who dropped the class. “I do understand why other people dropped and even why some of the students were crying in his class,” she said. Tonya said that although there were all different types of students in the class with unique and challenging situations, the professor made no exceptions for anyone regarding his classroom rules.

Most adults expect more flexibility than was exhibited by this professor because they are responsible for paying for their courses and are willing to accept the consequences of being late or missing class: lower grades or additional efforts to acquire missed information. For the professor to treat the class as if they were children infringed on Tonya’s motivation and seemed counterproductive to her. Ultimately, Tonya’s motivation helped her overcome her resentment of this professor and eclipsed her desire to withdraw from the class like many of her classmates.

Linda also provides an example of a student who has a strong motivation to attend college. Her boss had mapped out a wonderful plan for her to attend college, graduate, and take over his medical practice one day at around the same time she had decided to divorce her physically abusive husband. Her focus and motivation were tremendous, and she also had a 4.0 grade-point average. She was determined to succeed in earning the credential for her job and improving her quality of life. She said other students frustrated the teacher with behaviors that she believed caused the teacher to think that there was no motivation for excellence among any of the students. Behaviors of the teacher tied to the behaviors of the students had a negative effect on her because of her high motivation.

The instructor threatened to remove an online model of the bones that had been placed on a website to help students study for anatomy and physiology because the online

resource was apparently underused. This was a class Linda was taking the semester of the study and her most difficult course. Linda said there were instructors who did not seem to understand the significance of removing resources. The only other way for Linda to study the bones, besides that website, was to come to campus to view an actual set of bones that was kept in a back room near the library. Also, there were only two sets of bones, although there were several sections of the anatomy and physiology class. Because Linda worked full-time and was essentially a single mother of two young children, getting to campus outside of class time was a tremendous struggle and sacrifice. It was both costly and inconvenient. She used the computer model of the bones extensively. Therefore, when the instructor threatened to remove this valuable tool, Linda said she found this threat to be insensitive. Giving the instructor the benefit of the doubt, she said she thought that perhaps the instructor was trying to motivate other students, who weren't receiving passing grades, with fear. Linda's entire life was revolving around attempting to earn a perfect grade-point average in order to get accepted into the highly competitive nursing program. This was something that she said she wanted to change her life with so she could take care of her children. It was difficult for her to tolerate the instructor's threat of removing such a valuable resource that she depended on as a step toward reaching a future goal. She was torn between understanding that the instructor was trying to get the "kids" to do their homework and not needing that type of intrusive manipulation to be motivated because her motivation was internally driven.

Orientation to learning. Adults have a tendency to take a problem-centered or task-centered approach to learning (Knowles et al., 2005). They do not want to merely memorize facts offered in a class. The knowledge that adult students learn should be

applicable in real situations. It should be “life-centered” information (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 67). Students who participated in the study were community college students largely seeking associate’s degrees and planning to transfer to universities to earn bachelor’s degrees. They expressed tolerance and acceptance that their coursework would not be problem centered or life centered because there were a number of general-education requirements. Some students seemed aware that this could be frustrating and said during focus-group meetings that taking multiple courses that were content centered rather than life centered was frustrating and could be draining on an adult student.

In one focus-group discussion, after bringing this up as one of the negative aspects of attending classes at the college, one 41-year-old student informed the other participants about College Level Examination Program (CLEP) tests, generating great excitement among the other students participating in the study who shared her feelings about not wanting to sit through lecture courses if there was any way to avoid it—yet still wanting to earn their college degrees. The student explained to other participants that years before she had decided to attend college, she had learned about the existence of CLEP tests, such that one could take the test to get credit in areas they are proficient. Later, when she decided to go back to college, having the option of taking an examination to earn credit for information of which she had a “working knowledge” had a significant impact on her decision to enroll. Although taking a CLEP test is not an example of an actual class that was problem centered, the excitement around the idea of being tested on “real life knowledge” of subjects to receive college credit suggests that this was not typical of their experience in the college. The students said that they were excited because this prevented them from having to take the time to have to sit in some

classes unnecessarily. They said they did not want to sit in any class that was not going to help them solve problems or move forward; thus, to get credit for material that they already knew was ideal. This example illustrates that some adult students had the impression and experience that many available courses were unappealing lecture courses that were unlikely to stimulate their interest, especially if they already knew a great deal about the subject. This example does not fully illustrate this need of adults, but does point to the general attitude that adults have about how classes are valued.

A more direct example of this type of thinking was expressed by Roman, who was generally quite satisfied with most aspects of the college, but not with his accounting course. In each interview I had with Roman, he spoke at length about his accounting class. He was particularly unhappy that the required textbook did not provide realistic accounting questions or solutions to problems. He said that the purpose of taking a course is to understand how to do the work and to ultimately be familiar with each type of accounting problem. For him, this was more than just a matter of needing more practice to prepare for tests or quizzes. Roman believed that the college needed to provide the most updated problems possible, problems that he might encounter in the real world of accounting. He said for the professor to ask students to solve problems and not to provide the worked-out answers only meant that the students would earn a grade, but not necessarily gain the knowledge that their work was correct and accurate. He talked at length about what might be holding the college back from providing this service. Roman said:

I know, maybe it is expensive to find a book with the problems because then the textbook companies must have to pay extra for the answers to be worked out, but

still, they must be able to find something electronic to make this possible. This way of teaching does not make sense if you want to know accounting.

Roman felt that he was taking the course to gain accounting skills; the idea of not being able to have real accounting knowledge by knowing if the problems he was working out were correct was anathema to his orientation to learning.

Process Model and the Practice of Andragogy

Overall, students described fairly traditional, content-driven classrooms, in which teachers decided in advance how they would approach instruction: determine what knowledge or skill needs to be transmitted, arrange the material into logical units, select the most efficient way of transmitting this content, then develop a plan for presenting these content units in a predetermined sequence (Knowles et al., 2005, p. 115). A more adult-appropriate classroom is process driven (Knowles et al., 2005). A process-driven classroom (using an andragogical approach) is one where the instructor

prepares in advance a set of procedures for involving the learners in a process that involves 1) preparing the learner, 2) establishing a climate conducive to learning (creating a mechanism for mutual planning,... 4) diagnos[ing] the needs for learning, 5) decid[ing] which content will meet those needs ... 7) us[ing] suitable techniques for teaching, and 8) evaluat[ing] and rediagnos[ing] needs. (Knowles et al., 2005)

The content-driven classrooms that are prevalent in the college, as described by students, seem to ignore the needs of the learners. As mentioned in the section on learner needs, some students said that when they asked questions or tried to give feedback or provide input to teachers, they were made to feel that they were being disruptive. Adult

students were actually being disruptive if the teacher's goal was a content-driven, rather than a process-driven goal. The process-driven classroom was one that invites feedback and student questions. One teacher I interviewed did seem to have a process-driven classroom. He reported that he encourages student feedback and questions. He had decided to allow a time for students to bring additional knowledge into the classroom, and he had established a procedure by which that could be accomplished. He set aside time after each test in which students were asked to provide information to him that may have contradicted what he marked wrong on their test. He said if any student was able to provide a logical explanation for his/her answer, it would be acceptable. It had become the highlight of the week because multiple perspectives about the curriculum content were shared during this process. He found that the adults were particularly responsive to this method, and their enthusiasm for this method had a positive effect on the entire class. Here learner input and questions were valued rather than viewed as an interruption. In most cases, however, the students described experiences in classrooms in which teachers seemed to be unwilling to deviate from their content-driven plans, or had no plans, or imposed strict and arbitrary rules, causing student frustration and highlighting some of the problems adults faced at times in classes at the community college. An example of this is when both Martha and Jonathan were in computer coding classes, and the teachers seemed to be willing only to instruct in content-driven styles and required that students merely memorize codes. Martha and Jonathan both yearned for their professors to approach coding classes in ways that would not only fundamentally change the way the coding would be taught, but that would also allow students to have some input into how teachers were conveying information about codes. The teachers would have needed to be

more aware of what was needed by the students. The andragogical-process approach would have allowed these classes to be handled differently by creating an environment that would have encouraged teachers to engage in mutual planning with students, determine what students needed, and be open to various ways of teaching content.

Section 2: Institutional Services

Institutional services that were unresponsive to adult characteristics was the other major category that emerged from the data. Although the college has many exemplary services meant to accommodate nontraditional students, the students described experiences indicating that although the available services may have accommodated other nontraditional students, those services were not able to completely accommodate nontraditional-*aged* adult students. The college follows a “one college” philosophy, an effort by the institution to provide comprehensive services that meet the needs of all students. Based on some of the problems described by students in the study, the one-college approach may not have accommodated adult students who have challenges and needs different from those of some of the younger students. These can be understood by assessing the literature on adult roles.

Adult-development literature suggests that adults have expectations and priorities that supersede their personal educational goals (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992; Cross, 1981; Spellman, 2007; Strage, 2008). They need to take care of others (their children and sometimes their parents). Those who work are also invested in their jobs; they rely on their employment, and their employers need to be able to depend on them consistently and unconditionally. These types of obligations circumscribed the students’ time and personal resources (McGivney, 2004). Because of adult situational limits, students who

participated in this study reported they faced accessibility issues in many services available in the college. Accessibility, the primary institutional issue for them, was a problem in areas such as the hours and days that the services were available, the monitoring of younger users of the services, and effective assistance from support staff at the college. Issues with support staff included: the timeliness of receiving necessary paperwork or being given inconsistent information from interrelated, overlapping departments. Many of the services available could be quite valuable and helpful to nontraditional-aged adults and could provide needed support, but were frequently not offered at times that were convenient to adults, causing them to be perceived as unavailable.

Overview of available services. The college has a number of services that the research on community colleges would suggest are exemplary. A few of the exemplary services that this college provides include: counseling (both personal and academic); a plethora of learning-disability services and accommodations; a bookstore (with online access); a cafeteria; a library (with online access); a one-stop center that includes advising, admissions, the registrar, and the bursar in one building; a large multiple-subject tutoring center; a peer-tutoring center that also offers tutoring in multiple subjects; a full-time child care center; and financial aid services. There are two other services available, albeit not specifically for adults: Minority Student Affairs and the Equal Opportunity Fund. Both of these services provide funding and support for students, and were mentioned by adult students who were interviewed for the study.

Additional services provided by the college that are exclusively for adults are the CARE Program and the Veterans' Service Center. The other program that is specifically

for adults is a student-led organization named the Better Than Ever Club. The club, funded through the Student Activities office, like all other student organizations on campus, has two faculty advisors from the counseling department. The college relies on the student leadership of the club to develop the programming each semester, and the student leaders use Student Activities funding and resources to implement their programming.

Course scheduling. Although students would have liked to see unlimited options for classes, the college did have a robust schedule, offering classes every day except Sunday. The last class on campus ends at 10 p.m., which makes it possible for students who work full-time to attend many of the classes they need to complete a program at night. The college also had a standing committee that was actively working to get faculty members to create more distance-education courses, and that was facilitating training for faculty members who wished to learn more about teaching online. Although the college made great efforts to offer classes at various times, one of the consistent complaints by the students was that classes in their majors weren't available when they needed them. This meant there were classes they needed to take to graduate that were never offered in the evening or on the weekends when they were able to attend classes. Several faculty members observed that it was doubtful a student could complete an entire program at the college if the student were attending only nights and weekends—the most convenient times for adults who were predominately part-time evening students. This situation disproportionately affects the ability of adults at the college to complete a program. For some of the students, this scheduling means they are delayed in completing a program for up to a year and frequently have to find unique ways of attending classes scheduled at

inconvenient times that are not conducive to full-time employment. This was a major issue discussed in the literature (Lumina Foundation, n.d.) and underlined in the focus groups held the semester of the study.

Furthermore, some students described situations in which the one class they needed did not run due to low enrollment. Canceled classes were a fairly common condition at the college. Students usually learned that the classes were canceled one or two business days before the classes were scheduled to start. Situations like this can delay completion almost indefinitely. During one of the focus groups, the students said that administrators should have a way of letting students know that there are limitations on when they could take classes before the students begin their course of study, allowing students to make a more informed decision about whether to attend the college there.

Student services. Many student services had limited hours that did not match the students' needs, including the library, the tutoring center, and the financial aid office. Additional services discussed included child care, food service, and even lounge space. Many of the services were available several days and hours a week, but the hours were not necessarily the hours needed for adult students who frequent the college in the evenings, because the majority of the adult students worked either full-time or part-time jobs. For example, the cafeteria closed at 2 p.m. each day. The issue of adults rushing to the campus for classes in the evenings after work and not being able to purchase hot, complete meals on campus was mentioned frequently in the focus groups. The library also had limited hours, and several students mentioned that, Veterans'? ideally, the library and connected computer laboratories should be open 24 hours a day. Offices of critical importance to students, such as financial aid, were open on the typical 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

schedule, with one extended day a week when it was open until 6:30 p.m. Although this schedule is reasonable for a single shift of office workers, it left working adults at a disadvantage because they frequently could not access the office during those hours.

Support programs. The college had three programs that ostensibly supported nontraditional-aged students: CARE, the Veterans' Service Center, and the Better Than Ever Club. However, access to the two college-run programs was limited to a small subgroup of adult students. The third, a student-sponsored program, was open to all students, but it was underused.

The first program, CARE, a grant-funded program, had excellent benefits for those who qualified; however, the number of students who qualified for the program was minute in comparison to the population of nontraditional-aged students in the college. Also, those who qualified did not necessarily join the program. To qualify for the program, students needed to be returning students who had earned at least 31 college credits within the last 10 years. This program offers mentoring, support in using services, and funding. The CARE counselor literally walks students to the financial aid office and speaks on their behalf if necessary. The CARE staff member, who served in a dual role of coordinator and counselor, worked at the college part time, providing mentoring and support for students. The staff member also conducted workshops for adults and scheduled those events at times most suited to the adult lifestyle: evenings and weekends.

Students were recruited to the CARE program from outside the college; students who were already enrolled in the college, who met the criteria for CARE, were not eligible for the program, according to the program policy. Because the program is not marketed to new adult students at orientation sessions or to students who were already

enrolled in the college, most current students do not know about it. The coordinator visited libraries and malls to try to find adults to invite back to college. Because some details of this program are posted on the main website of the college, there seems to be some awareness of this program among the adults at the college. Several of the students who participated in the study mentioned the program, but said that they were told that they did not qualify. It seemed as if most of the adults in the study had been told they did not qualify for reasons that were not accurate.

Although most of the students who participated in the study did not qualify for the program, one of the interview participants, Tom, said that the CARE program had been invaluable to him. He said that by attending seminars and trainings held by the CARE coordinator the summer before the semester of the study, he was able to learn resume-writing skills and to get important tips on how to fill out transfer paperwork and applications for universities. It was an ideal program for most of the adults at the college—if they qualified. One student said, “They told me [I wasn’t qualified for the program] ... because it started after I came to campus.” That student was not qualified for the program because she was not a returning student, but rather a first-time student. Other students did not qualify because of the number of credits they had, but they seemed to have received conflicting information about the program through advisors and word of mouth. Those who were not involved with CARE—the majority of students—wished they had access to the support available through the program, which included funding, in addition to the help of the coordinating counselor.

The Veterans’ Service Center, which started during the semester of the study, serves only veterans. Upper-level administrators at the college identified this program as

one that serves nontraditional-aged adult students. There were no statistics available on how many students were eligible to use the Veterans' Service Center or how many students were using the service at the time. There was a marked effort to market the program among the existing students who were veterans. According to campus administrators, the only way the center's administrators were aware of student veterans on campus was if those students accessed various campus services for which veterans were eligible. The link to the Veterans' Service Center on the main website informs students of the location of the center and provides a frequently asked questions section to inform students about basic questions of eligibility. The center also had a table at the Student Activities Fair, a beginning-of-the-semester, campus-wide, club-information session, held during the semester of the study.

Last, administrators at the college counted the Better Than Ever Club as among the support they offered to nontraditional-aged adult students. This was an organization funded by the Student Activities Department. It was student run, but had two faculty advisors from the counseling department. This organization was mentioned several times by staff and administrators, several of whom attended the college years ago and remembered the club from their time on campus. Each of the administrators and staff who mentioned the club said that it was no longer as active as it had been in the past when it had been an excellent, helpful organization for nontraditional-aged adult students.

In spite of the low profile of the club, during the semester of the study there was an extremely energetic student leading the club. She held two on-campus meetings a week and also held an online "Campus Cruiser" chat at 8 p.m. on Tuesdays. The semester of the study, the club held several events and fundraisers. The president of the group said

there were more than 40 members who signed up; however, the meetings generally had attendance of about 10 people—three officers, the advisor, and only a few students. At one of the meetings I attended, the group discussed the needs of the adult students and asked all people attending the meeting what they would like to see on campus. Students talked about problems in their classes, problems with financial aid, and how they were treated by other students and staff on campus. They also talked about how they knew that the number of adults was statistically significant, although they rarely encountered other nontraditional-aged adults on campus. They suggested some identifiers such as T-shirts to heighten their profile on campus. Speaking to the president of the club later, I learned that the purpose of that discussion was to allow adults to vent and to help the officers understand what the nontraditional-aged adult students wanted or needed, enabling club officers to consider strategies to address those needs within the parameters of the club and those parameters were limited.

Counseling: Job Placement and Career Counseling

The scope of the counseling services at the college includes academic counseling, emotional counseling, and career counseling. The aspect of counseling that was discussed most was career counseling. Career counseling is a separate department with staff separate from that of the other counseling services. The department assists students in securing both jobs and internships, and works in cooperation with several other academic departments on campus. The department also provides services to help students learn more about their strengths and weaknesses, and how they might leverage those factors into career plans. The career-counseling department is referred to as the coop department.

Some adults said they believed that the career-counseling department should be more effective in helping them obtain work and believed that the department did not demonstrate an awareness of distinctions between adult and younger students. For example, two focus-group students were concerned about the way this department interacted with them. One student said:

I called up the coop department and said that I would like help acquiring a part-time job. They said I needed to have a 2.9 [grade-point average]. Well ... I do not have a [grade-point average] on file because I just transferred, but I think that they should take into consideration that I am an adult with all types of work experiences. I don't *just* have a [grade-point average] to go on because I have much more to offer.

The student suggested that the department was not willing to release any information about available jobs or assist her with the services such as resume preparation, if she did not have a high-enough grade-point average established at this college. Some staff from the counseling department acknowledged that getting a job or an internship for an older student was challenging; it is hard for older students to compete with younger students in the workforce. A counselor said:

The employers will sometimes call up and say that they want a young girl for their position. They think that a young girl will be the easiest person to mold and train. That is against the law. I can't do that and I tell them that, but it is hard to get employers to hire older students because they believe that [the older students] will have higher standards and more choices than younger people. They think it is more difficult to train older workers.

Still, students believed it should be part of the mission of the college to help students in this area. This was an issue that resurfaced many times. A student posting on the Nontraditional-Aged Adult Message Board said the following: “Let’s add a job placement service for adults. The college could work with area businesses to match non-traditional students (adults over 40) with available jobs. Let’s face it; the jobs currently offered are for 18 year olds.” The survey responses demonstrated that many students felt similarly.

Technology

Although using technology could be a challenge for some adult students, many believed that faculty members and the institution generally did not use available technology in ways that would help them attain ideal access to resources. This was a common comment among survey participants, as well as focal and focus group students. The efficient use of technology could make the resources convenient for students. The Campus Cruiser course-delivery platform, which includes the capability for faculty to post syllabi, the posting and acceptance of assignments electronically, the posting of bookmarks, and the posting of sound and video files, was described by students as lightly used by faculty members. Some faculty members did not use the Campus Cruiser email or announcement functions to reach students. In a focus group and on the Nontraditional-Aged Adult Student Message Board, students suggested that all faculty members should be required to use the Campus Cruiser to enhance and supplement classroom instruction. A student from the message board posted this under the Wish List topic:

- A policy for faculty requiring that ALL must make complete and total use of Campus Cruiser—especially for grades and feedback and assignments,

notes, PowerPoints etc., which most have in electronic form anyway; and availability of a syllabus outlining due dates for every homework and project with required reading in advance of opening up the course, and what their on-campus or online testing requirements are along with assignment submission methods.

- This same type of comment surfaced through focus-group discussions as well.
- An extension of this idea is that some students believed that every course should be available online and that all instructors should be available online for office hours at some point in each week. One poster said:
- I would add, mandatory online courses in each field whenever possible (except where physically impossible: labs, etc.) Also, more of an online presence period. Instructors, administration, etc., should be available online at least part of the day so students can ask questions without being on campus.
- These types of conveniences would have helped students function better as students and keep up with the adult responsibility to be off campus at work or at home.

Disposition and Accessibility

Several students seemed to be antagonized by the treatment they received at the student-services level in the departments. They did not believe that staff members understood what they had at stake when serving them; they believed that staff members undervalued their time and did not seem to be concerned about making sure that the

students had correct, timely, important information and service. Jonathan talked about his experiences at the registrar's window.

Sometimes you get to the window and are hoping you get the good one, and then all of the sudden you are with the rude one. You're like, oh boy, what happened to the nice one who was just here a minute ago. You just have to put up with a rude person [who is] blatantly and unapologetically giving you the wrong information.

A counseling staff member agreed that non-traditional aged students have expressed similar complaints about how they are treated by the various workers across campus, not only in the classroom, but when they are seeking services as well. He acknowledged that their adult experiences give them a different set of expectations than their younger counterparts. He said they come to the campus with a different set of standards than younger students. "The adults have been in the professional world. They are here because of the economy, and they didn't expect this to happen but ... here they are, and they bring some knowledge of a different world: a world that is more corporate, where there is more of a culture of accountability. The younger students don't even notice the same problems because they just graduated from high school. They are used to people telling them to go here or go there. Adults do not like to be talked down to or disrespected and that can cause a problem."

A focus-group member said that one semester she nearly had to attend another college because two offices, the admissions and the registrar, were giving her conflicting information and emailing each other her information and then claiming not to have received each other's emails. "It was a mess. I was ready to go to another college, and, finally, another administrator had to step in and register for me."

Another office that suffered from negative perceptions among adult students was financial aid. Jill reported, for example, that her first visit to the office was a disaster. She said:

I walked into the office, and there was a sign that read SIGN IN AND WAIT. I wasn't sure if I had missed the deadline for financial aid, and so I went up to a worker in the office and said, "Can I ask a question?"

The office worker said, "Sign in and wait." Jill asked, "Even if I just want to ask if I have missed the deadline? The office worker yelled, "That's two questions now! Sign in and wait!" Jill took a deep breath as she talked about it. When she spoke again, it was to compare the behavior of the financial aid office worker to that of an animal. "I have worked as a dog groomer, and so I am used to erratic behavior by dogs, and that is how I was able to maintain calm through the confrontation," she said.

Jill said when the women told her to sign in and wait, she yelled so loudly that "everyone in the office stopped what they were doing to look at us to see what I was going to do!" After that incident, Jill wrote a letter to the dean in charge of financial aid describing the situation. She received an apology letter from the dean who offered Jill any help she needed. Jill did not make any additional connections with the department that semester because she was too angry and humiliated to engage further with financial aid workers at the office.

One focus-group member said that she felt as if the staff members at the financial aid office treated her as if she were asking *them* for money. "It is not as if we do not have to pay this money back or as if it is their money," she said. Another student in the focus group added, "We are asking for this money because we need it to go to school and no

other reason.” Adults in general felt that they did not want to be spoken to as if they were younger than their years. They had a general expectation that they would be treated with dignity—as mothers, fathers, uncles, and employees—and different from how they were treated when they were teenagers. One counselor said that adults are disrespected on campus because they tend to look just like the other students. “After a while, the adult might ... carry themselves differently [than off campus], and they start to kind of seem the same as everyone else [other students on campus], and so the staffs across campus just don’t recognize that they are different, and they are not careful.”

The type of treatment adult students experienced on campus conflicted with their ideas of who they were in society and with how they were treated by others in their lives. There was also the matter of having staff members treat them as if their time were expendable. They took time off from work or family to be at the college. They expected the college to cooperate with them in providing services when they came to use the services.

Section 3: Role-Model Status and Leadership

Although instructional and institutional services issues were significant, students consistently described their interactions with younger students as also having a negative impact on their experiences at the college. These could be identified as classroom-management issues that might have been improved or alleviated by a more andragogical approach. Although students sometimes described positive instructional and institutional interactions, most had negative experiences regarding their exposure to and interaction with younger students. The only exceptions were those students who said they felt good that they had the patience to help younger students who perceived deficiencies in their

abilities to function as students. This matter came up frequently, and students discussed it with considerable passion.

Although most of the experiences were negative, some adult students found their niche as role models for younger students. Several students said that younger students were like younger brothers or sisters, or even sons or daughters. One focus-group student, a middle-aged woman, talked about monitoring the progress of students by listening to their conversations during class. As the middle of the semester drew nearer, she admonished any students who talked about giving up and sometimes would email them to make sure they were on track. Martha, an interview participant, was also proud that she was able to encourage younger students. She said that in her unscheduled time, she met two “young ladies” who were talking about quitting school. She warned them against it, describing her experience of quitting school years ago. She tried to illustrate through her own presence at the college that it would be better for them to stay and complete their education than to have to come back later. Pauline, another focus-group student, said she encouraged students to listen in class and warned students that quitting would put them in her situation. “You better listen to the professor and stop all of this fooling around, or you are going to end up just like me,” she admonished other students.

However, not all adult students felt so positively connected to their younger classmates. Some felt that younger students would “cling” to the older students and rely on them for more help than was reasonable. One focus-group member said he thought he attracted student “groupies” who wanted to know what classes he was taking so they could enroll in the same ones. “They are looking for some direction and someone to help them, and they cling to anyone who they think is going somewhere,” he said. A fairly

young professor who was interviewed for the study described a similar scenario that illustrated the tendency of younger students to seek out guidance from those on campus.

This one student insisted on meeting me in my office, and he seemed to think it was urgent. I was like OK, what is the question? He asked me an incredibly simple question about his personal direction, and it was hard to believe that a person would need someone else to advise them on such a matter, but he seemed to really need that guidance.

Tom, who said he felt antagonized by younger students in all campus environments, made the observation that younger students seemed to lack basic social skills. He wondered how these students would fair in the workforce in the future. “Are they going to go into a job and interview and say that they like to play ‘Angry Bird’ and text a lot?” Some students said they avoided using services at the college that may have benefited them, due to the presence of younger students who they experienced as loud, unproductive, and sometimes impolite. Jill, who had days in which she had to stay at the college the entire day because of her class schedule, said that she would have loved to have had some quiet place on campus that would allow her to do her homework. The ideal location for this would be the library, where there are open tables among the stacks, private study rooms, empty classrooms, and computers in the center of the library for research and for word processing. However, Jill said that she did not like to go to the library.

I don’t know what to say. ... The library is just *not* ... some of the activity going on at the library computers and all around is not adult behavior. ... There are too many young people, kids, on the computers surfing the Web, sitting on

Facebook.com, and waiting in line for those computers that are being wasted with other people goofing off.

Jill did not have the patience to deal with that behavior and said that the quiet, brightly lit café located around the corner from the college was a more comfortable environment for her to work on homework and relax. Martha felt the same way about some of the behavior of other students in relation to the services, and added the open computer laboratories and tutoring center to her list of places plagued by these problems.

Conclusion

Chapter 5 explored how the community college fails to meet the needs of nontraditional-aged adult students. Though the community college strives to provide abundant resources for underserved students by adhering to the one-college approach, which seeks to serve all possible needs of nontraditional students, the adults in the study described the college as falling short of fulfilling their adult needs. The classroom instruction is not adult, the services fall short of serving them because of limited accessibility that disproportionately affects adult students, and older students are sometimes antagonized by younger students in ways that affect their experiences negatively, although some adults seem to thrive on the attention they receive from younger students. Chapters 6 will summarize the first five chapters and conclude with a highlight of the findings, as well as implications for practice and for further study.

Chapter 6: Introduction and Summary of the Study, Discussion of Findings, Implications for Practice, and Future Research

Introduction and Summary of Study

The basis of this study was my experience with nontraditional-aged adult students in community colleges across the United States, where I have taught or observed for several years. I have had the opportunity to hear many firsthand perceptions of issues in community college from adult students. This is a six-chapter qualitative case study that was seeking to elicit descriptions from adults over the age of 25 about their experiences as community college students. The adult students in the study described experiences that related to their overall success and satisfaction and their potential failure and dissatisfaction. Chapter 1 contextualized the topic in literature that suggests the following: the country needs a more educated adult population (Carnevale, 2008; Kirby et al., 2004; Ritt, 2008), adults need to continue their educations throughout their lives to remain gainfully employed (Carnevale, 2008; Chao et al., 2007; Horn & Nevill, 2006; Milheim, 2005; Pulley, 2008; Ritt, 2008), and community colleges are committed to providing the flexibility and cost-effective education that would suit adults who need to be lifelong learners (Chao et al., 2007; Spellman, 2007; Zamani, 2000). These conditions are problematic because, in spite of the need for adults to take the time to be educated and reeducated throughout their lives, they must continue to serve in adult roles of full-time employment, multiple levels and types of caretaking of both the dependent young and the dependent elderly, and the expectation of personal financial independence and responsibility. Literature described in Chapter 1 posited that community colleges, with their missions of serving underserved, nontraditional students by offering flexible hours,

affordable tuition, and a nonresidential program, are uniquely positioned to serve adult students seeking higher education (Boggs, 2004). Though community colleges have been identified by business, government, and adults as being the best option for lifelong education, research suggests that community colleges have not yet developed the infrastructure necessary to serve the increasing number of adults in ways that do not interfere with their adult responsibilities (Ritt, 2008). Community colleges struggle to provide convenient services and an appropriate classroom environment (Ritt, 2008).

The literature review in Chapter 2 sought to highlight the differences between the way adult community college students experience higher education and that of others in the environment, by defining adult development, adult learning, and adult education. To highlight the significance of adulthood and its impact on adults in a higher education environment, there is a brief description of how the literature describes traditional-aged college students and their behavior, experiences, and attitudes on the college campus. Also a brief section on retention suggests that although adults are generally successful academically, they are still more likely to withdraw from college than traditional-aged students. Another section of the literature review highlights how adult characteristics intersect with adult-life situations and college conditions to create unique situational, dispositional, and institutional barriers or supports for adult students (McGivney, 2004; Milheim, 2005; Ritt, 2008). Lastly, the literature review highlights the types of programs that are considered innovative and exemplary in the community college and that presumably provide support to adult students.

This case study, described in Chapter 3, used multiple forms of data collection: a recruitment survey, individual interviews, and focus-group interviews. The interviews

and focus groups were conducted with students, faculty, administrators, and staff, to provide the clearest picture of adult students' functioning at the community college in classrooms and services. The various types of interviews also helped to buoy the validity and trustworthiness of the findings.

Chapters 4 and 5 are both data chapters. Chapter 4 first consolidated the students who participated in the study into four type categories that highlight the diversity and the commonalities between the students. This typology worked to highlight the significance of how adult students experienced some of the challenges to their success as students on and off campus, in spite of their differences. Chapter 5 focused on how adult students say they perceive the classroom and how they describe their experiences in the broader college context, by discussing types of experiences adult students described and identified as barriers or supports to their college experiences. Chapters 4 and 5 highlighted how students' ages, adult mindsets, and adult responsibilities impacted their experiences at the college, positively and negatively, in classrooms and with services.

Discussion of Findings and Answers to Research Questions

There were several different types of adults attending the college. The differences between the adult students were significant. There was a range of about 30 years between the oldest and youngest students who participated in the study. Some of the students were parents or caretakers of their parents, working full-time or part-time and struggling to maintain financial stability; others were single, or even married with great financial stability. Yet, the adult students seemed to have striking consistency in their descriptions of their experiences at the college. One of the most consistent descriptions was a pervasive feeling of being different from the younger students. Adults felt different and

believed others thought of them as different. I found those differences had an impact on how the adults experienced the college and how others (students, faculty, and administrators), experienced them at the college. The feelings of different experiences by adult students impacted their behaviors and actions. The perception of their difference held by others across campus also had an impact on how those others treated them. In the classroom and in the usage of services, students felt that their differences created barriers. Another finding was that the college did not have a good method of communicating with adult students.

The literature points to an issue of lower retention among adults in comparison to traditional-aged students. The retention difference at the college in the study is 10%. In spite of the extreme dissatisfaction with instructional practices and accessibility of service, the adults in the study were persistent and generally more academically successful than their younger counterparts, which was supported by the literature. All students in the study continued college or transferred to a university. The college did not provide any barriers to the retention of these students continuing because they were all retained; however, there were barriers to their satisfaction with the college and to their perceptions of their success.

Classroom Experiences: Differences

Adult students perceived and were perceived as advantageous and challenging to be in a classroom. Adults said that professors often appreciated having them in class because they were not texting or being otherwise disruptive in class. Faculty members who were interviewed also said that adult students were a pleasure to have in the classroom because the adults wanted to be there and appreciated the education being

offered. In spite of this general goodwill between adult students and faculty, some descriptions of experiences in the classroom belied this. Adults in the study were frustrated when faculty did not provide adult classroom environments. The diverse adult students included first-time college students, college graduates changing careers, and future graduate students earning prerequisites for their transfer programs. Adults in this community college found that the level of teaching in the classroom was frustrating at times and presented the greatest difficulty to completing their goals of graduating, receiving excellent grades, or staying in the college and taking courses. This was tied to the idea that teachers were not always able to successfully teach to two completely different audiences: traditional-aged and nontraditional-aged adult students.

Independent, experienced adult students wanted to bring their experience and motivation to the classroom. This is consistent with literature on adult learning (Dill & Henley, 1998; Kegan, 1994; Merriam & Caffarella, 1998; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Tweedell, 2005). Adults were seeking to be exposed to substantive information they could use immediately, either as a way to continue being successful as they navigate through an academic program, or as graduates who apply information and knowledge in a work or real-life situation. The other audience in the classroom, traditional-aged students, sometimes demonstrated a lack of attention, self-control, or interest in comparison to the older generations, represented by nontraditional-aged adult students (Murphy, 2010; Olinger, 2003). The adults described being acutely aware of the adjustments faculty members seemed to be making to function as teachers of students who behaved as if they were underprepared and unmotivated to function in the college environment.

Services were not accessible and communication was lacking. Other difficulties with being successful were more practical. Services available on the campus were numerous and exemplary, but for the adult students, their lack of access to the services sometimes caused tremendous frustration. The services were not always available at times that were convenient for adult students, who worked full-time jobs or had several part-time jobs and other responsibilities. Adults needed advice from advisors, counselors, information, and comfort zones on campus to unwind or rest, but the college's tendency to cater to younger students who primarily took courses during the day meant that adults were not accommodated in their needs for offices such as advising and counseling to have longer hours. Offices typically closed at 5 p.m., based on the assumption that younger students could easily make adjustments to accommodate the availability of services and take advantage of the 8 hours offices were open. Adults were also not accommodated in their needs for places of comfort and quiet. Administrators at the college expressed wariness at the idea of providing too much comfortable space for students who they believed, on the whole, consistently demonstrated that they were not mature enough to use the spaces appropriately. This was based on observations of frequent inappropriate behavior in spaces such as the library, computer laboratories, and tutoring centers.

Not having basic services such as counseling or advising frequently caused adults to make the wrong decisions in registering for classes, which affected their experiences because it increased the cost of completing their program. Money was one of their limited resources. Taking evening classes, with no cafeteria available, was even a problem for several students who said they worked all day and came to a night class, only to find that

the only way they could eat dinner was to purchase chips or sugary drinks out of the overpriced vending machines sprinkled across campus.

Communication gaps. Adults at the college frequently said they did not know how to access services and necessary information was not provided to them. The methods of communicating this information to students were the orientation and the webpage. The college did not invite part-time students to orientation. Adults on campus were predominately part-time students; this lack of information affected them disproportionately. There were several adult students who said they weren't comfortable using their computers to acquire all of the information they needed to function at the college.

Outside of the college. The adults had various experiences outside the college, but the majority of the students experienced some level of conflict between their outside lives and their student lives. The problems that emerged most consistently were time management and unsupportive families. There were some types of adults, however, whose lives outside of college seem to be quite conducive to student life. These were students with older children, working spouses, and lucrative employment or significant financial stability.

Conclusion. What adults described as problematic was the experiences in the classroom with some of their teachers. Many of the students said their teachers were not effective in their teaching styles or even how they organized or provided information for their classes. Additionally, some services were not as available as students needed. Those included the computers in the library and the tutoring center. Students described the library, which housed a computer laboratory, as having too much noise and no staff

monitoring it to make sure it was conducive to studying and doing research. The tutoring centers were generally considered understaffed and more than one student said that the tutors in the laboratory guided them to get wrong answers on assignments, which impacted their grades. They felt that this was especially egregious considering that they usually had to wait in line excessively long periods of time to meet with the tutors, who they said most likely made mistakes because they had too many students to help. They also sometimes felt inconvenienced by the financial aid department, which they described as mislaying paperwork, unfairly disqualifying them for aid, or treating them as if there were undeserving welfare recipients by yelling at them in response to their questions or having excessive wait times for students to receive necessary information or aid. The problems with the college in multiple areas spanned the classroom, the services, and the other students.

Implications for Practice

Colleges need to acknowledge that adult students are substantially different from younger traditional aged students. For teachers who are not aware of the differences between teaching adults and young, late adolescents, there should be training available. To that end, the college needs to provide a list of assumptions and guides that teachers can consider when working with adults. Exposure to concepts such as andragogy would be helpful to all faculty members in the community college setting. Ideally this training could be conducted as adult education, demonstrating to faculty members how to use strategies that would be effective for adults who come to class with experience.

Given that adults bring different amounts and kinds of experiences than their younger counterparts and these experiences are demonstrated to influence learning as

well as expectations of adult students, the the college could work on ways of helping students and teachers leverage the experience of adult students in the classroom, treating them as a resource rather than a distraction. A collaboration between adult students and teachers could make significant headway in understanding and highlighting what adults need. The college could develop a handbook that could be revised regularly with the help of a standing adult-education committee, composed of students and faculty, to guide this process.

Along the same lines as collaborating with adults to help teachers better understand the adult students on campus, the college could elicit more information from the adult students. The survey sent out by the college for me through Survey Monkey had an extremely high response rate. The college should build on the enthusiasm that adults demonstrated towards communicating and providing feedback. The college should conduct at least one survey each semester in order to learn more about the needs of the adult population on campus.

Another suggestion that involves communication is to establish an online interactive group for students. Several students who interviewed said that they yearned to be connected in some way to the other nontraditional-aged adult students. When I attended their Better Than Ever Club meeting, every student expressed this sentiment, in spite of the fact that they already together for the meeting. The adults needs a more convenient and accessible way of interacting. Similarly, the students who participated in the message board said that they found it helpful to have an online forum to express their ideas and feelings. A more sophisticated, campus-sponsored and marketed, password protected message board would be a good place for students to congregate online for

fellowship and information. The campus could consider providing an adult facebook page for the nontraditional-aged students. This would be an outlet for adult students to provide support for each other and it could be used to provide information and highlight the available resources.

Another innovation that might help adult students stay connected could be to have a separate orientation for adult students. At this time, only full-time students are invited to orientation. This means the majority of the adults are not aware of the orientation and do not attend. That is likely the explanation for why many adults are not aware of some of the services on campus. At least two employees of the college suggested that the college should implement this as a strategy to better serve adults. In this orientation, the college can help adults address some of the common problems faced by returning non-traditional students: how to integrate adult life into adult-student life, how to help professors understand students' goals, and how to successfully integrate into a class with multiple generations of students present. The orientation also needs to highlight school services, because many of the students reported being unaware of the services. Some students could benefit from training on technology in the orientation sessions.

The college may need to find creative ways of having offices open after 5 p.m. They may consider some online options for 24-hour chats or even hiring people to work around-the-clock shifts. The college, which has a police staff and even faculty housing on campus, should take advantage the fact that there are people on or around campus at all times, and consider providing longer hours for every office and service.

Adults also suggested that they need more options in terms of classes. The campus also has a tendency to offer classes when and where they have the greatest

potential to attract the greatest number of students. The College routinely cancels classes for low enrollment. When cancels classes or only has certain classes open during the day, this can either delay or prevent graduation for an adult student. After conducting research on which programs and courses would be best suited for this option, the college should implement a more robust independent study option for adults and they should develop and offer more online course for the courses that have low enrollment, but that are necessary for graduation.

Although I have suggested that generally, offices could be opened longer each day, the childcare center, a different kind of service, could also have extended hours. Currently the childcare program is only available during the week. However, the college is open 7 days a week. The childcare facility, which could be helpful to many of students who are parents, should consider matching their hours with days the college is open for student use.

Lastly, the college might work to provide a better way to organize the adult-student voice. The college may work on helping adults speak through a spokesperson or an organization that is preexisting, but the administration needs to become involved in giving an adult group as much power as possible. Such a group should be able to advocate for appropriate accountability from faculty members and staff and provide information. This group could be in the form of a board or a council that votes and has a real voice.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should look at community colleges that are using an adult-education approach or pilot studies in which adult college students are able to attend

some classes that take an andragogical approach to the classroom. Individual groups of adult students should be studied to learn what types of skills successful students use to cope with the community college environment. There should also be research on programs that have nontraditional hours to learn how well adults would use those services if they were offered at times outside of traditional work hours

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to find out what creates challenges to adults in a community college that could either make them less likely to stay or make them feel dissatisfied with their experience. I learned that community colleges are the ideal place for adults, but community colleges still have gaps in their abilities to provide services. Although administrators and faculty at community colleges profess to understand and appreciate adult students, community colleges overall have some issues that are outside the control of individuals working at the college.

Adults are driven and focused, but have limited resources. They need their education. The country needs for them to have their education. In spite of the benefits of a college education, their multiple adult roles have the potential to impede their progress or impact their experiences in college. They might learn less, even if they ultimately graduate, as was the case with one of the interview subjects who received a C in a class about which she was passionate because her experience was not leveraged; as a result, she ended up battling with her teacher nearly all semester instead of learning the subject. Other students seemed to have similar preoccupations that affected their abilities to engage fully in their courses, in spite of their high motivation. A lofty goal for this study

would be to provide insight into how multiple types of nontraditional-aged adult students can be served better in the community college environment.

Appendix A: Survey Questions and Consent Form

Survey Questions

I am Melissa Edwards and I am a Rutgers graduate student who is studying how nontraditional-aged adult students experience several aspects of higher education in the community college setting. I am giving you this survey in hopes that you can fill it out and return it via e-mail. If you receive this survey by hand, I hope you will take time to fill it out and give it back to me. It will help me learn more about this topic. I can be reached in the following ways: mccprofessorx@yahoo.com or 732-548-6000 ext. 3070.

Consent Form

You are requested to participate in research that will be supervised by Principal Investigator,

Melissa Edwards, on nontraditional-aged adult students' experiences in higher education. This survey should take about 5 to 10 minutes to complete. Participation is voluntary and responses will be kept anonymous. However, whenever one works with email/the internet there is always the risk of compromising privacy, confidentiality, and/or anonymity. Despite this possibility, the risks to your physical, emotional, social, professional, or financial well-being are considered to be 'less than minimal'.

You have the option to not respond to any questions that you choose. Participation or nonparticipation will not impact your relationship with Middlesex County College. Submission of the completed survey will be interpreted as your informed consent to participate and that you affirm that you are at least 18 years of age.

If you have any questions about the research, please contact Melissa Edwards via email at mccprofessorx@yahoo.com. If you have questions about the treatment of human subjects, contact the IRB Administrator at Middlesex County College. If you would like more information about the specific privacy and anonymity risks posed by online surveys, please contact the Middlesex County College Technology Services Help Desk and ask to speak to the Information Security Manager.

1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college?

- ☐ A. Job security
- ☐ B. Personal interest
- ☐ C. Life transition (specify) _____
- ☐ Other (specify)_____

2. If you have never attended college, what are your expectations?

- ☐ A. Improved. job security
- ☐ B. Professional growth
- ☐ C. Personal growth _____
- ☐ Other (specify)_____

3. How old are you?_____

4. How many semesters have you attended college?_____

5. Are you married? Y/N

6. Do you have children? Y/N

7. Do you work outside the home? Y/N If no, please skip to Question 10.

Do you work full-time or part-time?

8. Do you have any work related issues that make it hard for you to be a college student? Y/N

9. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?

- ☐ A. Hours and times of work interfering with class time.
- ☐ B. Workload at work prohibiting you from concentrating on your school work
- ☐ C. Both A & B
- ☐ Other (please specify)_____

10. What kinds of support services within the college have you

used? _____

_____.

11. What types of support could the college offer that would make you be a more effective student?

- ☐ Academic support
- ☐ Childcare support
- ☐ Counseling
- ☐ Other

(specify) _____

12. Is your course work generally timely or useful for work related use? Y/N

13. Is your course work generally timely or useful for personal use? Y/N

14. Were orientations, trainings and information provided and communicated to you appropriately and conveniently? Y/N

15. Are you interested in participating in a study that will ask you and several other nontraditional-aged adult college students to describe your experiences in community college? Y/N

16. If yes, what is your email address?

Appendix B: Student Research-Participant Interview-Question Protocols

Script: Thank you for agreeing to be interviewed. I hope to take about an hour of your time to ask you some questions that will help me learn more about nontraditional-aged adult students experiences in college. First I'm going to ask you some background questions about yourself and then we'll talk about your college experiences.

1. What is your age?_____
2. What is your marital status?
3. If you are a parent, how many children do you have and what are their ages?_
4. What is your employment status?
5. How many semesters have you been attending college?
6. Why did you decide to enroll in college?
7. What are your goals related to college?
8. What is your planned major?
9. How many classes are you taking this semester?

Supports and Challenges

10. What do you think will be one of the hardest things about getting through this semester?
11. In what ways do you think being a bit older than a traditional-aged college student matters to your being able to be a successful student, if at all?
12. What policies and practices of the college do you feel support your goals as student?
13. What factors outside of the college (home related) do you feel support your goals as a student?
14. What adjustments have you had to make in your life in order to be successful in college?
15. What barriers to success as a student have you encountered that you feel are college or course related?
16. What barriers to your college success have you experienced that are related to work?

17. What barriers to your college success do you feel are related to your home life. (Follow-up: What is something that has really been a road block? What, if anything, has helped you get around the road block?)
18. What is something that has really helped you achieve your academic goals and encouraged you to feel like you can make it in college?
19. If you are a returning student, what are your previous experiences with supports and obstacles?
20. Describe your experiences with time management.

Additional Probes**Faculty/academic experience**

1. What are the instructors like here?
2. What makes someone a good instructor?
3. What makes someone a poor instructor?
4. What has been your favorite class so far and why?
5. What has been your least favorite class and why?

Support Services

1. What supports for students are you aware of in the college?
2. What has been your experience with them?

Administrative Issues

1. What has it been like to get information you need about college requirements, rules and procedures?
2. Describe your experiences with your assigned advisor.
3. What has been your experience with getting help in the college?

Phone interviews

Script: We had the opportunity to speak at length at the beginning of this semester about your experiences on campus. I would like to take a few minutes of your time to get an update about how the semester is going.

1. At the beginning of the semester [or the last time we talked] you said that you thought one of your biggest challenges would be XXX. What happened over the course of the semester so far with that challenge?
2. How have things been going with school since we last talked?
3. What is something that has helped you be successful over the last few weeks?
4. What are some obstacles that you have experienced since we last talked?

2nd In-person Interviews

Script: As you have been talking to me regularly throughout the semester about what's happening, I would like to try to make this interview of a different nature - more reflective on how the semester has gone. I hope that you will look back over the experience as a whole, identifying what issues that seemed overwhelming at the beginning, but receded or got dealt with quickly. I hope you will even discuss issues that were surprisingly troubling. Let's have this be a debriefing, looking back, or summative conversation.

1. How do you feel the semester has gone for you?
2. What contributed to that feeling?
3. What were some of the high points of the semester? What about the low points? What did you do when you were in those low points?
4. Describe some of the low points involving faculty, administration, and work and school since I last spoke with you.
5. Tell me what has turned out to be your biggest obstacle this semester?
6. Have any of the obstacles prevented you from meeting your goals for the semester?
7. Can we talk about what has turned out to be your biggest support to success?

Summative Question

8. Look back over the semester and think about some of the issues that impacted you the most. Describe those issues.

Appendix C: Faculty-Interview Protocols

Script: I am gathering information about nontraditional-aged adult students in community college. Getting your insight about nontraditional-aged adult students with whom you have interacted on campus would provide me with more information about the topic.

Experiences with Adult Students

Describe your experiences with nontraditional-aged adult students.

Awareness of Adult Students

1. Describe how you are able to identify that one of your students is a non-traditional adult.
2. How does having a non-traditional aged student in class impact your classroom practice?
3. Are your practices any different when it comes to teaching non-traditional aged students?
4. Can you discuss your perceptions of student XXX who is part of the case study? Have there been any challenges with this student?

Reaction From Nontraditional-aged adult students toward you as an instructor

1. Describe your perception of how your non-traditional aged students react to you as an instructor.

Challenges

1. Describe challenges that nontraditional-aged adults seem to have in your classroom. In what ways do you address these challenges?

Appendix D: Administrative-Staff-Interview Protocols

1. Describe your experiences with nontraditional-aged adult students.
2. Describe your observations of the challenges and difficulties of nontraditional-aged adult students.
3. Please describe how non-traditional aged students are similar and different from younger students. How does this influence your interactions with them?
4. What do you know about supports in the college for this group of students (what are they, how are they working, what are the challenges in offering and sustaining them, how heavily used are they, what's missing, etc.)

Appendix E: Student Focus-Group Questions and Protocols and Consent Form

Consent Form: Focus Groups

Barriers and Supports: Nontraditional-aged Adult Students

Melissa Edwards

Education

Rutgers the State University of New Jersey

I am Melissa Edwards, a graduate student in the Education Department of Rutgers the State University of New Jersey. As part of my doctorate, I am conducting research under the supervision of Dr. AJill Belzer, I am inviting you to participate in my study. The purpose of the study is to examine the barriers and supports to community college experienced by nontraditional-aged adult students.

This study involves completion of a survey, two interviews, one optional focus group session and seven 15 phone conversations.

- You will first be asked to complete a survey.
- You will be invited to participate in a focus group.
- You will speak the to the principal investigator during the focus group session.
- Data gathered at the focus group will be analyzed by me and a case study narrative report will be written to describe your experiences.

*There are no risk associated with this study. **Your participation is completely voluntary. You may withdraw from this study at any time without penalty.***

All information obtained in this study will be kept strictly **anonymous**. All participants will be asked not to disclose anything said within the context of the discussion. All identifying information will be removed from the collected materials, and all materials will secured in a secure location and destroyed immediately after the study.

I also understand that my words may be quoted directly. With regards to being quoted, please initial next to any of the statements that you agree with:

	I wish to review the notes, transcripts, or other data collected during the research pertaining to my participation.
	I agree to be quoted directly.
	I agree to be quoted directly if my name is not published (I remain anonymous).
	I agree to be quoted directly if a made-up name (pseudonym) is used.
	I agree that the researchers may publish documents that contain quotations by me.

By signing this consent form, you are indicating that you fully understand the above information and agree to participate in this study.

Participant's signature _____

Date: _____

Researcher's signature: _____

Date: _____

If you have any questions about this study, please contact [Melissa Edwards, 732-548-6000 ext. 3070, and e-mccprofessorx@yahoo.com, and Dr. AJill Belzer, 732.932.7496, extension 8234, ajill.belzer@gse.rutgers.edu. This research has been reviewed and approved by the Rutgers the State Board of Education IRB. If you have any questions or concerns about this study, you may contact Sponsored Programs Administrator at Rutgers University at:

Rutgers University Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects
Office of Research and Sponsored Programs
3 Rutgers Plaza
New Brunswick, NJ 08901-8559
Tel: 732-932-0150 ext. 2104
Email: humansubjects@orsp.rutgers.edu

Focus Group Questions

1. Describe some of the factors that caused you to attend this community college?
2. What is it like being an adult in college?
3. What are the challenges to being an adult in college?
4. How do you deal with the challenges of being an adult in college?
5. What types of supports do you have for college and what additional supports would you like?
6. What types of conflicts do you experience between family obligations and college?

7. For those of you who are working, what has it been like to have to work and go to college at the same time?
8. Describe how the information you are learning in class is useful?
9. Describe your experiences with faculty members.
10. Describe your experiences with administrative staff when you need assistance or information.

There will be one faculty/staff focus group. It will take place within the first 3 weeks of the semester.

Focus groups for faculty/staff questions

1. Describe your experiences with nontraditional-aged students.
2. Discuss the differences between nontraditional-aged adult students and traditional-aged students.
3. What types of challenges do nontraditional-aged adult students present to your class or your department?
4. What do you think offers the most support to nontraditional-aged adult students on campus?

VIDEOTAPE and AUDIOTAPE USE CONSENT FORM

for Human Subjects

As part of this study, we have made a videotape or audio recording of you while you participated in the study. We would like you to indicate what uses of this videotape you are willing to consent to by initialing below. You are free to initial any number of spaces from zero to all of the spaces, and your response will in no way affect your participation. We will only use the videotape in ways that you agree to. In any use of this videotape, your name would *not* be identified. If you do not initial any of the spaces below, the videotape will be destroyed.

(AS APPLICABLE)

- The videotape can be studied by the researcher for use in the study.

please initial: _____

FOR QUESTIONS ABOUT THE STUDY

- Appointment Contact: If you need to change your appointment, please contact (*insert name*) at (*insert phone number*).
- Questions, Concerns, or Complaints: *If you have any questions, concerns or complaints about this **research study**, its procedures, risks and benefits, or alternative courses of treatment, you should ask the Protocol Director. You may contact him/her now or later at (*insert name and phone number of Protocol Director*).
- Emergency Contact: *If you feel you have been **hurt by being a part of this study**, or need immediate assistance please contact (*insert name of Emergency Contact*) at (*insert Emergency Contact's phone number*) or (if applicable) the Faculty Sponsor, (*insert name of Faculty Sponsor*) at (*insert Faculty Sponsor's phone number*).
- Alternate Contact If you cannot reach the Protocol Director, please contact (*name*) at (*phone number and/or pager number*).
- Independent of the Research Team Contact: *If you are not satisfied with the manner in which this study is being conducted, or if you have any concerns, complaints, or general questions about the research or your rights as a research study subject, please contact the Stanford Institutional Review Board (IRB) to speak to an informed individual who is independent of the research team at (650)-723-2480 or toll free at 1-866-680-2906. Or write the Stanford IRB, Stanford University, MC 5579, Palo Alto, CA 94304 . In addition, please call the Stanford IRB at (650)-723-2480 or toll free at 1-866-680-2906 if you wish to speak to someone other than the research team or if you cannot reach the research team.

I have read the above description and give my consent for the use of the videotape or audiotape as indicated above.

(If consent is to be obtained from a legally authorized representative (e.g., parent(s), legal guardian or conservator), signature line(s) for representative must be included on the consent form, as well as a description of his/her authority to act for the subject.)

Signature of Legally Authorized Representative (Parent, Guardian or Conservator)	Date
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Signature of Legally Authorized Representative (Parent, Guardian or Conservator)	Date
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Representative's Authority to Act for Subject

Representative's Authority to Act for Subject

Recruitment Flyer to be used to assist colleagues in connecting me with students

Call for Volunteers:

Study: Barriers and Supports to Nontraditional-aged Adult Students' Success in Community College

I am Melissa Edwards – a Rutgers Graduate Student studying in the education department.

You are invited to participate in a study about how nontraditional-aged adult students experience several aspects of higher education in the community college setting. I hope you will be willing to help me learn more about this topic. I would like to talk to you about how about 4 hours of your time this semester will help me learn a great deal.

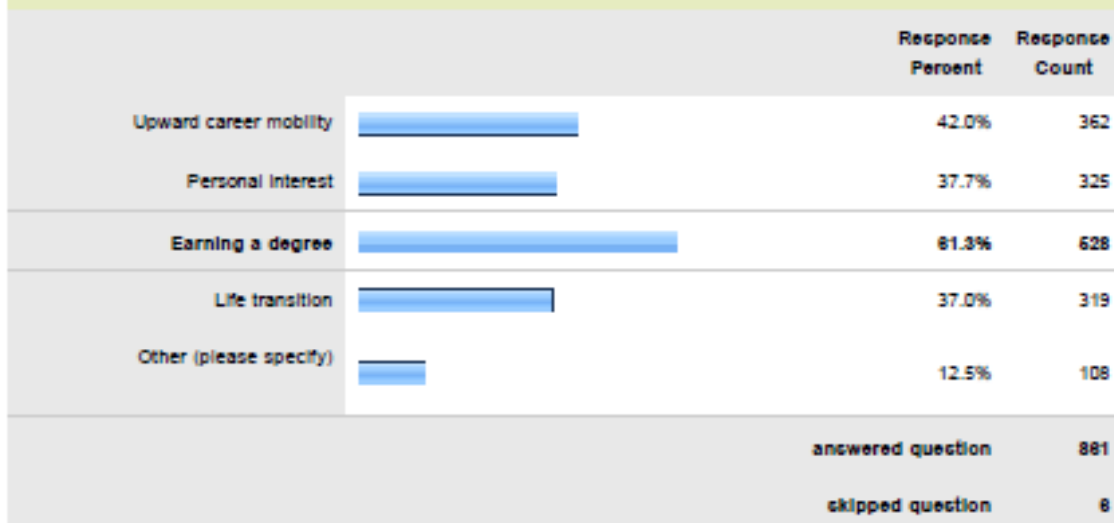
I can be reached in the following ways:
mccprofessorx@yahoo.com or
732-548-6000 ext. 3070.

Appendix F: Nontraditional-Age Adult-Students Survey

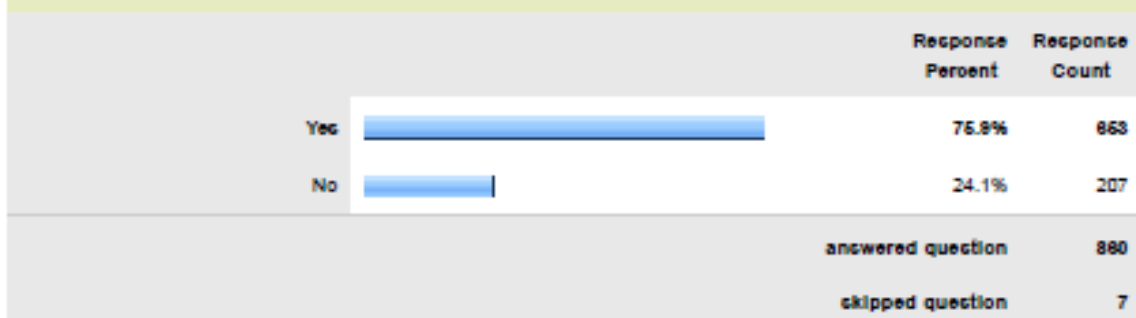
Nontraditional-aged Adult Students Survey






1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)







2. Have you previously attended college (including Middlesex)?





3. How many semesters have you attended community college (including Middlesex)?

		Response Percent	Response Count
1 - 2		21.1%	136
3 - 4		24.5%	158
4 or more		54.4%	361
answered question			646
skipped question			222



4. What do you expect to gain from attending college? (check all that apply)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Improved job security		53.3%	454
Professional growth		76.3%	641
Personal growth		71.6%	609
Other (please specify)		10.5%	89
answered question			861
skipped question			18



5. Are you currently attending Middlesex:

		Response Percent	Response Count
Full time (12 or more credits)		32.6%	275
Part time (1 to 11 credits)		67.4%	580
answered question			844
skipped question			23



6. Do you work outside the home?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		70.4%	687
No		29.6%	251
answered question			848
skipped question			18

7. Do you work:

		Response Percent	Response Count
Full time		71.8%	428
Part time		28.2%	168
answered question			696
skipped question			271



8. Do you have any work related issues (ex: schedule) that make it hard for you to be a college student?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		68.1%	384
No		33.9%	202
answered question			696
skipped question			271

10. Are you aware of and have you used any of the following Middlesex County College support services?

	Aware of	Used	Response Count
Academic Advising	70.1% (638)	58.9% (452)	768
Career counseling	86.8% (682)	23.9% (156)	654
Transfer help	88.4% (600)	20.2% (117)	579
Disability Services	96.1% (482)	6.7% (34)	507
Personal counseling	83.8% (468)	10.5% (51)	487
Childcare	86.8% (631)	4.4% (24)	548
Health Services	91.1% (421)	13.6% (63)	462
Help with developmental coursework at the Learning Center	90.2% (442)	16.3% (80)	490
Peer Tutoring	88.1% (488)	21.8% (123)	563
Financial Aid assistance	73.4% (612)	47.9% (334)	698
Library assistance	73.8% (467)	43.6% (270)	619
Clubs and organizations	91.8% (636)	14.7% (86)	584
answered question			804
skipped question			83

9. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?





		Response Percent	Response Count
Hours and times of work interfering with class time		77.8%	274
Workload at work prohibiting you from concentrating on school work		63.9%	225
Other (please specify)			84
answered question			362
skipped question			616

11. What three services would help you to be a more effective student? (choose only three)			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Academic Advising		58.7%	448
Career counseling		45.0%	338
Transfer help		27.7%	208
Disability Services		2.8%	21
Personal counseling		25.2%	189
Childcare		9.3%	70
Health Services		7.3%	55
Help with developmental coursework at the Learning Center		13.4%	101
Peer Tutoring		24.1%	181
Financial Aid assistance		42.1%	316
Library assistance		13.0%	98
Clubs and organizations		4.4%	33
Other (please specify)			54
answered question			761
skipped question			118





12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

	Response Count
	347
answered question	347
skipped question	620






13. How useful is your coursework for your current or future job?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Not useful		8.4%	68
Somewhat useful		23.3%	188
Useful		32.7%	264
Very Useful		35.6%	288
	answered question		808
	skipped question		68



14. How useful is your coursework on a personal level?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Not useful		3.6%	29
Somewhat useful		21.6%	175
Useful		40.3%	328
Very useful		34.5%	279
	answered question		808
	skipped question		68



15. How old are you?

		Response Percent	Response Count
25 - 27		17.5%	142
28 - 30		16.0%	130
30 - 35		19.4%	158
36 - 46		26.8%	210
46 +		21.3%	173
answered question			813
skipped question			64



16. Are you married?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		61.8%	418
No		48.4%	392
answered question			810
skipped question			67

17. Do you have children?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		68.7%	478
No		41.3%	336
answered question			814
skipped question			63

18. Are you interested in participating in a study that will ask you and several other nontraditional-aged adult college students to describe your experiences in community college?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Yes		80.5%	488
No		39.5%	319
answered question			808
skipped question			68

19. What is your email address?

	Response Count
	443
answered question	443
skipped question	424

Page 1, Q1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)		
1	Job stability	Mar 15, 2012 3:36 PM
2	learning english	Jan 21, 2012 11:08 AM
3	job loss	Dec 27, 2011 9:45 PM
4	to teach my children the value of education	Dec 14, 2011 12:58 PM
5	Post 9-11 GI Bill offered me a basic housing allowance on top of paying the tuition and books	Dec 13, 2011 11:01 AM
6	Get enough credits to obtain CPA license	Dec 11, 2011 5:35 PM
7	Opportunities and job security in the current field I am pursuing	Dec 10, 2011 9:11 PM
8	networking and other opportunities	Dec 10, 2011 12:31 PM
9	Felt I was passed over for a promotion w/out the degree	Dec 10, 2011 12:27 PM
10	learn the English language	Dec 9, 2011 10:40 AM
11	all of the above.	Dec 9, 2011 12:21 AM
12	change of a career from the fashion industry to medical	Dec 8, 2011 9:00 PM
13	exercise to the body is like learning for the mind	Dec 8, 2011 6:50 PM
14	The current economic climate for the most part forces you to have a degree if you want to live any sort of civilized lifestyle.	Dec 8, 2011 5:59 PM
15	Need to take pre- requisites to enter into a 2nd BSN program.	Dec 8, 2011 5:04 PM
16	I have longed to earn a college degree for sometime, but did not have the opportunity.	Dec 8, 2011 4:15 PM
17	Possible career change requiring prerequisite courses.	Dec 8, 2011 2:32 PM
18	Enhance my credentials and improve the opportunity of getting a job	Dec 8, 2011 11:43 AM
19	I am a traditional-aged student. I attained my B.A. from Ramapo College at the age of 22. I continue to work in the Social Services and I am expanding my knowledge.	Nov 29, 2011 5:34 PM
20	divorce	Nov 26, 2011 2:39 PM
21	I have a B.Com, Marketing Option degree from University of Nairobi, Kenya (1997) plus an MBA, Accounting, Montclair State University (2005). I just wanted to do something different, a science oriented program, probably Biochem	Oct 29, 2011 5:30 PM
22	Change of career path	Oct 28, 2011 10:56 AM
23	Im a Mail Carrier who was hurt on the job, I'm still working with limitations. I didn't want to go out on total disability, so I decided to go to college get a degree and then change my career	Oct 27, 2011 5:47 PM

Page 1, Q1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)		
24	require by connoco-philips for plant technician position	Oct 26, 2011 11:30 PM
25	to improve my english	Oct 24, 2011 5:03 PM
26	Lost my job	Oct 21, 2011 7:13 AM
27	use my Post 911 GI Bill from the military	Oct 20, 2011 4:34 PM
28	laid off from my job, need further education to be marketable in job market	Oct 19, 2011 11:57 PM
29	was laid off and given the opportunity of a tuition waiver	Oct 19, 2011 1:17 PM
30	completed AAS/RDH several years ago, finishing pre-req's for dental school	Oct 19, 2011 9:59 AM
31	I was laid off from a company called Bellcore (research company for all Baby Bell companies, i.e. NJ Bell, Bell Atlantic, Nynex, etc.). Baby Bell companies merged...i.e. Nynex and Bell Atlantic became Verizon, AT & T is now SBC (Southern Bell Communications), etc. Bellcore became Telcordia Technologies and because of all of the mergers, ended up being a technology co, lost money and tons of people are gone now.	Oct 18, 2011 8:38 PM
32	Military	Oct 18, 2011 6:12 PM
33	to fulfill a life goal	Oct 18, 2011 6:09 PM
34	was laid off from my job so I decided to change careers	Oct 18, 2011 4:58 PM
35	career change	Oct 18, 2011 4:30 PM
36	Lost my job 2 years ago & thought it would be a great time to go back to school	Oct 18, 2011 4:28 PM
37	I want a better job, and want to be a better example to my daughters.	Oct 18, 2011 3:48 PM
38	Update my skills for a better paid job to take care of my 3 young children. I have also changed careers, so this certainly means to get more education in the field as an Educator.	Oct 18, 2011 3:37 PM
39	I currently have a very physically demanding job (cook). I am 49 and single and responsible for my own financial well being. I needed to think about what I could do when I could no longer do the job I am doing, at the same monetary rate.	Oct 10, 2011 1:43 PM
40	Education & job skill, to gain better financial mean and help my children obtain higher education	Oct 6, 2011 10:16 AM
41	Divorce	Oct 5, 2011 10:52 PM
42	career change	Oct 4, 2011 1:18 PM
43	thirst for education	Oct 4, 2011 9:55 AM
44	earning credits to put towards my BSN degree	Oct 2, 2011 12:33 AM
45	changing career	Oct 1, 2011 4:11 AM

Page 1, Q1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)		
46	Requested to take class by my employer	Sep 29, 2011 4:16 PM
47	I want to earn more money.	Sep 29, 2011 3:51 PM
48	Injured in car accident, and must learn new job skills since I cannot be a chef anymore.	Sep 29, 2011 1:15 PM
49	for my future family	Sep 29, 2011 10:47 AM
50	career change	Sep 29, 2011 9:06 AM
51	divorce, need to support myself....was not prepared to	Sep 28, 2011 8:21 AM
52	More \$\$	Sep 28, 2011 1:26 AM
53	Sick of corporate America	Sep 27, 2011 10:02 AM
54	Career change	Sep 27, 2011 6:56 AM
55	Many reasons caused me to re-enroll as an adult. I needed to work 70+ hours per week for 2 years straight to afford to live. Retail seemed like my only skill-set. I felt that a degree would help me change careers. I was given the opportunity for tuition reimbursement my first semester back; this prompted me to go back sooner than later. Now I am currently underemployed and am taking the opportunity to try to earn my degree more quickly.	Sep 26, 2011 5:17 PM
56	When I retire from my current job I want to do something good.	Sep 26, 2011 4:00 PM
57	ability for the promotion	Sep 25, 2011 1:35 PM
58	career change	Sep 25, 2011 11:37 AM
59	I enrolled to college so I can become a better student and so that I don't have to take these classes when I graduate from high school and go to college.	Sep 24, 2011 8:25 PM
60	Laid off from previous job. Needed to make a career change.	Sep 24, 2011 12:36 AM
61	need for better job	Sep 23, 2011 10:32 PM
62	I want to improve my english because I have an autistic child and I have to talk a lot with the teacher and therapist	Sep 23, 2011 3:28 PM
63	Besides history, also have taken various language courses in preparation for international travel.	Sep 23, 2011 3:26 PM
64	the technical and emotional support of my fiancée	Sep 23, 2011 2:52 PM
65	I wanted to learn more about myself	Sep 23, 2011 7:41 AM
66	I needed one last class to complete my certification	Sep 22, 2011 9:50 PM
67	set a good example for my children	Sep 22, 2011 8:51 PM
68	Future Job Security to take care of my family	Sep 22, 2011 7:17 PM

Page 1, Q1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)		
69	...pursuing my dream to become a nurse	Sep 22, 2011 6:35 PM
70	Learn a profession that is in demand and pays well.	Sep 22, 2011 3:18 PM
71	wanted to be positive role model for my children	Sep 22, 2011 1:07 PM
72	Injury from overseas deployment	Sep 22, 2011 12:08 PM
73	Brain Injury	Sep 22, 2011 9:30 AM
74	I have my BA in Art History. I would like to get my master's in Art Therapy. Before I can apply to art therapy programs I need 12-15 credits in psych courses and 15-18 in studio art courses. As an undergrad I did not fulfill those requirements so I am doing it at MCC so I can apply to grad school.	Sep 22, 2011 8:41 AM
75	wanting to excel	Sep 22, 2011 8:38 AM
76	My wife just graduated with 2 degrees from Middlesex	Sep 21, 2011 10:45 PM
77	An example for my Children	Sep 21, 2011 9:30 PM
78	higher position	Sep 21, 2011 8:46 PM
79	Unemployment	Sep 21, 2011 8:15 PM
80	post 9-11 bill and earning a degree	Sep 21, 2011 6:14 PM
81	unhappy with my career at the time	Sep 21, 2011 5:22 PM
82	Currently Unemployed - unable to find employment without a degree	Sep 21, 2011 5:15 PM
83	desire to achieve a degree	Sep 21, 2011 5:14 PM
84	Different career path	Sep 21, 2011 4:43 PM
85	Want to start my own business	Sep 21, 2011 3:45 PM
86	Equal opportunity for myself, towards younger generations.	Sep 21, 2011 3:44 PM
87	Never completed college	Sep 21, 2011 3:04 PM
88	I have a bachelors in another field that no longer suits me. I am currently pursuing a new career path	Sep 21, 2011 2:47 PM
89	Be a good role model for my children	Sep 21, 2011 2:43 PM
90	Get a better job and finance school expenses in Africa.	Sep 21, 2011 2:41 PM
91	Earning a degree has always been a life long goal of mine	Sep 21, 2011 2:25 PM
92	loss of job	Sep 21, 2011 2:23 PM
93	job related training/program	Sep 21, 2011 1:55 PM

Page 1, Q1. What are some of the factors that caused you to enroll in college? (check all that apply)		
94	broke my wrist at work so I had to change my profession	Sep 21, 2011 1:54 PM
95	set an example	Sep 21, 2011 1:42 PM
96	career change	Sep 21, 2011 1:07 PM
97	Tuition wavier program	Sep 21, 2011 12:57 PM
98	I am presently collect unemployment and saw this as an opportunity to learn a new skill set.	Sep 21, 2011 12:47 PM
99	pursuing another degree. First degree in Journalism when I was in my 20's.	Sep 21, 2011 12:38 PM
100	career change	Sep 21, 2011 12:14 PM
101	The economy has made it hard to obtain a job with my MS so I am taking classes to obtain my RN	Sep 21, 2011 11:57 AM
102	The, however unlikely, possibility of meeting a woman.	Sep 21, 2011 11:52 AM
103	New requirements for job	Sep 21, 2011 11:48 AM
104	Career change	Sep 21, 2011 11:47 AM
105	experincing multiple job losses since 2006	Sep 21, 2011 11:30 AM
106	Laid-off from a company specific job. Needed additional skills to acquire another job.	Sep 21, 2011 11:25 AM
107	Foreign lawyer with Interest to work in legal field again.	Sep 21, 2011 11:18 AM
108	unemployed expanding my job search	Sep 21, 2011 10:48 AM

Page 2, Q4. What do you expect to gain from attending college? (check all that apply)		
1	Financial Improvement/ Financial stability	Jan 12, 2012 3:57 PM
2	career change	Dec 27, 2011 9:46 PM
3	Improved Income	Dec 14, 2011 6:21 PM
4	A college degree	Dec 13, 2011 10:48 PM
5	start my own business	Dec 13, 2011 5:37 PM
6	Academic acceptance	Dec 12, 2011 12:54 PM
7	get CPA license	Dec 11, 2011 5:36 PM
8	Professional connections	Dec 10, 2011 9:13 PM
9	all of the above.	Dec 9, 2011 12:22 AM
10	feels good learning something new, learning what others have learned	Dec 8, 2011 6:51 PM
11	Improved Self Esteem	Dec 8, 2011 6:26 PM
12	My credit courses to move onto an accelerated BSN program	Dec 8, 2011 5:05 PM
13	Career change	Dec 8, 2011 2:32 PM
14	Obtain well paid job with benefits	Dec 8, 2011 11:44 AM
15	It started out as a means to an end, to become a teacher, but I love learning and I think the professors at Middlesex are fantastic, a big part of why I love it now	Dec 8, 2011 11:32 AM
16	security	Dec 8, 2011 11:20 AM
17	A job in a new career	Dec 8, 2011 9:52 AM
18	Access to a better, higher paying, selection of jobs	Dec 8, 2011 8:11 AM
19	job skills	Dec 8, 2011 4:07 AM
20	transfer	Nov 8, 2011 2:06 PM
21	Associates degree	Nov 3, 2011 12:19 PM
22	required by the company for plant technician job	Oct 26, 2011 11:32 PM
23	social Interactions	Oct 25, 2011 8:26 AM
24	find a job	Oct 23, 2011 6:22 PM
25	Potential career change	Oct 20, 2011 8:11 PM
26	A degree in Education	Oct 19, 2011 11:58 PM
27	job eligibility	Oct 19, 2011 4:26 PM

Page 2, Q4. What do you expect to gain from attending college? (check all that apply)		
28	new and promising career	Oct 19, 2011 1:18 PM
29	Improved employability	Oct 19, 2011 11:06 AM
30	Provide a better lifestyle to my children.	Oct 18, 2011 9:00 PM
31	more confidence	Oct 18, 2011 8:12 PM
32	A career that I have always wanted.	Oct 18, 2011 4:01 PM
33	Social Networking to find employment, a higher degree than I have now, and to keep updated on the technology of the current generation and generations to come. Also to keep up my personal interest on continuous learning no matter what subject it is. I prefer to be in a classroom setting with other classmates than an on-line class. I feel the need of importance to interact with others and learn from others in personal growth.	Oct 18, 2011 3:44 PM
34	Fulfilling my dream	Oct 5, 2011 10:53 PM
35	feeling of completion and satisfaction	Oct 4, 2011 9:55 AM
36	a new career in psychology	Sep 29, 2011 1:15 PM
37	new career	Sep 28, 2011 2:25 PM
38	Career change	Sep 27, 2011 6:57 AM
39	I am aware that I was previously making more money than most workers in the same position are usually paid. Now that I am unemployed at a difficult time in economic history, I hope that a degree will justify my request to make the same amount of money in my next professional position.	Sep 26, 2011 5:19 PM
40	my personal self satisfaction	Sep 25, 2011 2:06 PM
41	prerequisite completion	Sep 25, 2011 11:38 AM
42	job satisfaction, mobility	Sep 25, 2011 11:00 AM
43	Improve in the subject in which I am attending	Sep 24, 2011 8:26 PM
44	a new career after I retire	Sep 24, 2011 11:18 AM
45	Another career that will take me into retirement	Sep 24, 2011 12:37 AM
46	money	Sep 23, 2011 6:26 PM
47	This is something I wish I would have had the opportunity to do when I was young. I have been fortunate though, I am well rounded individual who has live life to the fullest despite not having a degree. I have learn and grown about the corporate world from others and thus have had the opportunity to live a fair life even in addition to instilling great values in my 19 year old son who currently attends Rutgers	Sep 23, 2011 4:22 PM
48	ability to communicate in other languages	Sep 23, 2011 3:27 PM

Page 2, Q4. What do you expect to gain from attending college? (check all that apply)		
49	achieve a degree	Sep 23, 2011 11:58 AM
50	my daughter is 17 and begin college herself at brookdale...	Sep 23, 2011 9:30 AM
51	prerequisites for graduate work	Sep 23, 2011 12:08 AM
52	Financial Independence and an ADN degree	Sep 22, 2011 6:36 PM
53	Increased earning capability	Sep 22, 2011 3:19 PM
54	I doing it for my satisfaction	Sep 22, 2011 10:32 AM
55	career change	Sep 22, 2011 10:05 AM
56	Memory of past learnings	Sep 22, 2011 9:30 AM
57	Personal satisfaction	Sep 22, 2011 9:01 AM
58	career change	Sep 22, 2011 8:41 AM
59	Finding a career I enjoy	Sep 22, 2011 1:18 AM
60	Receive an AAS Degree	Sep 22, 2011 12:03 AM
61	additional income	Sep 21, 2011 10:45 PM
62	monetary growth	Sep 21, 2011 10:14 PM
63	satisfy prereqs	Sep 21, 2011 9:38 PM
64	motivation	Sep 21, 2011 9:31 PM
65	Nursing Degree	Sep 21, 2011 4:58 PM
66	Different career	Sep 21, 2011 4:44 PM
67	A career which offers personal satisfaction.	Sep 21, 2011 3:56 PM
68	Intellectual and social status.	Sep 21, 2011 3:45 PM
69	Gain technical knowledge	Sep 21, 2011 3:00 PM
70	New career path	Sep 21, 2011 2:47 PM
71	As a child of special education I programed to believe that my only options in this life were to learn a trad	Sep 21, 2011 2:29 PM
72	better degree	Sep 21, 2011 1:56 PM
73	New career	Sep 21, 2011 1:50 PM
74	self-worth	Sep 21, 2011 1:42 PM
75	new career	Sep 21, 2011 12:57 PM

Page 2, Q4. What do you expect to gain from attending college? (check all that apply)		
76	a new career	Sep 21, 2011 12:47 PM
77	Career options as I get older.	Sep 21, 2011 12:41 PM
78	prerequisites	Sep 21, 2011 12:28 PM
79	Did not want to disparage previously obtained college credits.	Sep 21, 2011 12:25 PM
80	opportunity to work in school setting after retirement	Sep 21, 2011 11:41 AM
81	hopefully additional income & as a role model to encourage my daughter to attend college	Sep 21, 2011 11:35 AM
82	Too long to explain but summing it up: Doing it over the right way and fulfilling what should have been.	Sep 21, 2011 11:33 AM
83	networking opportunities in my chosen field of study after or before graduation	Sep 21, 2011 11:32 AM
84	A job with a decent salary.	Sep 21, 2011 11:26 AM
85	transition from part-time work to full time work (with benefits)	Sep 21, 2011 11:16 AM
86	a job as a nurse	Sep 21, 2011 11:14 AM
87	getting most from my life.	Sep 21, 2011 11:10 AM
88	New career in new field	Sep 21, 2011 11:05 AM
89	Career Change	Sep 21, 2011 10:50 AM

Page 4, Q8. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?		
1	taking care of my daughter	Jun 25, 2012 4:54 PM
2	Small staff size makes it difficult to make schedule changes	Jan 16, 2012 11:04 PM
3	Workload taking up time from completing assignments and studying.	Jan 10, 2012 2:10 PM
4	Availability of needed classes limited	Dec 20, 2011 5:45 PM
5	& sometimes life just gets in the way :)	Dec 16, 2011 4:43 PM
6	I have to work extra hours in order to accomplish my duties	Dec 15, 2011 3:26 PM
7	kids at home	Dec 15, 2011 3:01 PM
8	Talking care of my children interfering with school	Dec 15, 2011 8:27 AM
9	lost of license	Dec 13, 2011 9:50 PM
10	Travel time	Dec 13, 2011 3:02 PM
11	work and family responsibilities as well as the volume of research assignment necessary for legal research	Dec 13, 2011 1:47 AM
12	Parking is still an issue at 5 pm on campus	Dec 12, 2011 5:21 PM
13	class times limited to nights and weekends	Dec 10, 2011 12:33 PM
14	have a very young daughter	Dec 9, 2011 1:10 AM
15	The hardest part for me is not being able to get answers when I have questions or problems with certain aspects of school. Often times certain departments close at 4 or 5 o'clock and they aren't open on weekends. Due to working in the daytime, it is hard to deal with any problems that arise as a student.	Dec 8, 2011 6:11 PM
16	schedule standard but limits me to night/weekend classes	Dec 8, 2011 3:32 PM
17	TRAFFIC	Dec 8, 2011 12:35 PM
18	Daughter (7yrs)	Dec 8, 2011 9:49 AM
19	children and activities	Nov 9, 2011 4:01 AM
20	cannot take as many classes as I would like to because of work	Nov 6, 2011 2:23 PM
21	there are not a lot of classes offered on-line	Nov 3, 2011 8:39 AM
22	I subcontract for a delivery company, and at times my working hours can be very challenging. I leave home at 3.30 a.m, twice a week, 5.00 am the rest of the week and drive an average of 1200 miles every week.	Oct 29, 2011 5:35 PM
23	Children	Oct 25, 2011 4:47 PM
24	hours and times of work interfering with study time	Oct 24, 2011 8:20 PM

Page 4, Q8. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?		
25	not enough time to rest	Oct 24, 2011 1:55 PM
26	Combined stress level between work and school; lack of sleep due to late work hours.	Oct 22, 2011 12:31 AM
27	I also have a part time job	Oct 21, 2011 2:39 PM
28	3 kids, 2 of them in school age and a newborn baby..	Oct 20, 2011 11:28 AM
29	Dealing with personal home disaster and personal business due to job loss	Oct 20, 2011 12:02 AM
30	FINDING THE TIME TO STUDY WITHOUT GOING TO BED AT MIDNIGHT	Oct 19, 2011 2:05 PM
31	not sufficient classes available online at moc	Oct 19, 2011 12:11 PM
32	required classes no available to me when I need them	Oct 19, 2011 10:45 AM
33	I can take all the classes that I'd like to because I have to work	Oct 18, 2011 10:51 PM
34	The college could offer more evening classes esp. in media arts area	Oct 18, 2011 10:29 PM
35	Support System is Lacking	Oct 18, 2011 8:33 PM
36	family life	Oct 18, 2011 7:10 PM
37	Family, juggling family, work and school	Oct 18, 2011 6:45 PM
38	40hrs a week @work + 12hrs a week in school + homework + wife and child	Oct 18, 2011 6:15 PM
39	Both	Oct 18, 2011 5:20 PM
40	many responsibilities	Oct 18, 2011 4:12 PM
41	Workload as a single, FULL time parent, and not getting paid for the job is certainly faced with lots of challenges and unexpected situations..	Oct 18, 2011 4:06 PM
42	workload and kids make it challenging to concentrate on school work	Oct 18, 2011 3:54 PM
43	commute is very far	Oct 10, 2011 10:54 AM
44	Exp. difficulty in pursuing my original goal due to availability of class schedule and program design/misleading to part-time student	Oct 6, 2011 10:56 AM
45	young children at home	Oct 5, 2011 11:01 PM
46	Not being able to obtain steady work with insurance.	Oct 3, 2011 10:56 AM
47	It is hard to go from work to school and focus completely sometimes.	Sep 28, 2011 4:51 PM
48	not making enough money. not being able to work more hours. right now I work 30 hours.	Sep 27, 2011 8:09 PM
49	I also have a husband and a 7 year old daughter	Sep 27, 2011 10:43 AM

Page 4, Q8. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?

50	Core classes that are only offered during the day.	Sep 27, 2011 7:01 AM
51	It is difficult to concentrate on school when you know that you have a house to maintain, bills to worry about paying, and a job that requires attention to detail.	Sep 26, 2011 5:23 PM
52	lack of funding	Sep 26, 2011 2:22 PM
53	I take public transportation and the commute is hard from work.	Sep 26, 2011 9:26 AM
54	I do not drive as well.	Sep 23, 2011 8:28 PM
55	anxiety from balancing work, school and other lives	Sep 23, 2011 2:58 PM
56	Single parent of 2	Sep 23, 2011 1:53 PM
57	Limited study and homework time	Sep 23, 2011 1:13 PM
58	family responsibilities	Sep 23, 2011 12:02 PM
59	A fluctuating work schedule that makes it difficult to form a routine with course work both on campus and at home; especially with my online classes. Similarly, school interferes with work, as I feel stretched thin and find my attention diverted. Also I am not able to work as many hours as I want/need to, thus causing financial stress which weighs back on both ends.	Sep 23, 2011 3:32 AM
60	kids	Sep 22, 2011 9:52 PM
61	children that require nurture and time	Sep 22, 2011 8:56 PM
62	Full Time worker & Parent	Sep 22, 2011 7:51 PM
63	Child Care	Sep 22, 2011 7:21 PM
64	Hard to make time to study and work.	Sep 22, 2011 3:24 PM
65	Too many work hours not giving me enough time to study and complete homework.	Sep 22, 2011 9:30 AM
66	feeling inferior	Sep 22, 2011 9:03 AM
67	trying to fit work school and still have time to do home things like cook laundry ect	Sep 22, 2011 7:47 AM
68	workload from school, full time work, work in the home - general lack of quality time in the home.	Sep 22, 2011 12:11 AM
69	My commute to/from work is 3.5 to 4.0 hrs each day - work a full 8 hour day on top of this leaves little study time available. I can afford to take only two classes each semester - so this is a long term goal	Sep 21, 2011 10:51 PM
70	financially, it is so overwhelming and at times impossible to plan a next meal, work to make enough money and still maintain school.	Sep 21, 2011 9:11 PM
71	Teachers don't take in consideration that adults have more responsibilities than	Sep 21, 2011 8:52 PM

Page 4, Q8. What are some of the work related issues that cause challenges for you as a college student?		
	students who live on campus or at home . Adult students that work have less time to meet deadlines	
72	juggling family, job & school responsibilities lend to less time for dedicated study time	Sep 21, 2011 8:34 PM
73	learning disability	Sep 21, 2011 8:18 PM
74	College hours do not go long enough in the evening, tutoring, library etc...	Sep 21, 2011 7:51 PM
75	getting used to college life	Sep 21, 2011 6:16 PM
76	single mother of 2	Sep 21, 2011 5:50 PM
77	I also have a daughter.	Sep 21, 2011 4:33 PM
78	My boss says if I want the job I have to keep it by coming to work the hours he gave me, not the hrs I need.	Sep 21, 2011 3:50 PM
79	I'm also a single parent.	Sep 21, 2011 2:40 PM
80	3 work loads - home overhead(this does not go away), work and school	Sep 21, 2011 1:55 PM
81	I am a director, so travelling for business can get in the way as well. Just part of the process.	Sep 21, 2011 12:46 PM
82	Meetings that take place after typical business hours make it hard to attend an in-classroom class on a regular basis. On-line classes fit much better into my schedule.	Sep 21, 2011 12:25 PM
83	Hours, responsibilities, travel required by work. However, one must just deal with it and balance accordingly.	Sep 21, 2011 11:51 AM
84	On-campus testing requirements difficult to work into schedule at work	Sep 21, 2011 11:46 AM

Page 4, Q11. What three services would help you to be a more effective student? (choose only three)		
1	If financial aid would be more supportive	Jan 10, 2012 2:10 PM
2	none	Jan 5, 2012 11:42 AM
3	how to use the unuser friendly Campus Cruiser!!!	Dec 16, 2011 4:43 PM
4	more availability of office hours of professors	Dec 13, 2011 1:47 AM
5	better quality of registration and academic advising (registration assistance very bad)	Dec 12, 2011 12:56 PM
6	doing fine,	Dec 8, 2011 6:54 PM
7	more online classes	Dec 8, 2011 9:36 AM
8	Work-study-life balance required seminar	Dec 8, 2011 2:22 AM
9	I don't really know the difference between advising and counseling	Oct 26, 2011 1:35 PM
10	Get more computers	Oct 26, 2011 9:44 AM
11	and nothing else	Oct 23, 2011 6:29 PM
12	one on one tutoring for academics when a computer is needed	Oct 20, 2011 6:56 PM
13	more Saturday and evening classes.	Oct 19, 2011 10:38 PM
14	less reasons to have to come to college other than class (aleks)	Oct 19, 2011 9:17 PM
15	Peer tutoring would help if it wouldnt be during my working hours, weekend tutoring would be great	Oct 19, 2011 2:05 PM
16	More consistent career guidance	Oct 19, 2011 7:53 AM
17	None	Oct 18, 2011 11:28 PM
18	wifi in all campus buildings	Oct 18, 2011 10:12 PM
19	Better support system and more time in the day	Oct 18, 2011 8:33 PM
20	I'm not sure - maybe more hours in a day.	Oct 18, 2011 8:21 PM
21	Excuse me, this question is beyond 3 choices of what I believe to be a more effective (successful) student. There are many factors and variables in directing a student of how to go about the pre to post steps to be a college student. So far with my experience these groups of services have a grave lack of communication between their service on who does what and where to direct the student. Instead they have you going in circles to each group, which takes the student unnecessary time just to get answers and fulfill the required deadlines of the college.	Oct 18, 2011 4:06 PM
22	Not having to worry about people in Registration losing paperwork!	Oct 18, 2011 4:03 PM
23	n/a	Oct 18, 2011 5:33 AM

Page 4, Q11. What three services would help you to be a more effective student? (choose only three)		
24	book and supply credits at the book store	Oct 10, 2011 1:50 PM
25	A greater support and guidance in the first initial semester, even beyond would make a better outcome for me as an who never attend college before	Oct 6, 2011 10:56 AM
26	Clubs for single parents	Oct 5, 2011 11:01 PM
27	More focus on the student and less on the bell curve which is misused.	Oct 3, 2011 10:56 AM
28	none	Oct 2, 2011 12:39 AM
29	time management	Sep 29, 2011 11:13 AM
30	more flexibility in class scheduling	Sep 25, 2011 11:03 AM
31	Many assistance offered is not available during the times I am on campus..	Sep 23, 2011 8:28 PM
32	I only required Academic Advising to approve courses I audit.	Sep 23, 2011 3:31 PM
33	actual assistance from the financial aid staff	Sep 23, 2011 2:58 PM
34	support group or something like that for middle-age students	Sep 23, 2011 8:15 AM
35	Consultation with the faculty	Sep 22, 2011 3:25 PM
36	Besides what I've already used, help with getting ready to transfer to graduate school, and get ready for the GRE.	Sep 22, 2011 3:24 PM
37	More classes at night and during the weekends	Sep 22, 2011 9:58 AM
38	Honors program	Sep 22, 2011 8:44 AM
39	more night classes and saturday studio art courses	Sep 22, 2011 8:43 AM
40	office time from adjunct faculty with core classes	Sep 22, 2011 12:11 AM
41	No CHEATING by other students in Class	Sep 22, 2011 12:06 AM
42	Offer more weekend courses late Saturday afternoon, so I can take more classes. Most classes are offered on Sat morning	Sep 21, 2011 9:35 PM
43	I have a clear idea of what it is I am going to do career wise, but financially now and educationally after MCC, I am nervous	Sep 21, 2011 9:11 PM
44	More support for the Adult learner, in every aspect	Sep 21, 2011 8:04 PM
45	None of the above	Sep 21, 2011 4:45 PM
46	As an older student I bring academic studies a wealth of life experience	Sep 21, 2011 3:00 PM
47	The school seems to help as much as it possibly can.	Sep 21, 2011 1:55 PM
48	keep campus cruiser updated	Sep 21, 2011 12:48 PM

Page 4, Q11. What three services would help you to be a more effective student? (choose only three)		
49	Academic advising for all areas not just the one you are studying. ie, studying dietitian, but no one to advise on how to take science classes from an order of success process.	Sep 21, 2011 12:46 PM
50	Services specifically geared towards returning adult students.	Sep 21, 2011 12:37 PM
51	More Independent Study courses, more courses utilizing SNAP testing environment and structured like Lane Liefert's C105 IN course, Tuesday HW not being due on Thurs, since I take a Wed. course, and if ALL professors would make full use of Campus Cruiser as do Prof Liefert and Prof Nickerson.	Sep 21, 2011 11:46 AM
52	Job placement services for students over 40.	Sep 21, 2011 11:30 AM
53	better veterans services	Sep 21, 2011 11:09 AM
54	More online classes	Sep 21, 2011 11:08 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
1	I just haven't found the academic advising to be of much help. When using them in the past, I was transferred from person to person several times trying to get transfer credits evaluated. Not an easy process by any means.	Mar 15, 2012 3:39 PM
2	Help using Campus Cruiser	Feb 1, 2012 2:47 PM
3	If (like me) I have a bachelor from my country and I would like to validate it here and pursuit for a master or higher studies based on it.	Jan 30, 2012 2:01 AM
4	Course Work	Jan 25, 2012 11:35 PM
5	It should be easier to apply for MCC & easier to apply for financial aid. I wasted 1 whole year.. having trouble with both application processes.. that was ridiculous!	Jan 12, 2012 4:18 PM
6	na	Dec 25, 2011 1:21 PM
7	MCC has offered seminars to adult students, ie-studying tips for adult students, however they are offered during regular business hours. Most adults work Full-time days.....	Dec 20, 2011 5:45 PM
8	Scholarships	Dec 20, 2011 12:19 PM
9	help using Campus Cruiser	Dec 19, 2011 11:55 PM
10	Work/school/home life balance counseling	Dec 17, 2011 3:11 PM
11	LOL. how to sign up for classes on the Campus Cruiser. I don't feel the website is user friendly at all!!!	Dec 16, 2011 4:43 PM
12	detailed prerequisites	Dec 15, 2011 3:26 PM
13	advising	Dec 15, 2011 3:01 PM
14	Registering for class is when I found out that some schools will not accept some credits, that I would need to speak to a career counseling or a transfer advisor.	Dec 15, 2011 1:22 PM
15	do not enroll unless you are willing to sacrifice as much time as a full time job. Even if you are taking one class it will require alot of study time and dedication.	Dec 14, 2011 8:02 PM
16	Help using Campus Cruiser	Dec 14, 2011 6:26 PM
17	Career Planning	Dec 13, 2011 10:50 PM
18	No comment.	Dec 13, 2011 9:50 PM
19	campus cruiser	Dec 13, 2011 8:18 PM
20	under Shared files, I believe that the professor should add information pertaining to the class. For example, handout, or review sheet. This would be helpful.	Dec 13, 2011 4:09 PM
21	not sure	Dec 13, 2011 4:05 PM
22	knowledge of the child care center and after hours child care	Dec 13, 2011 2:39 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
23	More information on on-line courses	Dec 13, 2011 11:04 AM
24	office hours of support staff campus cruiser has been a problem you thing an assignment has been send only to find the next day of next time that you log on that it has not been received. very frustrating.	Dec 13, 2011 1:47 AM
25	campus cruiser	Dec 12, 2011 8:21 PM
26	transfer programs	Dec 12, 2011 4:07 PM
27	Awareness of services available	Dec 12, 2011 12:46 PM
28	STUDY SKILLS, TIME MANAGEMENT,	Dec 12, 2011 10:14 AM
29	work study	Dec 11, 2011 8:47 PM
30	easier access to wireless	Dec 11, 2011 5:37 PM
31	Personal Counseling, and Peer Tutoring during evening hours	Dec 11, 2011 2:32 PM
32	Career Counselling	Dec 10, 2011 9:17 PM
33	Best strategies for balancing work, family & school. How best to select classes and prepare for them in advance.	Dec 10, 2011 12:38 PM
34	career and jobsearch training. More class time online like live lectures.	Dec 9, 2011 8:15 PM
35	financial aid help	Dec 9, 2011 4:00 PM
36	Accessing the wireless network	Dec 9, 2011 11:48 AM
37	Help using Campus Cruiser	Dec 9, 2011 6:02 AM
38	definitely help with using Campus Cruiser	Dec 8, 2011 11:06 PM
39	help people to know what they want to be in life, or how to decide what is the best career for me.	Dec 8, 2011 10:41 PM
40	Career counseling	Dec 8, 2011 9:03 PM
41	I don't know	Dec 8, 2011 6:53 PM
42	There is a summer camp for school aged children. It is expensive. Affordable summer camp would be a huge help.	Dec 8, 2011 6:31 PM
43	I think ALL information regarding tutoring should be given to the student. I have been going to the school for four years now and there are still things I am not aware of in this regard. I have suffered because of that.	Dec 8, 2011 6:11 PM
44	help teach in a slow speed during the semester..	Dec 8, 2011 5:04 PM
45	accessing wireless network.	Dec 8, 2011 3:33 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
46	None	Dec 8, 2011 2:49 PM
47	While I am Internet savvy, some instruction on Campus Cruiser could be beneficial.	Dec 8, 2011 2:34 PM
48	Wireless network help	Dec 8, 2011 1:44 PM
49	Computer class, beacuse technology is changing rapidly.	Dec 8, 2011 1:30 PM
50	A better financial aid system which aids Students whom are parents attend college to better our careers. College is very expensive and getting a loan on top of the ones we might be paying for already would just add to debt we may currently have.	Dec 8, 2011 12:49 PM
51	FLEXIBLE CLASS SCHEDULE	Dec 8, 2011 12:35 PM
52	tutoring	Dec 8, 2011 12:04 PM
53	One office (central place) with a special advisor or counselor for students like use that can help us with all our concerns and questions. For example: Financial help, unemployed, transfer, work & study, etc....	Dec 8, 2011 11:52 AM
54	I believe help navigating the website will always be useful to people who are inexperienced with computers.	Dec 8, 2011 11:34 AM
55	office hours on the campus	Dec 8, 2011 11:22 AM
56	winter session classes. 95% of the classes are in the morning. That's not really fair for people like myself who work 9-5. Make more classes available in the evening for the winter session.	Dec 8, 2011 11:13 AM
57	A brush up course to prepare students that has been out of school for quit a few years.	Dec 8, 2011 11:08 AM
58	all information is available...help for Campus Cruiser use student can recive in Library...also any other help	Dec 8, 2011 10:15 AM
59	J	Dec 8, 2011 10:07 AM
60	There should be more math tutoring for the advanced classes. Offering more time management seminars.	Dec 8, 2011 9:59 AM
61	not sure	Dec 8, 2011 9:42 AM
62	N/A	Dec 8, 2011 9:32 AM
63	Accessing wireless network, study tips, transition from work force to student	Dec 8, 2011 7:19 AM
64	Although I didn't need it, one of my buddies (also nontraditional aged) wished he had known about the math tutoring earlier.	Dec 8, 2011 4:10 AM
65	Accessing wireless network would be extremely helpful. Would have found tips on using Campus Cruiser helpful, as well - figured it out myself, but would've	Dec 2, 2011 1:36 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

	liked direction/guidance when first enrolled.	
66	more choices of the classes	Dec 1, 2011 11:42 PM
67	As I do not consider myself to be a nontraditional-aged adult student and I have graduated from a four-year college and have used similar services and learned about various information for college students, I find it hard to identify something that I could further benefit from.	Nov 29, 2011 5:41 PM
68	campus cruise	Nov 9, 2011 4:01 AM
69	n/a	Nov 8, 2011 2:08 PM
70	help with getting email, maybe an orientation would help, a tour of the buildings and parking	Nov 6, 2011 2:23 PM
71	Independent study courses	Nov 5, 2011 10:45 AM
72	it is quite useful	Nov 4, 2011 10:49 AM
73	help with computers	Nov 3, 2011 11:07 AM
74	more computer help	Nov 3, 2011 8:39 AM
75	Free computer operating classes	Nov 2, 2011 1:42 PM
76	Career advising.	Oct 29, 2011 5:35 PM
77	I really think MCC does a great job of helping us non-traditional students.	Oct 29, 2011 2:14 PM
78	none	Oct 28, 2011 10:58 AM
79	help using Campus Cruiser	Oct 27, 2011 10:08 PM
80	entire campus should be wireless	Oct 27, 2011 10:01 PM
81	it is all very self explanatory as long as you take the time to read. At least in my opinion.	Oct 26, 2011 2:07 PM
82	Making the studies skills class elective, and more guidance	Oct 26, 2011 1:35 PM
83	The school is not networked like some of the other school and I understand that because it's just a community college but we've entered the era of smart phones. I think wireless networking is very important these days.	Oct 26, 2011 9:44 AM
84	help using MCC specific programs (ADAM, campus cruiser, etc.)	Oct 25, 2011 2:44 PM
85	easier access to instructions on applying for financial aid, child care for less than full time students in evening classes, actually having a computer help desk in order to get the wireless to work with access to the library databases.	Oct 25, 2011 8:32 AM
86	IDK	Oct 25, 2011 1:06 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
87	a broader spectrum to help older students returning to college - one such program (CARES program?) only applies to students already have a certain number of credits	Oct 24, 2011 8:20 PM
88	academic advisor	Oct 24, 2011 5:05 PM
89	accessing the wireless network,	Oct 24, 2011 1:27 PM
90	Longer library hours for people without the Internet at home.	Oct 24, 2011 12:02 PM
91	If all departments gives a clear constant answers. Information about what courses I have to complete to get a associate degree.	Oct 23, 2011 6:29 PM
92	learn to use computer	Oct 22, 2011 10:21 AM
93	Assistance in finding financial assistance to supplant income in order to work less and focus more on school.	Oct 22, 2011 12:31 AM
94	accessing the wireless network, and use of the printers.	Oct 21, 2011 4:45 PM
95	tutoring assistance	Oct 21, 2011 4:22 PM
96	I think having someone to talk to is a big help. Some of us work and take care of home and have no sanity or time outside that scope of life.	Oct 21, 2011 2:39 PM
97	Library help wifi access extended tutoring hours	Oct 20, 2011 8:15 PM
98	For those of us who attend classes during the day, tutors that can help where computer work is necessary.	Oct 20, 2011 6:56 PM
99	How to not feel Intimidate by the young students	Oct 20, 2011 3:37 PM
100	help using the campus cruiser website, particularly when trying upload homework files	Oct 20, 2011 1:29 PM
101	For starters; being an adult returning to school is difficult as it is with all the new technics and terminologies being used but I believe having a nontraditional-aged adult student give an insight of whats expected as we begin this journey would probably ease some of the frustrations/stress we face as newcomers. More availability or explanation on how to use Campus Cruiser and the resources available would be helpful also.	Oct 20, 2011 10:53 AM
102	I'm currently taking Pre Calculus and I have asked my professor at least three times already to grant me access to the online book, that has examples and tutoring and I haven't got anything. The same thing happend last semester. Having a web based tutoring system helps a lot since you won't have to travel to get the instruction	Oct 20, 2011 10:47 AM
103	Using one website for online courses regardless of the subject or professor	Oct 20, 2011 3:31 AM
104	more online courses	Oct 19, 2011 10:38 PM
105	flexible class time on weekends,	Oct 19, 2011 9:17 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
106	help using campus cruiser	Oct 19, 2011 8:30 PM
107	wireless network	Oct 19, 2011 8:03 PM
108	not sure	Oct 19, 2011 7:38 PM
109	I went through hoops with no help just to get registered for full time. Perhaps, someone to help me through that process including the financial aid would have been nice.	Oct 19, 2011 7:37 PM
110	how to use a calculator for advance math problems	Oct 19, 2011 6:59 PM
111	Accessing the wireless network, financial aid assistance	Oct 19, 2011 6:01 PM
112	Parking, because when your a real adult your schedule is tight and you can't afford to come early to find a parking spot	Oct 19, 2011 5:54 PM
113	accessing the wireless network	Oct 19, 2011 4:38 PM
114	Anything dealing with navigating the school's information via the computer.	Oct 19, 2011 2:54 PM
115	NONE	Oct 19, 2011 2:25 PM
116	wireless network, I have a problem accessing the wireless network. this service should be available at all hours and if it is im not aware of it?	Oct 19, 2011 2:05 PM
117	too many to mention but perhaps you should go to rutgers and check out what they are doing	Oct 19, 2011 1:21 PM
118	online courses. Middlesex hardly has any online courses even in basic classes available such as split maths, ex: mat 014 a and b.	Oct 19, 2011 12:11 PM
119	academic advising	Oct 19, 2011 12:05 PM
120	Free nontraditional orientation class(es).	Oct 19, 2011 11:08 AM
121	N/A	Oct 19, 2011 8:50 AM
122	Although we can take computer classes, something less formal and costly would be helpful.	Oct 19, 2011 7:53 AM
123	wireless network	Oct 18, 2011 11:43 PM
124	counseling	Oct 18, 2011 10:51 PM
125	accessing the wireless network	Oct 18, 2011 10:44 PM
126	help choosing select courses	Oct 18, 2011 10:07 PM
127	help with tutoring	Oct 18, 2011 10:02 PM
128	accessing wireless network all around campus	Oct 18, 2011 9:55 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
129	really can't think of anything... sure seems like info and help is readily available, and knowing where to look for it is pretty easy to figure out.	Oct 18, 2011 9:12 PM
130	Help using Campus Cruiser	Oct 18, 2011 9:03 PM
131	Help using the computer and navigating courses and being able to sit in class. I am a heavy set person and can't sit in a classroom because of the seats so I have to take my courses online.	Oct 18, 2011 8:57 PM
132	Campus Cruiser	Oct 18, 2011 8:45 PM
133	people my age have other things to worry about that youngsters do not, such as rent/mortgage, children's tuition, bills in general, and also sick and older parents. I just lost my dad sept 24, 2011 and can't focus on school.	Oct 18, 2011 8:43 PM
134	Campus Cruiser, accessing wireless networks, book rental	Oct 18, 2011 8:41 PM
135	How the transfer process works and what classes will be transferable to other universities. Many times I have seen my peers take courses at Middlesex and were ill advised. They took classes they didn't need and there fore wasted their time and money. I know how it feels because it has happened to me. It is very important for students to have a purpose for being in school. If they are attending courses aimlessly it creates a situation where they is no path to success. Academic advising and Career services should be mandatory for all students to ensure middlesex is doing its best to increase their success rate.	Oct 18, 2011 8:33 PM
136	I'm not sure I have an answer for this either.	Oct 18, 2011 8:21 PM
137	Universal system for college transcript verification.	Oct 18, 2011 8:14 PM
138	I've noticed that in general students older and younger need help accessing campus cruiser.	Oct 18, 2011 8:03 PM
139	how the whole college thing works. coming back into all this after many years is very challenging.	Oct 18, 2011 8:01 PM
140	More Online Courses	Oct 18, 2011 7:10 PM
141	generally how to gain access and get the help we need.(The where, when and how)	Oct 18, 2011 6:45 PM
142	none	Oct 18, 2011 6:14 PM
143	help using campus cruiser, a lot of people don't know that a lot of information is found on the website, they should be aware of the services that are available on campus, like printing.	Oct 18, 2011 5:04 PM
144	help with campus cruiser	Oct 18, 2011 5:00 PM
145	Help with financial aid in order to attend college	Oct 18, 2011 4:56 PM
146	nothing	Oct 18, 2011 4:32 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

147	WIFI	Oct 18, 2011 4:28 PM
148	Internet use	Oct 18, 2011 4:14 PM
149	your examples definitely and writing a paper.	Oct 18, 2011 4:12 PM
150	More help in navigating Campus Cruiser.	Oct 18, 2011 4:12 PM
151	please refer to #11 Other	Oct 18, 2011 4:06 PM
152	Wireless computing	Oct 18, 2011 3:44 PM
153	Accessing wireless network	Oct 18, 2011 3:36 PM
154	n/a	Oct 18, 2011 5:33 AM
155	None	Oct 10, 2011 2:59 PM
156	I have noticed on job postings excel is used often I would love to take more informative computer courses (workshop) that would not effect my GPA	Oct 10, 2011 1:50 PM
157	more online classes, not enough	Oct 10, 2011 10:54 AM
158	tutoring, one on one help, more detail explanation on what classes is needed for major.	Oct 10, 2011 5:51 AM
159	Professors being more in-tune with students that may work full-time. Programs offered (ex: stress and well-being) in the evenings so part-time students attending at night can feel a sense of belonging.	Oct 9, 2011 10:44 PM
160	Teachers	Oct 9, 2011 9:11 PM
161	more night classes	Oct 8, 2011 9:45 AM
162	advising of refresher course before placement testing and help with understanding college process.	Oct 6, 2011 10:56 AM
163	Work shops held in evening hours or on Saturday.	Oct 5, 2011 11:01 PM
164	Other ways to get information from academic advising, maybe emailing a question or phone call, I don't have the time during the day to wait in line to ask a question. More seminars during evening hours on adult education	Oct 4, 2011 2:33 PM
165	A opportunity to get to know more people my age that are in the process of a career change by have a non-traditional group to join	Oct 4, 2011 1:22 PM
166	Mc^2 is more than I had imagined!	Oct 4, 2011 3:30 AM
167	none	Oct 3, 2011 11:51 PM
168	Lab schedules that are given on the first day of class and not three weeks into the semester. This the case in Marketing, Art and Design every semester.	Oct 3, 2011 10:56 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
169	The same as for any student.	Oct 2, 2011 12:39 AM
170	Help with remedial courses. Like algebra its so hard from going to school more than a decade or two and not be able to get it!	Oct 1, 2011 4:14 AM
171	Help with using technology that younger students use without even thinking about it, for example the use of graphic calculators, and many computer programs.	Sep 29, 2011 4:32 PM
172	I dont know what to say. maybe off campus Internet access to college databases, since I am disabled.	Sep 29, 2011 1:17 PM
173	Access to wireless network.	Sep 29, 2011 9:38 AM
174	help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network	Sep 29, 2011 7:33 AM
175	one to one tutoring	Sep 28, 2011 11:24 PM
176	Using computer programs	Sep 28, 2011 8:57 PM
177	Tutoring at various times. I am studying accounting and there is only tutoring for accounting after 4pm which a student in my class complained about to the professor. Many of us work in the evening so we can study during the day.	Sep 28, 2011 4:44 PM
178	More classes available online and more hybrid classes.	Sep 28, 2011 4:12 PM
179	pepole with learning disability find more information and help.	Sep 28, 2011 11:12 AM
180	Being informed of what services are available in general.	Sep 28, 2011 10:57 AM
181	FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE	Sep 27, 2011 9:58 PM
182	applicable scholarship info... online courses...	Sep 27, 2011 8:09 PM
183	After hours office hours atleast once a day per week or Saturdays...Registrars office, Counseling, Chambers Hall offices, etc...have wireless network available throughout the Campus	Sep 27, 2011 3:41 PM
184	Time managment, most adult aged students either work, have children, are responsible for themselves and other people, or all of the above. And finding enough time in a day to be able to accomplish everything you want to, or hope to, is probably the task I find most difficult about returning back to school after so long.	Sep 27, 2011 1:11 PM
185	not sure	Sep 27, 2011 10:43 AM
186	Information on book rental	Sep 27, 2011 10:04 AM
187	The truth about what classes are required for each major. Allow	Sep 27, 2011 9:54 AM
188	Classes for health students offered at night.	Sep 27, 2011 7:01 AM
189	Working full time, and going to class 2 nights a week is very difficult. I have	Sep 26, 2011 6:04 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
	heard that students can park in the faculty parking after 5. Is that true?	
190	accessing the wireless network	Sep 26, 2011 4:04 PM
191	More evening services for full time workers. More flexibility.	Sep 26, 2011 12:05 PM
192	How could I effectively report the fact that an individual assign to teach an on-line course didn't do her duty, not to mention is not prepared to teach the course?	Sep 26, 2011 10:47 AM
193	Information being available isn't the problem. Having the time to take advantage of the help is the issue.	Sep 25, 2011 5:51 PM
194	more hybrid classes	Sep 25, 2011 1:38 PM
195	help using Campus Cruiser.	Sep 25, 2011 6:45 AM
196	Help using Campus Cruiser	Sep 24, 2011 10:55 PM
197	weekend classes	Sep 24, 2011 10:27 PM
198	accessing wireless network, use of a computer	Sep 24, 2011 7:01 PM
199	Help using Campus-Cruiser	Sep 24, 2011 11:39 AM
200	Increased direct counselling regarding courses and planning (guide) toward the final goal	Sep 24, 2011 11:21 AM
201	Accessing the wireless network	Sep 24, 2011 9:59 AM
202	help with campus cruiser	Sep 24, 2011 9:20 AM
203	full and clear explanation of what it is, how it is used, why it's important.	Sep 23, 2011 11:53 PM
204	nothing that I can think of	Sep 23, 2011 11:22 PM
205	wireless network information, devices or supports that are available but not announced (ex: even if a student does not have disabilities, many professors do not mind if their lectures are recorded, besides the basic recorded a student can buy a pulse pen he/she might find useful.	Sep 23, 2011 8:37 PM
206	Try to meet the needs of mature students who have been out of school for a number of years with later availability of certain student services.	Sep 23, 2011 8:28 PM
207	accessing the wireless network	Sep 23, 2011 8:26 PM
208	a special counselor dedicate for nontraditional-aged students	Sep 23, 2011 8:21 PM
209	more wi-fi areas other than the college center, library and IRC.	Sep 23, 2011 8:15 PM
210	financial aid	Sep 23, 2011 7:20 PM
211	campus cruiser should be less complicated to use, also the different offices should	Sep 23, 2011 6:31 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
	be more organize when dealing with students affairs.	
212	more financial aid information would be nice - the fact that you do everything on campus cruiser now made me nervous when I was filling out my paperwork.	Sep 23, 2011 3:38 PM
213	More information on how to get around during the first week of school. It was such a burden getting through the first week of school because of parking, long and slow moving traffic. I was late every day for classes.	Sep 23, 2011 3:37 PM
214	Technological capabilities at MCC, eg. Campus Cruiser, etc.	Sep 23, 2011 3:31 PM
215	help from the financial aid department	Sep 23, 2011 2:58 PM
216	Tutoring	Sep 23, 2011 12:53 PM
217	Help with selecting proper classes for each individual's goal, if needed some students should be given extra time in test	Sep 23, 2011 12:04 PM
218	None	Sep 23, 2011 9:33 AM
219	better access to see what classes are need to complete degree	Sep 23, 2011 9:32 AM
220	very basic computer classes and campus cruiser possible a program for the first 2 or 3 semesters designed to help returning adults so they could better understand the workings of college life	Sep 23, 2011 8:15 AM
221	be more helpful in advising because their not really helpful.	Sep 23, 2011 7:56 AM
222	Campus Cruiser assistance would be great...what is really needed is a revamping of the site to make it more organized and accessible. There is really no uniformity as to how each professor utilizes the site or formats the information. For example, some make use of all of the tabs, with each section on its own page such as "syllabus", "shared files", "assignments", "course content", sometimes changing the patterns within a single class, often repeating some random files or information but not others, and almost always interpreting the folder headings differently than other professors (i.e. putting homework assignments under "assignments" vs "course content" or "shared files", etc). While other professors choose to just lump everything in to the "shared files" page, which makes for a lot of scrolling and searching every time a file is needed...but at least everything is all in one place. Regardless, I find myself wasting time clicking every tab under each course every time I sign on, partially out of the confusion of trying to remember who keeps what where, and partially out of the paranoia that I will miss something imperative, simply because it wasn't under the heading that I expected it to be. With the amount of time Campus Cruiser takes to load each page during "high traffic hours", it's simply just a drain to be wasting that kind of time out of my day. It would really make better sense for each professor to be given a template page, in which they can fill out the amount and names of their own headings to control their page in a manner that works best for them; if it makes sense to the professor, I can almost guarantee it will work much better for the class. Nothing is worse however, than the fact that different classes are conducted through different websites, thereby making CampusCruiser all but obsolete for a select course or two. But that's	Sep 23, 2011 3:32 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

another story entirely. The bottom line is continuity and clarity are severely lacking within CampusCruiser. I think the other thing I personally would like to see is better communication to students of the "support systems" mentioned above (# 10). What little I do know about these systems I found out from my own tiresome navigation through MCC's website. was not required to attend an orientation, but I also never received any sort of information packet in the mail informing me of such resources. Not to mention, before transferring here it was nearly impossible to get any department on the phone, let alone receive any information from them. After tiring of leaving endless unreturned voicemails and emails, and on time constraints, I found myself driving the 45 minutes to campus a couple times a week trying just to speak to someone to see if I WANTED to attend this school. It was only after paying the application fee and processing my acceptance that I was finally able to sit down in the Academic Advising offices to discuss my plans, gain some insight and pick my classes...something I was very excited about doing, but came to find was merely a rushed few minutes of zero eye contact and instructions to register for my classes myself online. I understand that especially at a community college, resources and personnel may be scarce, making it more stressful for those who are available. But we are students, excited about whatever journey we are embarking upon...any individual working in a school has been through the same experience themselves, and therefore in my opinion, should harness their empathy and understanding. More to the point, apart from the "consumers" we are also the paying customers, and it seems only fit that we not only be treated with courtesy and respect, but that we are made fully aware of the worth of our tuition; the resources available and the compassion of the staff.

223	Services for Adults returning to college	Sep 22, 2011 10:48 PM
224	question 13 does not follow. my course work is not useful for my current job, but it will be useful for my future job. which one do I mark?	Sep 22, 2011 8:56 PM
225	health classes for older people	Sep 22, 2011 7:40 PM
226	quicker access to a syllabus to get books and materials needed	Sep 22, 2011 7:21 PM
227	According to my past four semesters at MCC, the college and professors supply me with everything I need to be successful.	Sep 22, 2011 6:39 PM
228	Campus Cruiser tutorial would be nice. Evening and summer courses for the Engineering Technology students & more than 1 teach to teach the same subject so we have a choice. Tutoring in the Technology building in the evenings not just day time.	Sep 22, 2011 5:25 PM
229	more scholarships available.	Sep 22, 2011 5:13 PM
230	Proper Orientation of college and available resources, including campus cruiser	Sep 22, 2011 4:42 PM
231	they should evaluate professors, they are always in a rushfeel lost in class at times. More explanation on subjects, more patience, more support system	Sep 22, 2011 4:20 PM
232	I think those two things are already available. I think there should be at least one counselor knowledgeable about taking the GRE, and applying to graduate school.	Sep 22, 2011 3:24 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

	Not everyone at a community college is an undergraduate! It would also be great to have a workshop or tutoring available on computer skills that adult students may not have but need for class, like how to create a powerpoint.	
233	more assistance with computers. everything is digital at this time. older students need assistance navigating the computer in order to complete assignments	Sep 22, 2011 3:20 PM
234	accessing the wireless network	Sep 22, 2011 3:05 PM
235	A little-bit of everything the college offers....from the courses to the clubs, fitness center, tutoring, accessing the wireless network, etc....	Sep 22, 2011 2:20 PM
236	more information regarding student loan process	Sep 22, 2011 1:28 PM
237	Help using Campus Cruiser	Sep 22, 2011 12:57 PM
238	all of the above .	Sep 22, 2011 12:24 PM
239	help using campus cruiser	Sep 22, 2011 12:12 PM
240	wifi	Sep 22, 2011 11:56 AM
241	The right degree for specific jobs	Sep 22, 2011 11:39 AM
242	accessing the wireless network	Sep 22, 2011 11:29 AM
243	Financial Aid	Sep 22, 2011 10:20 AM
244	Campus Cruiser	Sep 22, 2011 9:30 AM
245	Are there any job opportunities or internships? This information should be posted in Big Red Letters on The Home Page. Adult student have far more financial responsibility than the younger students. There are adult students that are single parents that do not have the privilege of two adults with a job or any other type of legal income coming into the home. Transfer adult students should be aware that middlesex college may not accept many of their transfer credits thus leaving them faced with the decision to start over (not logical). This may change a potential adult students interest in MCC. I have a lot of commentary hope my time spent here will be useful and result in making any needed improvements:-)	Sep 22, 2011 9:00 AM
246	peer tutoring..pairing 1st year students with end year students	Sep 22, 2011 8:51 AM
247	Better Wireless access across campus.	Sep 22, 2011 8:50 AM
248	Accessing the wireless network campus-wide	Sep 22, 2011 8:44 AM
249	Summer courses that are not condensed classes. Normal classes at during the week.(Normal = Traditional time frame)	Sep 22, 2011 7:01 AM
250	help understanding how to schedule courses.	Sep 22, 2011 1:10 AM
251	Clear information on the college process and college degree requirements for	Sep 22, 2011 12:27 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)

	those of us who have no previous college experience and are not coming into college from high school.	
252	online library resource use for research projects - Instruction	Sep 22, 2011 12:11 AM
253	A fairness Policy	Sep 22, 2011 12:06 AM
254	There's a significant amount of information on financial aid, but there could be more. For example, I'm still unclear as to when/how refunds are processed (my financial aid was processed after the tuition due date, so I had to put the money up myself).	Sep 21, 2011 11:40 PM
255	Online access to the library, help with the campus cruiser	Sep 21, 2011 11:37 PM
256	More choices for later classes	Sep 21, 2011 11:02 PM
257	Nothing I can think of, its all pretty stright foward for me.	Sep 21, 2011 10:51 PM
258	Every student should have thesame help available to them unless they are physically challenged.	Sep 21, 2011 10:43 PM
259	More computer labs hours. More computer labs.	Sep 21, 2011 10:28 PM
260	None, all info can be accessed online or from students and professors	Sep 21, 2011 10:22 PM
261	both	Sep 21, 2011 10:21 PM
262	I have nothing in mind, as nontraditional-aged adult student I'm fine with fast growing information system	Sep 21, 2011 10:13 PM
263	Academic advising	Sep 21, 2011 9:20 PM
264	accessing wireless network, and how to survive financially while focussing on school	Sep 21, 2011 9:11 PM
265	There should be more classes online that require students to take the test online. Taking online classes and having to go online for test defeats the purpose	Sep 21, 2011 8:52 PM
266	Honors classes available at night or on Saturdays	Sep 21, 2011 8:34 PM
267	wireless network access to online resources at the library for papers	Sep 21, 2011 8:33 PM
268	accessing wireless network. It needs to be all over campus	Sep 21, 2011 8:18 PM
269	More computers for students to use	Sep 21, 2011 8:18 PM
270	Campus Cruiser, help with technology,	Sep 21, 2011 8:04 PM
271	tutoring in newbrunswick at evenings	Sep 21, 2011 7:53 PM
272	More online courses	Sep 21, 2011 7:25 PM
273	n/a	Sep 21, 2011 7:09 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
274	Streamlined walk-through of the process of enrollment and registration.	Sep 21, 2011 7:05 PM
275	I have encountered people in all department ready to assist me and direct me to the areas or people that can assist me with my needs	Sep 21, 2011 6:43 PM
276	Preparing for college, using campus cruiser and refresher computer courses	Sep 21, 2011 6:36 PM
277	more evening classes	Sep 21, 2011 5:50 PM
278	tutoring access and academic advising/planning	Sep 21, 2011 5:28 PM
279	Financial Aid office is slow to responding. Additional info would help	Sep 21, 2011 5:17 PM
280	assistance balancing work/personal life & academics	Sep 21, 2011 5:17 PM
281	Accessing the wireless network	Sep 21, 2011 5:12 PM
282	More financial aid assistance.	Sep 21, 2011 5:02 PM
283	using campus cruiser	Sep 21, 2011 4:43 PM
284	The staff get more involved with using the Campus Cruiser so the students can stay active with questions or answers.	Sep 21, 2011 4:33 PM
285	using campus cruiser tour of campus services available	Sep 21, 2011 4:10 PM
286	peer groups	Sep 21, 2011 4:05 PM
287	Information on services available. Information on time budgeting and planning to reduce stress. There is enough stress already.	Sep 21, 2011 4:00 PM
288	None	Sep 21, 2011 3:49 PM
289	cannot think of any	Sep 21, 2011 3:07 PM
290	Offer certain engineering programs throughout the campus rather than a certain area at a certain time schedule.	Sep 21, 2011 3:05 PM
291	There should be know delineation between young, and mature. Mature students are much more focussed, and are able to conducted themselves Intellectually a process in which only time can grace. I am mature; but I don't particularly care for the implied notion of aging equals decline. This service should be an attempt to make mature students as transparent as young students, matures students are repositories of knowledge beyond academia real world skills. time only changes biology; the state of mind is determined by how well the individual prepared for aging.	Sep 21, 2011 3:00 PM
292	Not personally, but I have heard many older adult students complain of having a hard time with computed based learning (ie: ALEKS)	Sep 21, 2011 2:47 PM
293	Make students aware of ALL the wonderful services and support available at MCC.	Sep 21, 2011 2:36 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
294	Help using campus cruiser Help understanding the pre reqs for classes	Sep 21, 2011 2:23 PM
295	accessing the wireless network	Sep 21, 2011 2:12 PM
296	How to fit into the College life, after being out of school for years.	Sep 21, 2011 2:05 PM
297	Text books RENTAL for the course or semester instead of buying them and wasting money every semester	Sep 21, 2011 2:01 PM
298	Middlesex provides lots of information.	Sep 21, 2011 1:55 PM
299	scholarships!	Sep 21, 2011 1:44 PM
300	Evening hours for services	Sep 21, 2011 1:43 PM
301	not sure	Sep 21, 2011 1:34 PM
302	more guidance, in career counseling, clubs and groups of people pursuing same careers, help/info on how to compete in a world of much younger professionals	Sep 21, 2011 1:24 PM
303	More online classes	Sep 21, 2011 1:20 PM
304	Workshops for campus cruiser, time management, work-study, student accounts: eg. load money on id to purchase food from cafeteria and bookstore.	Sep 21, 2011 1:17 PM
305	campus information (practical information -parking, etc)	Sep 21, 2011 1:11 PM
306	help in getting the degree faster and making the curriculum one is for all	Sep 21, 2011 1:07 PM
307	Campus cruiser	Sep 21, 2011 1:04 PM
308	more courses on the adult counseling services. workshops I have seen conflict with my class schedule	Sep 21, 2011 12:50 PM
309	Which courses would be of the most assistance of providing job security: Grant and scholarship info.	Sep 21, 2011 12:50 PM
310	accessing the wireless network. It should be throughout the entire campus.	Sep 21, 2011 12:48 PM
311	On-line Classes.	Sep 21, 2011 12:46 PM
312	Help with tuition or text book purchases. Adults returning to college have financial considerations that are not a factor of, or even fathomable by the majority of the student body who are by-and-large still under the auspices of their parents. In my particular case, I have a mortgage, normal financial responsibilities for my household, and vastly significant expenses related to the college expenses of my children.	Sep 21, 2011 12:37 PM
313	nontraditional-aged peer tutoring. a club to meet other nontraditional-aged students.	Sep 21, 2011 12:29 PM
314	Help using Campus Cruiser - services offered during the evening	Sep 21, 2011 12:29 PM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
315	All the information I need is easy accessible. I just wish there were more online classes offered.	Sep 21, 2011 12:25 PM
316	more evening classes	Sep 21, 2011 12:16 PM
317	relearning how to study and mix family and work with school	Sep 21, 2011 12:09 PM
318	Writing a research paper and citing in certain formats	Sep 21, 2011 12:03 PM
319	Help with online classes. I have had one professor that was great with helping and I am currently taking a class that the professor is not much help and does not provide much feed back.	Sep 21, 2011 12:02 PM
320	I've needed help understanding course substitutions and degree requirements due to having previous educational credit, as well as financial aid and registration questions. I would have liked it if some of the more basic information had been available on the website. It's hard to find a workable time to drop in.	Sep 21, 2011 12:01 PM
321	professor tutoring, more knowledgeable counseling	Sep 21, 2011 11:59 AM
322	The addresses and names of the financial aid department's staff and their immediate family members.	Sep 21, 2011 11:55 AM
323	I think an assessment of older, returning students would be appropriate. Taking into account more of our life experiences so that the courses we do take are geared towards new education, not repeating what I already am familiar with. However, I don't think older returning students are of key importance to the college as is steering the youth and helping to shape them.	Sep 21, 2011 11:51 AM
324	Advisement always has a different answer each time you attend. Maybe 1 counselor for older students to streamline things	Sep 21, 2011 11:50 AM
325	More information than just contacts for the amnesty program, the CARES program.	Sep 21, 2011 11:50 AM
326	More flexibility in scheduling assignments hand-in and testing (again refer to Jane Leffert's CS 105 IN format, more weekend courses similar to Rider that fulfill all requirements for specific degrees, more independent studies, a full-formatted syllabus, more use of ALEKS in whatever courses it is currently offered, specific courses and lectures available for borrowing via podcast, DVD, broadband access. Very important - prior to a course beginning, the full syllabus (with dates for specific deadlines and any on-campus attendance for online courses should be made known so we can determine the best way to schedule and not have to risk a withdrawal and financial losses. More use of Smart Boards or Whiteboards (our eyes are not as sharp as they used to be to see chalk on a blackboard at a 90 degree angle).	Sep 21, 2011 11:46 AM
327	accessing wireless network	Sep 21, 2011 11:45 AM
328	More extensive questions and answers on the website. (For planning semesters, etc)	Sep 21, 2011 11:41 AM
329	help using Campus Cruiser one on one counseling information on where to find	Sep 21, 2011 11:38 AM

Page 4, Q12. What information should be more available to nontraditional-aged adult students? (ex: help using Campus Cruiser, accessing the wireless network, etc.)		
	help for ceratin things such as how good is a professors teaching skills, what to do if you don't like your professor. help on staying motivated when you feel discouraged	
330	Financial based scholarships, that do not have restrictions, like must be a single parent, those of us without kids, need help paying for school to etc.	Sep 21, 2011 11:36 AM
331	wireless network	Sep 21, 2011 11:33 AM
332	I need help with using certain parts of the computer such as the graphic features and charts and power point presentations. My generation are not as computer savvy as the rest of you are.	Sep 21, 2011 11:31 AM
333	Job Placement Services	Sep 21, 2011 11:30 AM
334	Flexible class schedules	Sep 21, 2011 11:29 AM
335	more personalized attention for adults. (Ex. Interviews with chairman, permit to use useful devices at classes-tape recorder, looks for better and expedite ways to learn, courses of majors not offered in Summer-gain time).	Sep 21, 2011 11:28 AM
336	more afternoon classes, full cafeteria service on Fridays, a late night study/computer room (like the Owl's Roost in Records Hall)	Sep 21, 2011 11:22 AM
337	More online and hybrid courses.	Sep 21, 2011 11:21 AM
338	N/A	Sep 21, 2011 11:17 AM
339	nothing that I can think of	Sep 21, 2011 11:16 AM
340	Not sure.	Sep 21, 2011 11:11 AM
341	More standardized online coursework	Sep 21, 2011 11:08 AM
342	None	Sep 21, 2011 11:02 AM
343	Accessibility, availability, and requirements of and or for grants-in-aid, financial aid, scholarships, and etc.	Sep 21, 2011 10:59 AM
344	Workshops on navigating the Internet to a student's educational benefit, Campus Cruiser tutorial	Sep 21, 2011 10:53 AM
345	Time management.	Sep 21, 2011 10:53 AM
346	Longer hours of operation in the bookstore, keeping the library open longer on Fridays and Sundays.	Sep 21, 2011 10:50 AM
347	n/a	Sep 21, 2011 10:47 AM

Appendix G: Age Distribution of Nontraditional-Aged Adult Students

Adult students age distribution: 25 - 56

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