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William E. Ashcraft  
*Old Dominion University*

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**AN EXPLORATION OF FACULTY AND STAFF MENTORING ON HIGH-RISK  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SELF-EFFICACY, SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND  
PERSISTENCE**

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B.S. September 1996, Excelsior College  
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A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of  
Old Dominion University in Partial Fulfillment of the  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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Committee Members:  
Dr. Mitchell R. Williams, Chair  
Dr. Shana Pribesh, Member  
Dr. Dennis Gregory, Member

## ABSTRACT

### AN EXPLORATION OF FACULTY AND STAFF MENTORING ON HIGH-RISK COMMUNITY COLLEGE STUDENT SELF-EFFICACY, SUPPORT SYSTEMS, AND PERSISTENCE

William E. Ashcraft  
Old Dominion University, 2018  
Director: Dr. Mitchell Williams

The purpose of this study was to explore the effects of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems and persistence and identifying the attitudes and behaviors of successful faculty and staff mentors. Using a phenomenological qualitative approach, twenty-two successful high-risk students from one urban community college were interviewed and asked to identify and describe someone on campus who had been most influential in their ability to persist. The twenty-six community college faculty and staff personnel identified by these students were interviewed to learn what they do to help students succeed and persist. Four themes emerged from these interviews: (1) High-Risk Community College students are unprepared for college completion prior to college entry; (2) The desire to quit college by High-Risk community college students is one that occurs often in a semester and is motivated by the various causes of collegiate unpreparedness discussed in theme one; (3) Mentoring of a transactional nature by more than one faculty or staff mentor when these vulnerable students were ready to quit is responsible for their decision to stay in college; and (4) The best mentors possess a combination of interpersonal traits. The most frequently mentioned valued faculty / staff mentor characteristics are (a) authenticity; (b) compassion; (c) sense of humor; (d) accessibility / approachability; (e) a sincere desire to see students succeed. Five implications for community college decision makers were also recommended.

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For Kristin,

My life truly began when I met you.

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For the past several years throughout this program, I have reflected repeatedly on the importance of relationships. My completion of this program would have similarly been negatively impacted had it not been for so many impactful relationships.

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"What do you say about someone who's always there with support and understanding, someone who makes sacrifices so that your life will be easier and more successful? Well, what you say is that you love that person and treasure her."

You have supported me every step of the way. You have cheered each milestone and made sacrifices for me to pursue this opportunity, waiting patiently for me to resume my life as your husband. I could not have done this (or much else) without you.

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## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

Levinson (1996) held the main components of life are the relationships formed with others. These relationships influence and direct our life for better and sometimes, for worse. Echoing these findings, in 2009, *The Atlantic* asked George Vaillant, the longtime director of the Harvard Grant study (a longitudinal study designed initially in 1938 to learn about optimum health and the conditions that promote them), what the most important finding of the study had been. Maintaining our lives are shaped and enriched by a “sustaining surround” (p. 52), of relationships, his answer: “the only thing that really matters in life are your relations to other people” (Vaillant, 2012, p. 24).

The importance of relationships are as important in the workday as well as in our personal lives. Interviews with 2 million employees at 700 American companies found that what determines how long employees stay, and their productivity is the quality of their relationship with their immediate boss. Underscoring the importance of relationships, it seems people join companies, and leave bosses (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). In summation, mentoring researcher Brad Johnson concluded the career contributions holding the greatest meaning --- those that sustain people long after our careers end --- are relational (2016), this because human lives are highly interdependent (Bandura, 1997).

Relational ties are essential sources of support especially during periods of major transition, and throughout the ongoing process of career development (Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979). Levinson et al., (1978) asserted as college age students navigate from adolescence to adulthood, they enter a period of major transition. In the United States, entering college represents a major

developmental transition (Sy & Romero, 2008). It is during this transitional period these “novice adults” reorder their relationship with their parents, while finding their place in the world.

Levinson and his colleagues further argued during this transitional period of a young adult’s life a mentoring relationship with a more experienced adult is vital. It is because mentoring experiences contribute in a crucial way to ushering mentees into adulthood (Johnson, 2016), Russell and Adams (1997) asserted the formation of a mentoring relationship should be considered a major developmental task of the college and early career years. It is through mentoring relationships a young adult gains support, guidance, and counsel as they accomplish mastery of the adult world (Kram 1985).

### **Background of the Study**

Humans have an instinctive need to collect and share information and are becoming mentors even as we are being mentored (Clutterbuck, 2004; Harari, 2015). This ability and need to share (and store) detailed information fueled the cognitive revolution, leading to the birth and development of civilization (Fromkin, 1998; Harari, 2015; Roberts & Westad, 2013; Wilson, 2013). According to the theory of generativity, as explained by Erikson (1980) individuals are impelled by a desire to feel needed, and their capacity to provide valuable assistance to others, as well as a desire to improve society, manifested by a concern for succeeding generations (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998). It is these same motivational traits, concerns and actions that is commonly referred to and understood as mentoring (Johnson, 2016).

Dating from medieval times, intentional and thoughtful mentoring is one of the most important and enduring for the higher education faculty (Johnson, 2016). Over a millennium ago, mentoring stood at the heart of the European university tutorial system. For example, Oxford University used its dons (senior faculty members) as tutors and long-term developmental

mentors to students. Dons lived on campus and mixed with students in a variety of contexts and university events. Through these frequent interactions the don would come to know students not just academically, but also socially and personally (Scott, 1992). This close relationship between mentor and mentee, faculty and student has impacted the highest scholarship across many disciplines and across the centuries as one study by Harriett Zuckerman (1977) of all U.S. Nobel Laureates by 1972 revealed that more than half (48) had worked, either as students, post doctorates, or junior collaborators, under older Nobel laureates. Recognizing the importance of relationships as between faculty and student, the Council of Graduate Schools now lists mentoring as 1 of the 6 factors leading to successful PhD completion. (2008).

A recent (2014) Gallup-Purdue Index Survey of college graduates revealed the importance of mentoring relationships between faculty and students. The survey of nearly 30,000 adults found that if graduates recalled having a professor that cared about them as a person, made them excited about learning, and encouraged them to pursue their dreams, their odds of being engaged at work more than doubled, as did their odds of thriving in all aspects of their well-being. In response to the prompt, "My professors cared about me as a person" less than 3 in 10 answered affirmatively (27%). Less than 1-4 respondents answered in the affirmative to this prompt, "I had a mentor (in college) who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams" (22%). The survey further revealed only 14% of college graduates "strongly agree" they were supported by professors who cared, made them excited about learning, and encouraged their dreams (Gallup 2014).

Gallup's findings of large numbers of non-mentored students notwithstanding, modern educational leaders acknowledge the value of mentoring as a remedy to problems continuing to vex administrators. Mentoring has been shown to increase academic achievement, self-identity,

and positive self-image, facilitate career development, while reducing drop-out rates and risky behaviors (Crisp, et al., 2017; Jacobi, 1991; Roche, 1979).

With so much attention directed towards student retention and success, addressing and identifying persistence related problems possessed by so many college students, it is understandable why mentoring programs are increasingly utilized in higher education. Current research points toward mentoring as a means of promoting student success (Crisp, et al., 2017; Kahveci, Southerland, & Gilmer, 2006; Pagan & Edwards-Wilson, 2003; Salinitri, 2005). Mentoring has become an urgent national need as evidenced by countless formal and informal programs in both the public and private sphere (Freedman, 1993; Girves, 2005; Halpern, 2005; Sorrentino, 2007).

Recent research reveals much about the needs, conditions and preparedness of students in higher education. College students labeled as “High-Risk” particularly have been the subject of extensive research, most of the research focused on the obstacles they encounter in earning a college degree (Choy, 2002; Crisp, et al., 2017; Schreiner, Noel, & Cantwell, 2011).

The literature defines “High-Risk” as those students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002). Personal characteristics that may place a student at risk for not succeeding in college are identified as those features that locate the student in a population without a long or necessarily successful history in higher education. Examples of such students include students who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary education or students with low socioeconomic status. Students of color who enter predominantly White institutions also may be high risk because of the challenges they face from marginalization and discrimination (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Schreiner, et al., 2011; Torres, 2003).

Despite significant efforts to enhance the success of high-risk students, their rates of persistence to graduation continue to lag substantially behind other students. Only 26.2% of students who take at least one remedial course graduate from college, compared to a 59.4% graduation rate for students who are not required to take any remedial coursework (Smith, 2013). First-generation students graduate at one-third the rate of students whose parents have college degrees; first-generation students have a higher risk of dropping out and not returning for the second year of college (Schreiner, et al., 2011). First-generation students often have poor pre-college preparation, lower career hopes, lack of family support, lack of peer and faculty support, fear of the college environment, and poor study skills or habits (Crisp, et al., 2017; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

The sociological literature is of one mind regarding the significance of SES or low-income in affecting individuals' educational and social outcomes (O'Connor, 2009). Less than 29% of low-income students graduate, compared to 73% of high-income students and 55% of middle-income students. African American and Latina/o student graduation rates lag 16 to 25 percentage points below the rates of Asian Americans and European Americans (Smith, 2013). As degree attainment is considered by many to be the definitive measure of student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007), it appears that more can be done to ensure the students admitted to college are successful.

The success and retention of high-risk students has been explored from the perspective of their comparative lack of family support (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), their academic under preparation (Ishitani, 2006), and their lack of cultural capital (Walpole, 2003). The limited research on factors contributing to the retention of high-risk students has tended to focus on the



programs and services designed to assist these students (Colton, Conner, Schultz, & Easter, 1999).

The importance of mentoring relationships in education notwithstanding, the large body of mentoring research involves students attending four-year institutions, or students in graduate programs, rather than students attending community colleges (Crisp & Cruz, 2009; Crisp, 2010; Crisp, et al., 2017). Consequently, although the literature discussing persistence is extensive (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Locks, Hurtado, Bowman, & Oseguera, 2008; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Tinto, 1975; 2012), researchers call for additional persistence research specific to community college students (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Crisp, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

### **Problem Statement**

Community colleges have a complex mission as they provide students affordable access to post-secondary education in the United States. In addition to access, these two-year institutions of higher learning help students restore confidence in their academic ability, gain a skill, or recession-proof their resumes. Community colleges also prepare students for degree programs, ready students for transfer to four-year institutions, and provide a host of other educational opportunities (Levin & Kater, 2012).

It is accurate to say that the comprehensiveness of the mission of community colleges fuels the complexity of that mission. The conception among many scholars is that these colleges are “non-specialized by design, their mandate is to offer a comprehensive curriculum and to serve a wide range of community needs” (Owen, 1995, p. 145). Further making the accomplishment of that mission more difficult, “unlike four-year colleges and universities,

community colleges are non-traditional or un-traditional: they do not even adhere to their own traditions. They make and remake themselves” (Levin, 1998, p. 2).

The conventional definition of the community college mission incorporates the educational functions that comprise “five traditional community college programs” (Cross, 1985, p. 36). These include: (1) collegiate and transfer education; (2) vocational education; (3) developmental or compensatory education; (4) general education; and (5) community education and service (Meier, 2013, p. 4).

The rise of community colleges coincided with the rise of a political movement in the United States called the Progressive movement. Ratcliff (1987) makes the case that the first public junior colleges emerged as a result of broad social and economic forces spawned by the second industrial revolution (1870-1920) and its aftermath (Meier, 2013, p. 7). The demands placed on the United States due to this second industrial revolution included training and educating workers for factories that required workers to possess better and more specialized skills.

In addition to providing job skills or certificates, the demands of the second industrial revolution created an entirely new class of employees that also needed specialized training and education: the managerial class. These individuals needed to be able to run the business concerns of the burgeoning factories. They needed to understand and possess budgetary or organizational skills, critical thinking and analytical skills.

A further consequence of the second industrial revolution was that of a boom of immigration as millions of immigrants, primarily eastern Europeans came to this country to escape forced military service, poverty, or political oppression. These millions of immigrants (some 35 million over a 30-year span) needed housing and jobs, which they often got at local

factories, or through patronage of the “boss system” prevalent in United States cities. These immigrants also needed an education. They needed to learn to speak and read and write English. They needed (and wanted) to learn about their new home, to become American. To respond to these needs caused by the second industrial revolution, training and educating workers and managers and providing English skills to the millions of immigrants, the comprehensive high school began to take shape as did also the birth of junior, or community colleges.

The end of the Second World War (1945) provided further needs and ways to add to continuing or community education. Widespread liberal optimism (in much the same way evidenced by progressives at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) about higher education’s potential to stimulate economic growth, strengthen democracy, mitigate class and racial conflict, and to provide Cold War ideological munitions to the nation provided a cultural context supportive of junior college expansion (Meier, 2008) and by extension the mission of continuing education and community education.

This postwar explosion of community colleges offering community or continuing education was tied closely to the G.I. Bill and the Truman Commission. This legislation was in response to veteran demands for higher education and workforce training and had “the most direct impact on the community college mission” (Meier, 2013, p. 14). The presidential commission (Truman Commission) asserted that community colleges “must prepare [their] students to live a rich and satisfying life, part of which involves earning a living” (President’s Commission on Higher Education, 1947, pp. 6-7). Taken together, the legislation and the presidential commission created a permanent national perception that “college attendance was a right and not a privilege,” and that community education or continuing education was a necessary public good (Meier, 2013, p. 14).

Studies on college student retention over the past 40 years have properly focused on the importance of the first year experience, academic performance, self-efficacy, clear, early academic goals as keys to student retention (Baker & Siryk, 1984; Tinto, 1975, 1987, 2012). Yet, despite the vast literature on the college dropout process, “much remains unknown” about why college students do not persist (Tinto, 2012, p. 4).

The classroom for non-residential institutions found in most community colleges, is the one place, and perhaps the only place where students meet each other and the faculty and engage formal learning activities. For the great majority of students, success in college is most directly shaped by their experiences in the classroom (Tinto, 2012). Therefore, developing, enhancing, strengthening relationships between students, especially those defined as “High-Risk” and faculty or campus personnel should correlate to student success and persistence. It is not just the relationship developed that is a key to retention, but the academic and social deficiencies such a relationship impacts. Two under consideration in this study are self-efficacy and social capital.

Bandura (1977) theorized the beliefs people hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they behave. These beliefs (self-efficacy) influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (Bandura 1997).

A substantial body of literature exists detailing the positive impact self-efficacy has on the success of students in college (Aguayo, Herman, Ojeda, & Flores, 2011; Majer, 2009; Vuong, Brown-Welty, & Tracz, 2010; Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). Wood, Hilton, and

Johnson (2014) suggested in education, the term is best understood as “academic self-efficacy.” This form of efficacy then refers to a student’s confidence in his or her own abilities to meet desired academic goals such as achievement, persistence, transfer (Torres & Solberg, 2001).

Interest in the concept of social capital was stimulated largely by the work of James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu in the late 1980s (Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005). While the term “Social Capital” originated as early as 1920, the original theoretical development of the concept “social capital” did not appear in print until 1986, when Pierre Bourdieu published “The Forms of Capital” (Portes, 2000). The term “social capital” is a way of defining the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust upon which we draw in daily life. The central idea behind social capital is that social networks are a valuable asset (Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005).

Mentoring has been defined as a relationship supporting career development enabling an individual to address the challenges encountered moving through adulthood and through an organizational career (Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978; Roche, 1979). Recent evidence additionally supports the idea that high-quality mentorships generate the relational skills (emotional awareness, empathic listening, and compassion) needed to build other high-quality relationships. A strong relationship with an emotionally intelligent mentor can help a mentee develop a relational cache; a set of relational skills and attitudes that are transportable to the mentee's subsequent relationships (Johnson, 2016; Ragins 2012).

Schreiner and her colleagues (2011), interviewed successful high-risk undergraduate students located at six different institutions of higher education (two community colleges, two colleges, and two universities). The team of eleven researchers found seven themes emerging from the interviews stressing the importance of personal attributes of faculty and staff in college student persistence.

Research over the past four decades has supported the benefits of mentoring in both education and business (Kram, 1985) providing benefits to both the mentors and the protégées such as increased academic performance (Campbell & Campbell, 1997; Crisp, et al., 2017), improved self-efficacy (Keller, 2007; Smith, 2013), and exposure to a wider social network or support systems (Crisp, et al., 2017; Kram, 1985). Yet, gaps in the literature exist, particularly in examining the impact of mentoring on community college students, as well as a dearth of studies exploring specific mentoring outcomes for community college students such as self-efficacy and support systems. Taken together, the literature does not consider how faculty and staff mentoring at community colleges assist in specific academic outcomes and aid in student persistence.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is an exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study is an extension of the qualitative study, “The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence” (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

### **Research Foci**

This research is guided by the following specific foci that will be addressed through data collection and analysis:

1. How did faculty and staff mentoring effect high-risk community college students’ self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?
  - 1a. How did mentoring affect the decision of high-risk community college students to persist?
  - 1b. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student self-efficacy?
  - 1c. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student support systems?

2. According to high-risk community college students who were mentored, what personal characteristics do effective mentors possess?
3. How do faculty and staff mentors recognize in themselves the same personal characteristics of effective mentors as described by high-risk community college students?

### **Professional Significance**

This study seeks to fill gaps in the research in the following ways:

A focus of this study was an extension of an existing study: Educational studies should be replicated as the dynamics and demographics of the students sampled change over time. The study being built upon, (Schreiner, et al., 2011) is over 7 years old.

This study focused on community colleges. Although community colleges occupy an integral place in American higher education, providing access to higher education for over 10 million students each year, representing nearly half of the nation's undergraduates (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2013; Pascarella, 1997; Wyner, 2014), very little research has been done concerning them (Pascarella, 1997). Schreiner's study involved two community colleges, as well as four colleges and universities. This study focused exclusively on community colleges and community college students;

A focus of this study was on the effects of mentoring on community college students. This area of research particularly involving community college students and campus personnel has been understudied. One current study (Crisp, 2010) attempted to explain the effects of mentoring of community college students by faculty, and that was quantitative study.

This study sought to understand the effect of mentoring in a community college designated as a Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI). Most mentoring studies appear to be

conducted at predominantly white institutions with relatively few studies focused on the experiences at minority serving institutions (Crisp, et al., 2017).

Understanding the impact of mentoring in the words of the principal actors, the students and campus personnel themselves was also a focus of this study. As mentoring is a relational (Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978), this study seeks examine the roots of this relationship through qualitative methodology, a methodology that is, at its foundation, relational (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012).

This study focused on hearing the voices of “High-Risk” students. There is a social justice component to this study by giving voice to “High-Risk” students (Crisp, et al., 2017; Smith, 2013). Often the demographics represented by the students in this study are among the most marginalized in our society; Additionally, rather than focusing on what these students lack, as many studies have, this study approaches “High-Risk” students from the perspective of factors producing academic success;

A focus of this study was on the effect of mentoring on persistence of community college students. Mentoring is acknowledged as having positive effects on success in school, research has largely focused on graduate students, or students in certain narrow fields such as medical students (Eimers, 2001). Mentoring research has not focused on the impact of mentoring on the persistence of community college students;

This study focused on Self-Efficacy. Studies have been conducted linking self-efficacy with the successful completion of certain English, Math or Science (“gate-keeper”) courses but does not add to understanding the factors causing self-efficacy. This study links a specific action (mentoring) as potentially impacting self-efficacy, and how self-efficacy impacts persistence.



Lastly, a focus of this study was on the importance of support systems. Studies have been conducted linking support systems with successful completion of the first-year experience in higher education but does not add to understanding the impact of support systems on persistence of community college students. Nor does the extant literature add to understanding how mentoring impacts support systems. Crisp and her colleagues (2017) maintained the importance of increasing a student's social capital (support systems), this is done as part of the mentoring relationship. This study links a specific action (mentoring) as potentially impacting support systems, and how support systems impact persistence.

### **Overview of Methodology**

Using a qualitative approach in the phenomenological tradition, 22 successful high-risk undergraduate students and 26 influential faculty and staff mentors from one urban community college in the western region of the United States were individually interviewed. Following the method utilized by Schreiner et al., (2011) a purposeful criterion sampling technique was utilized to select students based on criteria designating them "high-risk" and successful by their institution. Students who met these criteria for successful high-risk undergraduates were randomly selected from the institutional lists obtained from the registrar's offices.

During the interviews, students were asked to reflect upon a time they were ready to drop out or leave college, and who on campus has influenced their decision to persist and/or their ability to succeed. They were then asked to discuss how that relationship with a faculty or staff member assisted in the growth of their self-efficacy and added to their support systems. Once the student identified the person(s) on campus who has influenced them the most, that person

will then be interviewed. Should any student have been unable to identify an influential faculty or staff member they would be eliminated from the study.

Data were collected by a team of researchers using semi-structured interviews. Interviews were conducted by one doctoral student researcher. A panel of mentoring experts reviewed the interview protocol and questions. To obtain completeness, not confirmation, the ultimate goal of triangulation (Hays & Singh, 2012) both sets of interviews (student / faculty and staff) were randomly reviewed for coding validity by two graduate students experienced in qualitative research from a nearby university. Additionally, one independent auditor was used to ensure the respective interview protocols are followed with exactness, and to determine the extent to which the researcher has conducted a “comprehensive and rigorous study” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 209).

Each high-risk student participated in a one-hour, audio-taped interview; each named faculty or staff member also participated in a one-hour audio-taped interview. The student interviews focused on a time the students’ considered dropping out of college, and who on campus has most influenced their ability to succeed and stay in college. They were asked to describe how the faculty or staff member was influential in the students’ decision to persist; how the faculty or staff member assisted the student in developing self-efficacy in their ability to succeed, how they provided support to the student, what personal qualities that individual that have impacted the student. The interview concluded by asking students what advice they would give to another student who is considering leaving college.

The interviews of the faculty and staff named by the students focused on their perceptions of their work in helping community college students persist. The faculty or staff

member were informed they were identified as being instrumental in a students' desire to stay in college, and were asked for their reaction to this, as well their opinion of what about their personality made them effective in working with community college students. The faculty and staff were asked their opinions, based on their experience, as to why community college students drop out. They were asked to reflect and describe a time they helped a student develop confidence in their academic abilities, and a time they acted as a support system for a struggling community college student. The interview concluded by asking them what advice they would give to another faculty, full-time or part-time, or staff member, who is working with a community college student considering quitting college.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Patterns and themes were constructed through a content analysis of the transcripts, and codes were developed accordingly (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

### **Delimitations**

- The study focused on mentoring by community college faculty and staff:

In this study, students were asked to reflect and identify the faculty or staff mentor influential in the students' decision to persist. It may be expected the relationship, developed during a previous semester is continuing during the study, the strong possibility exists these relationships began prior to this study.

- The study focused on mentoring as having an influence on student outcomes:

Mentoring has been chosen for this study as being influential because mentoring is uniquely individualized. Relationships matter (Levinson, 1978), mentoring is relational (Kram, 1985; Johnson, 2016); education of all endeavors to be transforming, is relationship-based.

Research shows what is often missing from the concept of mentoring being a good or desirable thing for colleges and their students, is how mentoring actually shapes and influences the student experiences (Crisp, et al., 2017).

- The focus of this study was on high-risk community college students:

High-risk students are an appropriate sample to understand how mentoring affects persistence as these students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002).

- The focus of this study was on the effect of self-efficacy and support systems on student persistence:

While many studies focusing on high-risk students have approached them from a deficit model, this study approaches high-risk students from the perspective of the factors producing success. Mentoring is known to impact self-efficacy (belief in the dream); and is an added support system taken together, impacts persistence.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

- **Academic Self-Efficacy:** This concept refers to a student's confidence in his or her own abilities to meet desired academic goals for example achievement, persistence and transfer (Torres & Solberg, 2001).
- **Community College:** Community Colleges offer open, affordable and open access to higher education, provide comprehensive services that benefit individual students and communities (Hawley & Harris, 2005; Pascarella, 1997; Vaughn, 2006, p. vii).
- **Faculty:** College faculty are full professors, assistant professors, and adjunct instructors, who facilitate and instruct students through the process of learning information at a

college or university. Faculty articulate concepts and ideas to students and provide encouragement for succeeding in higher education (Schreiner, et al., 2011)

- **High-Risk Students:** Defined as those students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002; Schreiner, et al., 2011).
- **Mentee:** Individuals who are “proactive, willing to learn, and . . . selective in accepting advice from their mentors” (Williams, Levin, Malhotra, & Holtzheimear, 2004, p. 112).
- **Mentor:** A mentor is someone with greater experience or wisdom who offers guidance or instruction intended to promote the protégé’s development (DuBois & Karcher, 2005).
- **Mentoring:** Mentoring is a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student or faculty member (Johnson, 2016).
- **Persistence:** Persistence refers to the quality of students’ effort in an academic setting such as a college or university (Tinto, 1993).
- **Self-Efficacy:** The beliefs that people hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they behave (Bandura, 1977).
- **Support Systems:** Can also be understood by the term “social capital” and is a way of defining the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust drawn upon in daily life. The central idea of social capital is that social networks or support systems are a valuable asset (Field 2017).

## **Summary of Chapter 1**

Relationships make a difference (Levinson, 1996; Vaillant, 2012). Relationships matter in all aspects of our lives, and give our lives substance and meaning (Levinson, et al., 1978). Mentoring is relational and reciprocal in its practice between mentor and mentee (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985). This study proposed to expand the body of literature regarding “High-Risk” community college students by understanding the impact mentoring of college faculty and staff has on the students’ self-efficacy and social capital, and how together these impact persistence. Following this chapter is a discussion and analysis of scholarly literature related to questions and sub-questions addressed in this study. Chapter 3 is a description of the methods used in this study to address the research questions posed in the introduction. Chapter 4 is a detailed analysis of the data collected, and Chapter 5 will conclude the study with a discussion of the findings related to the existing literature.

## CHAPTER 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Mentoring as we know it, has been practiced for millennia, across diverse cultures and in a variety of professions (Allen & Eby, 2007; Garvey, 2017; Johnson, 2016). As such, mentoring is widely recognized in a variety of professions as a strategy associated with positive work outcomes such as engagement, satisfaction, and organizational commitment, as well as a positive correlation to such outcomes as organizational commitment and job satisfaction (Kreitner & Kinicki, 2004; Mathews, 2003; Poteat, Shockley, & Allen, 2009; Van Emmerik, 2004).

At the heart of mentoring is relationships; indeed, mentoring itself is relational (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978). In addition to mentoring, the other variables examined as affected by mentoring in this study, are at their root, also informed or affected by relationships. Self-efficacy, an individual's confidence in their ability to perform certain tasks is formed as a reflection of how others see the individual, and that vantage point is relational to trust (Bandura, 1977, 1993). Social capital, understood in one way as support systems are those reciprocal (relational) ties between individuals, formal or informal; social, professional, personal, or familial, that hold society together (Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). At the same time, many factors causing students to be identified as High-Risk, often occur because of relationships, whether they be within their respective families, with others, or with various types of institutions (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013; Lareau, 2011). Student persistence in higher education is also impacted by relationships; relationships between the student and the institution (Astin, 1977; Schreiner, et al., 2011; Tinto, 1975) as well as relationships with faculty and staff (Barnett, 2011; Crisp, et al., 2017; Johnson, 2016; Schreiner, et al., 2011). In the same way that research indicates employees don't leave companies, they leave managers (Goleman, Boyatzis,

& McKee, 2002), Tinto (1975) and Schreiner, et al., (2011) suggest that students who leave college before graduation, don't leave institutions, they leave relationships.

### **Purpose Statement**

The purpose of this study is an exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study is an extension of the study, "The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence" (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

### **Methodology**

A broad search was conducted to search out and identify resources related to the research proposed in this study. Electronic searches were completed using ERIC, EBSCO, and Google Scholar. Search terms were identified across five content areas: Mentoring, High-Risk Community College Students, Self-Efficacy, Support Systems, and Persistence. Combinations of the following terms were searched: Mentoring college students, faculty mentoring students, college staff mentoring college students, community college, academic self-efficacy, social capital, college student persistence.

Additionally, this study has been enriched by the many relevant books in print throughout the past four decades on mentoring, social capital, support systems, college persistence, and self-efficacy. These books have informed this study, while also serving as a valuable resource to other articles in the literature on the salient topics. All relevant literature was stored and evaluated on the researcher's computer.

### **Introduction**

Relationships make a difference. Our brains are fundamentally built inside of, and because of relationships (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013). It is the inner mind that highlights the



power of relationships, and the invisible bonds between people (Brooks, 2011; Goleman, 2006; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013), and is the sum and substance of our lives, providing meaning to our daily experience and existence (Levinson, 1996).

In this sense, Levinson's (and others) observations relate specifically to traditional, one-on-one mentoring, relationships between individuals. It is the sum and substance of these individual relationships, the sociologist Emile Durkheim claimed, that holds society together, serving as threads from which society is woven together. English philosopher Edmund Burke says these threads form a social contract that spans the ages: "Society is indeed a contract. It is a partnership. . . not only between those who are living, but between those who are living, those who are dead, and those who are to be born" (2009, p. 96).

Many historians claim these exchanges not only hold society together, these exchanges aided the development of civilization itself, furthering the spread of trade which in turn furthered, oral traditions, cultures and religious beliefs (Armstrong, 2006; Fromkin, 1998; Harari, 2015; Wilson, 2012). Durkheim held this interdependence of strangers in the modern industrial, often faceless society meant that modern society is united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the interaction itself (Field 2017; Putnam, 2000).

Durkheim asserted it is these general relationships "the brief moments" where exchanges of information, insights, and personal stories are shared that holds society together. Levinson, et al., (1978) in studying adult males, and adult females (Levinson, 1996), suggested a personal relationship with a mentor where the generational sharing of information, insights, and personal stories is the most important relationship in young adulthood, and forms the basis of the significant relationships of adulthood.

Levinson held mentoring relationships for men and women between the ages of 17-30 are so vital because they have entered a developmental stage he called “novice adulthood” where young adults re-order relationships with parents, while at the same time find their place in the adult world. The magic of the mentoring relationship with the “novice adult” is found as the mentor helps the young man gain a “fuller sense of his own authority,” increasingly having the experience becoming an adult. It is at this point the relationship begins to change (Levinson, et al., 1978, p. 99). This relationship and these changes occur as the mentor

act(s) as a teacher to enhance the young man’s skills and intellectual development.

Serving as sponsor, he may use his influence to facilitate the young man’s entry and advancement. He may be a host and guide, welcoming the initiate into a new occupational and social world and acquainting him with its values, customs, resources, and a cast of characters. Through his own virtues, achievements and way of living, the mentor may be an exemplar that the protégé can admire and seek to emulate. He may provide counsel and moral support in times of stress. (1978, p. 98)

Kram (1985) expanded on this construct to include relationships with superiors, peers, subordinates, friends, and family members. These relationships to Kram were essential sources of support as the young adult experiences a major transition (such as novice adulthood), and throughout the ongoing process of career development. For these and other reasons, a noted mentoring scholar (Johnson 2016) maintained these mentoring experiences contribute in a crucial way to ushering mentees into adulthood.

In the decades since Kram and Levinson discussed the needs of “novice adults” and the ways in which mentors can assist, the novice adults have changed, and research shows even the description of 18-30-year old’s from “Novice” to “Emerging” (Arnett, 2015). Arnett pointed out

in the past, adulthood has been defined by four accomplishments: moving away from home, getting married, starting a family, and becoming financially independent. In 1960, 70% of American 30-year olds had accomplished these things. By 2000 fewer than 40% had done the same. In the place of these more material achievements, emerging adulthood is characterized in Arnett's (2015) study by five main features: (a) Identity explorations (finding an answer to the question "who I am?"); (b) Instability (in all aspects of life including relationships, work, and living accommodations); (c) Self-focus (obligations to others are not as important); (d) Feeling in-between (similar to the descriptions of Kram and Levinson, a feeling of being in transition); (e) Possibilities / optimism (a sense that one can transform their lives). Whether the college age adults are novice as conceptualized by Kram and Levinson or emerging as postulated by Arnett, the need for a mentor to kindly, patiently guide and encourage from adolescence to adulthood is still much needed (Johnson, 2016).

Beyond serving as a bridge to adulthood, mentoring relationships have been discussed to reduce school dropout rates, reduce risky behaviors, increase academic achievement, self-identity, and positive self-image, and facilitate career development (Crisp, et al., 2017; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978). In a 1972 study, Harriett Zuckerman found of all US Nobel laureates, more than half (48) had worked, either as students, post doctorates, or junior collaborators, under older Nobel laureates (Zuckerman, 1977). Recognizing the impact of mentoring on students, the council of Graduate Schools now lists mentoring as one of the six factors leading to successful PhD completion. (2008). Echoing Levinson, et al., (1978), Johnson (2016) asserted the benefits to the mentee can be so valuable to the mentee that identification with at least one important mentor should be considered a major developmental task of the college and early career years.

The effects of mentoring relationships extend throughout the mentee's professional life. Compared to non-mentored individuals, those with mentors tend to be more satisfied with their careers, enjoy more promotions and higher income, report greater commitment to the organization or profession, and are more likely to mentor others in turn. (Eby, et al., 2008; Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985; Poterat, Shockley & Allen, 2009). Typically, when asked to reflect on the major satisfactions and frustrations at work, people consistently mention others that served as mentors to them (Kram, 1985). Sadly, these kinds of relationships are not readily available to most people in organizations; they remain a greatly needed but relatively rare occurrence in most work settings or in institutions of higher education (Gallup, 2014; Johnson, 2016; Kram 1985).

Crisp, et al., (2017), asserted providing college students with access to mentoring has become a national priority. This because mentoring can be effective in reducing inequities in outcomes for marginalized and underrepresented groups. Crisp, et al., (2017) further posited mentoring integrates students from historically underrepresented groups in higher education, and further can advance social justice and equity agendas. Mentoring efforts have also been found to support social justice by providing equitable forms and types of support for underrepresented and underserved groups such as African American, Latina/o, and low-income students (Crisp, et al., 2017; Dahlvig, 2010; Smith, 2013; Tovar, 2014).

Generally, research has shown quality mentoring relationships are associated with critical benefits and ethnic minority populations. Mentors can help youth from diverse backgrounds grow in socially accepted ways influencing their cognitive, interpersonal, and identity development including improve school attendance academic achievement, and the likelihood of

graduating from high school. Moreover, these relationships show reductions in delinquent behavior and increases in psychological well-being. They also reveal improved relationships with their parents and their peers (Liang & Grossman, 2007).

Much of the research on student faculty mentoring is overwhelmingly focused on the graduate level. This is because student-faculty mentoring relationships are an inherent part of graduate training models for many disciplines. Graduate school is viewed as an extension of the apprentice master model of learning a trade; as such, it follows that the relationship between mentor and protégé is of critical importance. Graduate level mentoring relationships are qualitatively different than those at the undergraduate level because mentors are likely to be more invested in their graduate student protégés than their undergraduate ones due to the length of the relationship and the fact that many graduate student protégés will become colleagues with their mentors after graduation (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007).

Levinson et al., (1978) held mentoring is something every undergraduate student needs, yet Crisp et al., (2017) asserted students from working-class backgrounds; first-generation students; African-American, Latina/o, and American Indian Native American students and others from historically represented groups may not have equitable access to mentoring support when compared to majority groups.

Deliberate and thoughtful mentoring is one of the most important and enduring for the higher education faculty (Johnson, 2016). Institutions with active mentoring are more likely to have productive employees, stronger organizational commitment, reduced turnover, a stronger record of developing talent, and a loyal group of alumni and faculty. (Allen, et al., 2009; Russell & Adams, 1997). Mentees in high quality mentorships report stronger long commitment to the institution and also exude more positive and notable organizational citizenship behavior (e.g.,

assisting coworkers, volunteering to do things not formally required of them) than those not mentored or those in poor supervisory relationships (Donaldson, Ensher, & Grant-Vallone, 2000).

### **Definitions of Mentoring.**

The word mentor is introduced in Epic Greek literature, and etymologically from many Greek roots meaning “think,” “counsel,” “remember,” and “endure.” One more contemporary article describes a mentor as a “protector, benefactor, sponsor, champion, advocate, supporter, or counselor” (Freedman, 1993, p. 31). Mentoring is recognized as having positive effects on mentors and mentees alike, and is looked at in business, government and educational circles as a “magic bullet” to cure the ills of both organizations and society. A literature review (Nora & Crisp, 2007) of over fifty scholarly articles revealed no commonly accepted definition of mentoring. Scholars have struggled for decades to define the term (Garvey, 2004; Gibb, 2003; Jacobi, 1991), because mentoring literature has been more concerned with understanding the relationship between mentoring and other constructs, than defining the nature of mentoring itself (Allen & Eby, 2007). So, while mentoring is everywhere; there is no clear and consistent definition for it, there is, nonetheless an intuitive belief that mentoring works (Rhodes, 2005). What follows, then, are ten definitions, by no means exhaustive, from the literature serving to form a cross-section of mentoring definitions.

Definition 1: “Mentoring is a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student or faculty member. A mentor provides the mentee with knowledge, advice, counsel, challenge, and support in the mentee's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession” (Johnson, 2016, p. 23);

Definition 2: “[The mentor] may act as a teacher . . . [and] . . . as a sponsor. . . [the mentor] may be a host and a guide, welcoming the initiate into a new occupational and social world and acquainting him [or her] with its values, customs, resources, and cast of characters. Through his {or her] own virtues, achievements, and way of living, the mentor may be an exemplar that the protégé can admire and seek to emulate” (Levinson et al., 1978, 98);

Definition 3: “To be sought out as a teacher, adviser, sponsor, and much more --- to facilitate realization of another’s dream --- to mutually share in this “love relationship” which can be equated to the relationship with a “good enough” parent who sets boundaries which are safe for the growth of the individual, this is the role of the mentor” (Barnett, 1984, p. 14);

Definition 4: “A mentor supports, guides, and counsels a young adult as he or she accomplishes mastery of the adult world of work” (Kram 1985, p. 2);

Definition 5: “The protégé often uses the mentor as a model to set personal standards of performance and code of ethics. The protégé gains visibility within the colleague network of the mentor. With this association and exposure come a degree of status and increased professional opportunities” (Cronan-Hillix, et al., 1986, p. 124);

Definition 6: “Mentoring is a process by which persons of superior rank, special achievement, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (Blackwell, 1989, p. 9);

Definition 7: “We consider mentoring to be a dynamic, reciprocal relationship in a work environment between an advanced career incumbent (mentor) and beginner (protégé) aimed at promoting the career development of both. For the protégé, the object of mentoring is the achievement of an identity transformation, a movement from the status of understudy to that of self-directing colleague. For the mentor, the relationship is a vehicle for achieving mid-life

generativity, meaning a transcendence of stagnating self-preoccupation” (Healy & Welchert, 1990, p. 17);

Definition 8: “One between an older, more experienced adult and an unrelated, younger protégé --- a relationship in which the adult provides ongoing guidance, instruction, and encouragement aimed at developing the competence and character of the protégé” (Rhodes, 2002, p. 7);

Definition 9: “A mentor is an adult who you can go to for support and guidance if you need to make an important decision or who inspires you to do your best” (Zimmerman, Bingenheimer, & Notaro, 2002, p. 226);

Definition 10: “Mentoring is a process for the internal transmission of knowledge, social capital, and the psychosocial support perceived by the recipient as relevant to work, career, or professional development; mentoring entails informal communication, usually face-to-face and during a sustained period of time, between a person who is perceived to have greater relevant knowledge, wisdom, or experience (the mentor) and a person who is perceived to have less (the protégé)” (Bozeman & Feeney, 2007, p. 17).

It should be noted in these sampled definitions, many researchers highlighted specific roles (e.g., teacher, counselor), although Johnson (2016) asserted “mentoring is not defined in terms of a formal role assignment, rather by the “character and quality of the relationship,” as well as the specific functions provided by the mentor p. 28). Some researchers are age specific (adult); some mention abilities (more experienced, more knowledgeable). Some researchers in the sample above, while addressing roles, also chose to emphasize specific functions of a mentor (e.g., guide, role model, counseling, encourager, source of support). Other researchers emphasized the length or enduring nature of the mentoring process, indeed referring to it as a



“process.” Lastly, some emphasis is placed in these definitions on specific outcomes of the mentoring process (e.g., self-confidence or self-efficacy either as a worker or as a student or as an adult; developing character; gaining visibility within the colleague network or gaining social capital of the mentor).

In surveying definitions in the literature, DuBois and Karcher (2005) noted three main characteristics of mentoring relationships. First, a mentor is someone with greater experience or wisdom; second, the mentor offers guidance or instruction intended to promote the protégé’s development; and third, there is a trusting emotional bond between the mentor and protégé. At its most fundamental level then, mentoring is an intensive kind of teaching (Smith, 2013). Building on the idea of mentoring and teaching, one participant in Kram’s (1985) study of mentoring at work, made this observation about their senior manager:

I see him like a teacher --- totally impressive in terms of knowing all the fundamentals. . . . the kind of teacher everybody would want to get into his class because you know he cares about you as an individual. He is one of a kind. (p. 31)

### **History of Mentoring**

Humans have an instinctive need to collect and share information and are becoming mentors even as we are being mentored (Harari, 2015). The initial place of gathering and information sharing for humans, and thus a place for mentoring to take place, may have been the campsite, used by Homo Sapiens, as much as one million years ago (Wilson, 2012). Unlike a shrieking animal signaling danger, humans can issue a warning, and share details regarding the direction of the danger, which way the object of danger is heading. This ability to share (and store) detailed information fueled the cognitive revolution, leading to the birth and development of civilization. From the cave art of Lascaux and Font-du-Gaume to the epic literature of

Gilgamesh and Homer, man has demonstrated a need to share information to succeeding generations about his experiences, his understanding of them, and the lessons he has gained from them. This generativity, defined by Erikson (1959, 1980) as denoting a “concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” we call mentoring.

In ancient literature, the survivor of the flood, Gilgamesh was mentored by Utnapishtim teaching Gilgamesh lessons about the meaning of life and immortality; The immortal Virgil mentors Dante through the Divine Comedy, as he walks before Dante, leading him into and out of the dangerous places of the various rings of Hell. In these examples from ancient literature, we see mentors creating and assuming roles and functions now synonymous with mentoring: guide, teacher, provider of self-efficacy, protector, etc.

In Homer’s *Odyssey*, the first time the use of the name Mentor is introduced as the Greek Goddess Athena assumed the role of an older friend of Odysseus, calling herself Mentor as she worked with his young adult age son, Telemachus to specifically bolster his sense of self-efficacy. In this capacity, Athena (Mentor) acts as protector and champion of both Odysseus and his son Telemachus. Using Mentor’s treatment of Telemachus as an example, the term protégé means someone who is protected.

The Greek poet Hesiod, a contemporary of Homer, may have explained at once the need of Homer’s Mentor, as well as explaining one of the many roles of a mentor when he created a new version of the Indo – European myth of the four ages of men. In Hesiod’s conceptualization, there were four successive ages each more degenerate than the last and each named after a metal: gold, silver, bronze, and iron. Hesiod inserted between the Bronze Age and the Iron Age, the worst era of all: The Heroic Age. The men of this heroic age were demigods, those described as being just and good, those who turned their backs on the hubris of their forbearers, but even so

they fought the terrible Trojan War, which finally destroyed them. Now the heroes lived on in the Blessed Isles at the very edge of the world --- the Heroic Age was the age then of Odysseus.

The heroic age was succeeded by the age of iron, the era in which Homer and Hesiod --- and Telemachus lived. The world in which they lived, (historically called “The Greek Dark Ages”) was a world turned upside down, lurching toward an inevitable destruction. To them life was hard and hopeless and would never be as glorious as in preceding generations. With this background, the need for Mentor in Homer’s story, and the role of a mentor connect closely with the concept of generativity: Mentor (to Homer), and mentors to us, provide a link to the past needed to strengthen the rising generation as they transition to adulthood.

Underscoring the mentor / mentee relationship Homer adds a play on words: the name Telemachus means “far from the battle” this meaning places Telemachus as being somehow weak and in need of some form of protection; in other words, a “protégée” (Garvey, 2017) and as a consequence of Mentor’s (Athena’s) efforts to “put some courage in him,” he is no longer “far from the battle” as he aids his father, Odysseus in ridding their home of the suitors in the bloody climax of the epic.

Throughout the poem, Athena also used her conversations with Odysseus and Telemachus, leading them both to reflect and learn from their experiences and develop wisdom of their own. Acting as philosopher and sage, Athena (Mentor) raised self-awareness, increased their ability to think and helped them develop qualities such as humility and mindfulness, many of the functions and roles associated with mentors and mentees (Clutterbuck, et al., 2017).

Two and a half millennia later in his classic work, *The Adventures of Telemachus* (1699), Fenelon developed a narrative begun by Homer, focusing on the relationship between Telemachus and Mentor. In the process Fenelon created a label describing the relationship

between Telemachus and Athena / Mentor: “Mentoring.” Fenelon argued the term “mentoring” started in France and migrated to England so that by the 18<sup>th</sup> century the word “mentor” had entered both the French and English languages as a common noun. Supporting this construct, Roberts (1998) argued the term “mentor” was not even present in the English language until 1750. Lee (2010) took this concept further by holding Fenelon as the true source of the word mentor and not Homer. The word mentor is used extensively in 18<sup>th</sup>-century texts when it is often capitalized about Fenelon’s character, Mentor.

Beyond creating the term, Fenelon’s conceptualization of what a mentor is and does is of greater worth. Fenelon suggested throughout his work that all life’s experiences hold within them opportunities to teach and learn, as does the observing of others’ behaviors offer positive and negative experiences. It is through these experiences, coupled with the guidance of a mentor that provides opportunities to learn “the ways of the world” or what Kram (1985) would later call, “psychosocial functions.”

Fenelon’s narrative provides some insight into what a mentor is and what a mentor does from the perspective of both the mentor and mentee. These insights about the functions of a mentor have formed the conceptual basis about mentoring in education and business, and amongst researchers. These mentoring functions include, (1) Fostering mentee independence and self-efficacy; (2) Supporting and challenging the mentee; (3) Providing opportunities for mentee experiential learning; (4) Developing values and virtue of the mentee; (5) Aiding in the psychosocial development of the mentee; (6) Forming a relationship of trust and emotional commitment; and, (7) Developing and sharing a spirit of altruism (Garvey, 2017).

Inspired by Fenelon, 18<sup>th</sup> century writer, Caraccioli wrote *Veritable le Mentor ou l’education de la noblesse* in 1759; in 1760 it was translated into English to become *The True*

*Mentor, or an Essay on the Education of Young People in Fashion*. Similarly, to Fenelon, Caraccioli posited Mentor is the personification of wisdom with a highly developed self-knowledge. To Caraccioli, a mentor does not act from self-interest, but from principle, drawing on experience in order to tackle serious issues and is sought out by mentees rather than seeking them.

A further 18<sup>th</sup> century link to Fenelon is found in a work entitled *The Female Mentor* by Honoria, published in three volumes in English in 1793 and 1796. Taken together then, our understanding of what a mentor is or what a mentor does, or what mentoring is, is a construction created in 18<sup>th</sup>-century literature. Through these works, mentoring is presented as a principled activity one that may facilitate learning and development within a caring, supportive, and challenging relationship (Garvey, 2017).

Beyond these significant foundational mentoring constructs, significant systems of mentoring include the guru-disciple tradition in Buddhism and Hinduism; the discipleship system of Elders practiced in Rabbinical Judaism, and Christianity. Mentoring was practiced in Ancient Greece as young men, usually from prosperous families gained the skills needed to successfully participate in the public life of Athenian democracy by observing their fathers, uncles or other older men as they performed the work of adult males. These young men watched the older experienced men participate in the assembly, serve as counsellors or magistrates, make speeches in court cases. In all ways, these young protégées would learn about public life, as well as how to function as an adult within the expectations and demands of society by spending his time in the company of the older man and his adult friends (Martin, 2013). Again, we see mentors provide experience, knowledge, increase in self-efficacy, and an entrée to the mentor's world of professional and personal acquaintances, thus acting as a source of social capital.

In the Roman Empire, the Romans while seeking to emulate the Greeks in culture, philosophy and religion, took the Greek idea of mentoring and added a uniquely Roman flavor (Fromkin, 1998). Mentoring, Roman-style called for rich and powerful Romans of high social status to be linked through personal relationships with the masses of average citizens. This relationship involved the mentors acting as “patrons” protecting and supporting the lower classes who became dependents or clients (Zoch, 2000). It may have been this sense of social unity produced by this form of mentoring that caused Tertullian to exclaim “The world is every day better known, better cultivated, and more civilized than before” (Muller, 1961, p. 267).

Dating from medieval times in education, deliberate and thoughtful mentoring is one of the most important and enduring for the higher education faculty (Johnson, 2016). More than a millennium ago, mentoring stood at the heart of the European university tutorial system. For example, Oxford University used its dons as tutors and long-term developmental mentors to students. Dons lived on campus and mixed with students in a variety of contexts and university events. The Oxford don would come to know students not just academically, but also socially and personally (Scott 1992).

In Colonial America, mentoring appeared through the idea or concept of character. Character to the generations of the Founding Fathers was the impersonation of admired values or traits in another, in much the same way an actor takes a role, until that copied trait becomes part of the person (Smith, 1993). In this way, the individual being copied served as a “mentor” to the one seeking to improve in some character trait.

During the era known as “Jacksonian America,” the concept of “moral uplift” evidenced in reform organizations to address and solve social problems, connected an idea of mentoring, using people to serve as models of proper or upright behavior. One such organization, the New

York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP) utilized mentors. Members of this organization volunteered to serve as “friendly visitors” who would visit and try to form personal relationships with the poor as a way to reduce poverty.

Philanthropic organizations such as Hull House throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prospered in America because the middle classes believed the best way that they could serve the poorer classes, whether they were economically poor, morally or behaviorally poor was by forming benevolent relationships with them (McGerr, 2003; Traxel, 2006). This same idea or concept continues to the best days through such organizations as Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Smith, 2013).

Throughout history, mentors have influenced mentees in philosophy, politics, psychology, entertainment, music, sports and in many of the world’s religious traditions with far-reaching consequences. Socrates mentored Plato, who in turn mentored Aristotle, who in turn mentored Alexander the Great. George Fairfax mentored George Washington who in turn mentored the Marquis de Lafayette and Alexander Hamilton; George Wythe mentored many of the early leaders of the United States including John Marshall, Henry Clay, and Thomas Jefferson who in turn mentored James Madison; Theodore Roosevelt and Louis Howe mentored Franklin D. Roosevelt. Franklin Roosevelt, Georgia senator Richard Russell, and Texas congressman Sam Rayburn took turns mentoring Lyndon B. Johnson; Colonel House mentored Woodrow Wilson; in psychology, Freud mentored Jung.

In music, Haydn mentored Mozart and Beethoven; Duke Ellington mentored Tony Bennett, who in turn is mentoring Lady GaGa; Bing Crosby mentored Frank Sinatra; Tina Turner mentored Mick Jagger; Woody Guthrie mentored Bob Dylan; later, Dylan and Little Richard mentored in different ways, the Beatles. In entertainment, Jack Benny mentored Johnny

Carson and Buster Keaton mentored Lucille Ball. In sports, Phil Jackson mentored Michael Jordan; Ward “Piggy” Lambert mentored his point guard, John Wooden; later as basketball coach at UCLA, Coach Wooden mentored among others, Lew Alcindor (Kareem Abdul-Jabbar) and Bill Walton. Fifty years after they had first met, Abdul-Jabbar reflected on the impact of his mentor: “without Coach, my life would have been so much less. Less joyous. Less meaningful. Less filled with love” (2017, p. 5). Leo Durocher and Monte Irvin mentored Willie Mays who in turn mentored Bobby Bonds and Bobby’s son, Barry; Gordie Howe mentored Wayne Gretzky; bitterness existed between Casey Stengel, Joe DiMaggio, and the young Mickey Mantle when their attempts at mentoring Mantle did not meet their expectations, as Mantle failed to heed their example or counsel.

Mentoring has a place in the religious tradition as well: Abraham mentored his nephew Lot; Jethro mentored his son-in-law Moses who in turn mentored Caleb and Joshua; Naomi mentored her daughter-in-law, Ruth; Jesus mentored His disciples; the Apostle Paul mentored Timothy; Mohammad was mentored by his wife (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007).

As has been shown, mentoring has been known and utilized for several millennia, across cultures, professions and nationalities. Mentoring has shown to have an enduring hold on both young and old, male and female, because of the intuitive belief, then as now, that mentoring works, carrying benefits to both mentor and mentee as well as society in general.

### **Mentoring scholarship**

Even with the vast historical and cultural reach staying power of mentoring, much like the other variables of this study, self-efficacy, social capital, and college persistence, there has been little attempt to define mentoring or understand the mechanics of it until fairly recently. It



seemed to be sufficient that it did work, that mentoring did have certain personal and societal benefits, without understanding how and why it worked.

This all changed with the 1978 publication of Daniel Levinson's seminal work, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, and Kathy Kram's (1985) equally important and influential study, *Mentoring at Work*. In both qualitative studies, the importance of the construct of mentoring is advanced. Levinson, et al., (1978) asserted that forming a meaningful mentoring relationship is one of the most important developmental tasks of young adulthood. Levinson further found that one or more important or key mentoring relationships in young adulthood was essential in forming a solid life structure for young people, arguing

The mentor relationship is one of the complex and developmentally important a person can have in early adulthood . . . No word currently in use is adequate to convey the nature of the relationship we have in mind here. Words such as 'counselor' or 'guru' suggest the subtle meanings, but they have other connotations that would be misleading. The term 'mentor' is generally used in a much narrower sense, to mean teacher, adviser, or sponsor. As we use the term, it means all these things and more. (p. 97)

Kram (1985) inspired by Levinson's work, added to our knowledge and understanding of mentoring by proposing mentoring relationships are effective less from the roles performed by the mentor, than by separate and distinct functions performed by the mentor. Kram's work, a qualitative study of 18 mentor-protégé relationships was the first in-depth study of mentoring in the workplace in which Kram identified several key aspects of mentoring relationships such as functions of mentoring, phases of a mentoring relationship, and the complexities of cross-gender relationships. While Levinson's work reawakened an interest in mentoring by both the public and scholars, Kram's study launched a spate of research on mentoring in the fields of

psychology, education and management. Over the succeeding three decades, most of subsequent mentoring research has focused on three general areas of interest: 1. Mentoring youth; 2. Mentoring in the workplace; and 3. Mentoring of students by faculty and staff (Allen & Eby 2007).

### **Mentoring of Youth**

Increased attention has been paid over the past several decades regarding the mentoring of youth. This increased attention has been fueled by large amounts of research that links one good relationship with an adult to a host of positive outcomes for children or adolescents (in much the same way Levinson, et al., 1978 described the effect of mentoring on novice adults) including better psychological and academic adjustment (Spencer 2007).

Definitions of mentoring revolve around the idea that a mentor is a more senior person acting as a guide, a sponsor, teacher, role model (Johnson, 2016) acting for and in behalf of a younger less experienced person. Using that definition then, it follows the first mentor(s) humans meet are our parents. Levinson, et al., (1978) compares the mentoring relationship to parenting, raising mentors to the level of parents, stating that not having a mentor, or receiving poor mentoring is “the equivalent of poor parenting in childhood” (p. 338). Perhaps it is this equation that leads Rhodes (2002) to assert “vulnerable children would be better left alone than paired with mentors who do not recognize and honor the enormous responsibility they have been given” (p. 3).

In much the same way parents encourage the development and accomplishment of childhood dreams, which aids in self-efficacy, mentors assist in the realization of another’s dream (Levinson, et al., 1978) together mutually sharing in what has been called a “love relationship.” This relationship, grounded in love and achievement of dreams can be equated to

the relationship with a “good enough” parent who sets boundaries which are safe for the growth of the individual (Barnett, 1984, p. 14).

Ainsworth (1989) also found links existing between mentoring and parenthood, noting powerful emotional attachments lasting beyond childhood, suggesting that mentors (e.g., coaches, teachers) are parental surrogates, play a powerful role in healthy human development and psychological adjustment. One example of this relationship type of mentor as surrogate parent with life changing effects is that of George Herman (Babe) Ruth. At the age of 7, Ruth’s parents, realizing he needed stricter supervision than they could provide, sent him to live at St. Mary’s Industrial School for Boys, a school run by Catholic monks. It was there that Ruth met Brother Matthias, one of the monks who took an instant liking to the boy, becoming a father figure and positive role model, while introducing him to structure, and to the game of baseball (Creamer, 1990).

Referring to that idea of mentors as surrogate parents, Lyndon Johnson, when informed of the death of his mentor, Franklin D. Roosevelt, said “that man was like a daddy to me” (Dallek, 1991, p. 266). Men and women can be surrogate parents in the mentoring relationship. By the same token, mentees can and do serve as surrogate children to mentors. Indeed, mentoring is often compared to parenting in the literature (Johnson, 2016; Levinson, et al., 1978; Kram, 1985). Certainly, the childless “Father of his country,” George Washington saw Lafayette and Hamilton as surrogate children (Smith, 1993). The absence of such a relationship in childhood may have profound consequences, as Henry Kissinger observed about Richard Nixon, the night that Nixon announced his historic diplomatic opening to China, “imagine how far this man could have gone, and what he could have accomplished, if only someone would have loved him” Wicker, 1991, 430).

The Grant Study is part of the Study of Adult Development at Harvard Medical School. It is a 75-year longitudinal study of 268 physically- and mentally-healthy Harvard college sophomores from the classes of 1939–1944 (including four men who subsequently ran for the U.S. Senate, one cabinet officer and President John F. Kennedy). Vaillant's (1977) conclusion from this study of many of the most outstanding men in the United States, found those who were the most successful tended to have a mentor in young adulthood, he called "warmth relationships." The conclusion Vaillant reaches from his work is "the warmth of relationships throughout life has the greatest impact on life satisfaction. Happiness is love. Full stop" (Vaillant, 2012, p. 52). Roche's (1979) article in the *Harvard Business Review* reported that 2/3 of nearly 4,000 executives listed in the "Who's News" column of the *Wall Street Journal* reported having a mentor. Additionally, executives with mentors reported earning more money at an early age, attaining higher levels of education, following a specific career plan, and feeling more satisfied with their careers.

Unsurprisingly, researchers have found positive outcomes for mentoring of youth who are living in high-risk settings (Rhodes, 2002). Williams and Kornblum (1985) in a classic study concluded a key difference between successful and unsuccessful youth from lower-income urban communities was mentoring: the successful youths had mentors, the unsuccessful did not. Williams and Kornblum (1985) found the success or failure of teenagers in later life are influenced by many factors; but the most significant is "the presence or absence of adult mentors" (p. 108).

In a similar vein, Lefkowitz (1986) recognized the vital protective influence supportive adults had on at-risk youth, particularly those, who as Levinson et al., (1978) encourage youth to live their dream. Among the low-income youth he studied he found the same pattern occurring

frequently: those who escaped effects of poverty, and “social pathology” was “the kid who found somebody, usually in school, sometimes outside, who helped them invent a promising future” (p. 117).

In a subsequent study of 294 youth, Beier and colleagues (2000) found those with natural mentors were significantly less likely to participate in four of the five high-risk behaviors they measured: smoking, drug use, carrying a weapon and unsafe sex. Participation in the fifth high-risk behavior, alcohol use was unaffected. Zimmerman and his colleagues (2002) found those with natural mentors had more positive attitudes toward school, and were less likely to use alcohol, smoke marijuana, and become delinquents. Rutter and Giller (1983) asserts minority children of low-income, divorced or separated parents were less likely to drop out of school if positively influenced by extended family members and other caring adults. This finding caused them to hypothesize about the importance of situations “where good relationships outside the family can have a protective effect similar to that which apparently stems from within the immediate family” (p. 237).

### **Mentoring within the workplace**

The need for mentoring relationships are omnipresent throughout the major developmental events of one’s life (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978). Mentoring is synonymous with parenting (Ainsworth, 1989; Johnson, 2016), and the first mentors encountered are parents, or those serving as surrogate parents (Barnett, 1984; Levinson, et al., 1978) as the mentee learns how to become human, how to perform the basic tasks appropriate to childhood. Mentors support, guide, and counsel a young adult as he or she accomplishes mastery of the adult world of work (Arnett, 2015; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978).

A mentor relationship allows participants to speak freely about concerns about self, career, and family (Kram, 1985). This is done through mentoring as mentoring provides opportunities to gain knowledge, skills, and competence. By the same token, mentoring relationships are reciprocal: that is, they benefit both the mentor and the mentee (Johnson, 2016). These relationships benefit the mentee as he / she enters the world of work, the world of becoming an adult (Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978). They benefit the mentor as they provide opportunities to enhance their personal need for generativity (Erikson, 1959, 1980; Levinson, et al., 1978); Additionally, mentoring relationships allow the older mentor to remain current, enhancing the mentor's need to feel competent in his / her work (Kram, 1985).

Johnson (2016) maintains mentoring is not defined in terms of a formal role assignment, but in terms of the character and quality of the relationship and in terms of the specific functions provided by the mentor. Accordingly, one of Kram's (1985) lasting contributions to the field of mentoring scholarship is her proposal of specific and unique mentoring functions.

These functions confirmed by a significant volume of empirical research as critical to the success and satisfaction of mentees and are categorized as career and psychosocial in nature. Both career-oriented mentoring functions (guidance, networking, challenge, direct teaching) and psychosocial / relational mentor functions (encouragement, support, counsel, and collegiality) contribute to mentee outcomes in important ways (Forehand, 2008; Kram, 1985; Lunsford, 2012).

Remembering the introduction of the name / word "Mentor," in Homer's *The Odyssey*, Athena in the role of Mentor acts in a psychosocial way when she provides encouragement to Telemachus. Athena's (Mentor's) purpose in coming to Ithaca is to provide some courage to Odysseus' young-adult aged son. She accomplishes this by noting as a friend of Odysseus', how

much Telemachus resembles his father, and suggesting by in a carefully calculated manner that Telemachus is very much Odysseus' son, and while carrying the blood of Odysseus, Telemachus is also able to replicate the courageous acts of his father. Protegees judge this specific function of mentoring as even more important than the than the career functions of mentoring (Mullen, 2007). As it did for Telemachus anciently, psychosocial mentoring, when it is cultivated increases the protegees overall satisfaction in the relationship, while increasing the sense of competence and identity of the protegee (Mullen, 2007).

### **Career Functions**

Blackwell (1989) emphasized the importance of career development defining mentoring as a “process by which persons of superior rank, special achievement, and prestige instruct, counsel, guide, and facilitate the intellectual and/or career development of persons identified as protégés” (p. 9). Adding to the conversation, Healy and Welchart (1990) considered mentoring to be a “dynamic, reciprocal relationship” between mentor and mentee or protégé, aimed at the career development of both, thus the reciprocity contained within the relationship. For the protégé, the object of mentoring is the achievement of an identity transformation, a movement from the status of understudy to that of self-directing colleague. For the mentor, the relationship is a vehicle for achieving mid-life generativity, meaning a transcendence of stagnating self-preoccupation (p. 17).

According to Kram (1985) career functions encompass self-efficacy and the acquisition of support systems at work. This specific function is the aspect of the relationship that strengthens advancement or “learning the ropes” in any organization. The career function of mentoring occurs naturally as the mentor supports, guides, and counsels a young adult, leading to the mentee accomplishes mastery of the adult world of work.

Viewed in this context, the mentoring relationship supports career development, enables mentees to address the challenges encountered moving through adulthood and through an organizational career. Career development occurs as mentors teach, advise, coach, and model; these functions help mentees master necessary professional skills and ultimately "learn the ropes" of both the discipline and the organization. The functions and the outcomes they are designed to produce, prepares the mentee for hierarchical advancement and other markers of success in an institution and a career (Kram, 1985).

The mentoring relationship is vital to future career development and advancement of the mentee as the mentor serves as a sponsor in the organization. Without this sponsorship stemming from acquired social capital, individuals are likely to be overlooked for promotions regardless of his or her competence and performance.

Sponsorship, an important career functions of mentoring is possible largely through the experience, rank and influence of the mentor (Kram, 1985). The greater experience, rank, and influence of the mentor translates to the amount of sponsorship or social capital drawn upon by the mentee or protégé. In this relationship, the protégé often uses the mentor as a model to set personal standards of performance and code of ethics.

The protégé gains visibility within the colleague network of the mentor. With this association and exposure come a degree of status and increased professional opportunities (Cronan-Hillix, et al., 1986). Obviously, then, the mentor in the workplace may well be more cautious in the mentee selection process, as the mentor's reputation, and hence, his or her power, rank and influence is risked by the performance of the mentee sponsored by the mentor, Thus, they may prefer to choose mentees similar to the mentor, and / or those possessing skills



reminiscent of the mentor at a comparable age, thereby limiting opportunities for others (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

### **Psychosocial functions**

Psychosocial functions are those parts of a relationship that enhances a sense of competence (self-efficacy), clarity of identity, and effectiveness within a professional role (Kram, 1985). The psychosocial functions of mentoring are only possible because of the interpersonal relationship of the mentorship (Clutterbuck, 2004). Herrera and her colleagues (2000) observed that the vital center of the relationship is the bond that forms between the mentor and mentee. If that bond does not form, as is true in any embryonic relationship, the relationship will not last long enough to have any positive impact on one or the other. The quality of this relational bond causes the mentee and mentor to identify one with another. The mentor sees in the mentee a younger version of themselves, and the mentee sees in the mentor a model whom the younger would like to become (Kram, 1985).

As is true in a love relationship (Johnson, 2016), these psychosocial functions are built on trust, intimacy and interpersonal bonds formed in the relationship. These functions include specific mentor behaviors that enhance mentees' professional and personal growth, identity, self-worth, and self-efficacy. Psychosocial functions include (but not limited) role modeling, acceptance and confirmation, counseling and friendship.

Functions such as these found in high-quality mentorships generate relational skills like emotional awareness, empathic listening, and compassion necessary for the mentee to build other high-quality relationships. A strong relational identity is linked with such relational abilities as communication of empathy, respect and compassion to mentees and for the capacity of for encouraging and managing appropriately professional intimacy; these relational identities are

crucial when it comes to forming a strong relationship with a mentee (Allen, Poteet, & Burroughs, 1997). Recent research indicates a strong relationship with an emotionally intelligent mentor can help a mentee develop a relational cache; a set of relational skills and attitudes that are transportable to the mentee's subsequent relationships (Ragins 2012).

Of the psychosocial functions described, role modeling is the most frequently reported, and undoubtedly the function most associated with mentoring (Kram, 1985). Role modeling involves the mentor or senior person setting a desirable example, and the mentee being able to identify with that example. Setting a good example is simultaneously a conscious and an unconscious process. The mentor may be unaware of the example they are setting, and the mentee may be unaware of the strength of their identification with that example (Kram, 1985).

### **Student-Faculty Mentoring Relationships**

Mentoring relationships inherently involve teaching and learning (Levinson, 1978, Johnson, 2016). It is not surprising and is to be expected many great mentors have been known as teachers. Socrates, Jesus, George Wythe among others were identified by their mentees as first and foremost teachers and came in contact first with their eventual mentees as a result of the teaching relationship.

At times, the term mentor is used in the context of formal programs designed to match novice students or faculty with seasoned advisors or sponsors in acknowledgement of the teaching and learning component of the relationship. At other times it is a word applied to a faculty member only in retrospect, sometimes years after the relationship has ended (Johnson, 2016). One educator has suggested that academic departments have a "moral responsibility" to ensure that students are mentored by faculty (Weil, 2001); while another educator called mentoring "the forgotten fourth leg in the academic stool." (Jacob, 1997, p. 486).

In academe, besides the examples of Socrates, Plato and Aristotle, mentoring stood at the heart of the European university tutorial system. For example, Oxford used its dons as tutors and long-term developmental mentors to students. Dons lived on campus and mixed with students in a variety of contexts and university events. Stressing the relationship aspect of mentoring, the Oxford don would come to know students not just academically, but also socially and personally (Scott, 1992).

Current and recent literature supports the construct that mentoring of students by faculty is instrumental in student success, and higher graduation rates. Excellent mentoring, and in particular, student-faculty interaction outside of the classroom, is associated with academic achievement and persistence in college (Astin, 1977; Campbell & Campbell 1997; Kuh & Hu, 2001; Tinto, 1975). When college freshmen are actively engaged by faculty, they are more likely to return for the sophomore year and are more likely thereafter to persist until graduation. Mentoring also predicts higher grade point averages (GPAs) and completion of more credit hours (Johnson, 2016).

Similarly, other studies establish impact of student relationships with family, siblings and peers on behaviors, attitudes, and perceptions ultimately affecting the students' persistence decisions (Hurtado-Ortiz & Guavain, 2007; Nora & Cabrera, 1996; Terenzini & Pascarella, 1991). At the same time some studies suggest the support of peers may play a central role in persistence (Bank, Slavings, & Biddle, 1990). Hurtado & Carter (1997). Crisp (2010) found discussions with peers outside of class aided with Latino students' sense of belonging to and adjustment to college (Crisp, 2010; Crisp, et al., 2017). Findings by Alva and Padilla (1995) suggest support from family, friends, faculty, and / or staff can shape community college

students' perceptions and attitudes regarding their abilities, thereby influencing their academic performance.

These relationships with faculty, staff, and others are of particular importance to “novice adults” extending beyond college persistence. Ragins (2012) found high-quality mentorships generate the relational skills (emotional awareness, empathic listening, and compassion) needed to build other high-quality relationships. A strong relationship with an emotionally intelligent mentor such as a faculty or staff member can help a mentee develop a relational cache; a set of relational skills and attitudes that are transportable to the mentee's subsequent relationships. In this sense, mentoring relationships serve as an essential building block, a keystone to future relationships. Perhaps because of this correlation between healthy mentoring relationships and future relationships, evidence in studies finds a reduction in the inevitable conflicts between work and school and family roles. Evidence that mentees have fewer work-family conflicts and report more success balancing the demands of work and family than those without mentors (Nielson, Carlson & Lankau, 2001).

Deliberate and thoughtful mentoring is one of the most important and enduring for the higher education faculty (Johnson, 2016). Institutions with active mentoring are more likely to have productive employees, stronger organizational commitment, reduced turnover, a stronger record of developing talent, and a loyal group of alumni and faculty (Allen et al., 2009; Russell & Adams, 1997).

Mentoring begets mentoring. Whether it is Plato who mentored Aristotle after he had been mentored by Socrates, or Jefferson who mentored Madison, following his mentoring by George Wythe, consistent findings in mentoring research is that former mentees (those who report a significant positive mentorship with a faculty member) are significantly more likely to

subsequently mentor juniors themselves. (Allen, et al., 1997; Busch, 1985; Clark, et al., 2000; Ragins & Cotton, 1993; Roche, 1979). While at the same time, non-mentored students recognize that they missed an element of their education that was crucial (Johnson, 2016).

Despite the evidence that mentoring of students by faculty and staff provides demonstrable benefits to both mentor and mentee, Johnson (2016) asserts solid advising, and excellent mentoring (attending to students, carving out time to know and understand each advisee's needs for academic guidance) is not universal across institutions, departments, or individual faculty members. Johnson's assertion is borne out by the recent (2014) Gallup-Purdue Survey where fewer than 3 in 10 of the 30,000 college graduates responded positively to the following prompts: "My professors cared about me as a person; I had a mentor (in college) who encouraged me to pursue my goals and dreams." One in seven (14%) of college graduates "strongly agreed" they were supported by professors who cared, made them excited about learning, and encouraged their dreams.

### **Attributes of Mentors**

Relationships viewed in the traditional sense have personal attributes that bring and keep the interested parties together. Not surprisingly, the attributes identified in the literature of successful mentoring relationships read like a wish list for constructing a love relationship. As mentoring is relational, and relationship-based, and has been referred to as something akin to a love relationship (Sternberg, 1986), mentors and mentees have identified attributes of successful mentors. Happily, as is true with many personal traits, while some of the desired attributes may not come naturally to mentors, most attributes of successful mentors can be developed and enhanced (Johnson, 2016).

Most, if not all of the interpersonal traits or skills associated with successful mentoring, and other successful relationships, fall under a type of intelligence called emotional intelligence (Goleman, 2005). Summarily explaining and qualifying the multiple types of intelligences, Gardner (2008) found

Interpersonal intelligence is the ability to understand other people: what motivates them, how they work, how to work cooperatively with them. Successful salespeople, politicians, teachers, clinicians, and religious leaders are all likely to be individuals with high degrees of interpersonal intelligence. Intrapersonal intelligence . . . is a correlative ability, turned inward. It is a capacity to form an accurate, veridical model of oneself and to be able to use that model to operate effectively in life. (p. 9)

Salovey and Mayer (1990) offered a rather elaborate definition of emotional intelligence, creating five domains: (1) Knowing one's emotions (or self-awareness); (2) Managing emotions; (3) Motivating oneself; (4) Recognizing emotions in others; (5) Handling relationships.

Among graduate students and medical school students, the most frequently cited attributes of excellent mentors include, intelligence, expertise, empathy, honesty, a sense of humor, compassion, dedication, generosity, enthusiasm, patience, flexibility, and caring (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Cronan-Hillix, Davidson, Cronan-Hillix, & Gensheimer, 1986; Johnson, 2016; Rodenhauser, Rudisill, & Dvorak, 2000). Mentees also mention frequently such qualities as communication skills, ability to read and understand others, ability to motivate, psychological stability, and honesty (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Johnson, 2016; Zey, 1984). Additionally, satisfied mentees often describe their mentors as admired, trusted, genuine and respected (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Burke, 1984; Clark et al., 2000).

So important are personal characteristics or attributes in the mentoring relationship, some authors have advised mentees to scrutinize prospective mentors on these personal characteristics: honesty, flexibility, warmth, patience, healthy work habits, integrity, comfort with mutuality and vulnerability in relationships, self-awareness, communication skills, sensitivity to diversity, and capacity for trust (Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Johnson & Ridley, 2008, 2015).

After examining over 600 pairs of mentoring relationships, Herrera and her colleagues (2000) observed “at the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond that forms between the youth and the mentor. If a bond does not form, then youth and mentors may disengage from the match before the mentoring relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact on youth.”

In Schreiner’s (et al., 2011) study, the following 7 themes emerged following 62 student interviews and 54 interviews of influential staff and faculty, stressing the importance of personal attributes:

1. A desire to connect with students;
2. Being unaware of their influence on students at critical junctures;
3. Wanting to make a difference in students’ lives;
4. Possessing a wide range of personality styles and strengths but being perceived by students as genuine and authentic;
5. Being intentional about connecting personally with students;
6. Different approaches utilized by faculty compared to staff; and
7. Differences in the types of behaviors that community college students reported as fostering their success (pp. 325-326).

True in the creation or attraction of any relationships, consistent findings in the literature illustrate the striking importance of interpersonal skills in both the forming of a mentorship

relationship and in the efficacy of the mentorship. Indeed, interpersonal ability is seen by prospective mentees as one important ingredient in the initial attraction to a mentor and the appeal of participating in a mentoring relationship; relational awareness is among the more highly rated and frequently mentioned factors in describing ideal mentors (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Schreiner, et al., 2011). Ultimately in one study of graduate students it is the mentor's interpersonal skills that most powerfully bound the student to the professor, the program, and the research enterprise itself (Shivy, Worthington, Wallis, & Hogan, 2003).

Relationships do make a difference (Levinson, 1996), and it is personal attributes or characteristics that make or break relationships. This is no less true with the relationship known as mentoring. Indeed, similar positive traits in all love relationships, i.e., trust, intimacy, caring, honesty, warmth to name a few are consistently mentioned in the literature by both mentors and mentees as being critical in beginning and maintaining a healthy and productive mentoring relationship.

### **Self-Efficacy**

We have always lived in challenging times; our day is no different: political turmoil; social, informational and technological upheaval, globalization of human connectedness any or all present additional challenges. "We have a system of news that tells people constantly that the world is out of control, that they will always be governed by crooks, that their fellow citizens are about to kill them" (Fallows, 1996, 142). Noted biologist Julian Huxley opined "the tempo of human evolution during recorded history is at least 100,000 times as rapid as that of pre-human evolution" (Huxley, 1942, p. viii). These rapid changes and advances, even when Huxley commented on them 75 years ago, more so evident today, severely strain confidence in



ourselves, our surroundings and in our ability to move confidently in the future, placing greater importance on people's sense of efficacy to shape their future.

### **Definition of Self-efficacy**

Bandura (1977) theorized the beliefs people hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts powerfully influence the ways in which they behave. According to Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, these self-efficacy beliefs help determine the choices people make, the effort they put forth, the persistence and perseverance they display in the face of difficulties, and the degree of anxiety or serenity they experience as they engage the myriad tasks that comprise their life. Through this social cognitive-learning theory, Bandura thus suggests that people learn from one another (observation, imitating, and modeling), observing others' behavior, attitudes, and the outcomes of those behaviors (Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). Simply put, personal influences interact with environmental influences, and lead people to make behavioral choices (Bandura, 1986). Completing this cycle are people's behaviors or actions complete the cycle, and serve to influence the next situation, influencing the course of action, shaping future activities or contexts (Ritchie, 2016).

In the context of community colleges, students then interact within the framework of learning consisting of themselves, their thoughts and beliefs (personal influences), the teacher, the context, the learning space (environmental influences), and their actions (behavioral choices). The foregoing are all relevant to learning methods, commitment, and engagement, and ultimately affect achievement (Ritchie, 2016).

An understanding of self-efficacy is important because these beliefs (self-efficacy) people choose to accept and act on, determine the course of their lives (i.e., how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their

resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize). Therefore, the greater their self-efficacy, the greater an individual's confidence in their ability to perform tasks and persist in the completion of those tasks (Bandura 1997).

Research has revealed the attitude you have at the beginning of a task determines the outcome of that task more than any other single factor. For example, if you believe you will be able to succeed at an undertaking and you approach the endeavor with a sense of excitement and joyful expectation, your chances of achieving success are much higher than if you face the task with dread and apprehension (Abascal, Brucato, & Brucato, 2001).

### **Self-Efficacy in Education**

A substantial body of literature exists detailing the positive impact self-efficacy has on the success of students in college, student behaviors, outcomes, and self-efficacy is believed to increase persistence (Aguayo, Herman, Ojeda, & Flores, 2011; Choi, 2005; Pajares & Schunk, 2001; Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). Specifically, self-efficacy is a positive determinant of desired academic outcomes such as (a) Enhancing adjustment to college; (b) College satisfaction; (c) Establishing challenging goals; (d) Purpose in life; (e) Writing-grammar performance ability; (f) Reducing students' stress and anxiety; (g) Actionable pursuit of enhanced development and improvement (Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014).

Evidence in the literature suggests that the way students feel about their relationship to the professor may play an even larger role than many faculty know in developing or sustaining academic self-efficacy. Micari and Pazos (2012) held this is true because in especially difficult

courses, students lack personal resources to rely on for support, motivation, and so on those the student-faculty relationship takes on greater importance.

In one of the early studies on the impact of student-faculty interactions, Pascarella and Terenzini (1978) reported informal contact with faculty had a significant relationship with persistence in college among first-year students even when controlling for a number of factors known to impact student retention. Kuh and Hu (2001) found the quality of student faculty interaction had an effect on students' effort or their self-efficacy in college, which in turn had an effect on their satisfaction and gains in learning.

Komaraju, Musulkin, and Bhattacharya (2010) similarly showed student's academic self-efficacy to be strongly related to their relationships with faculty, including their sense of professors' approachability, accessibility, and respect for students. Eimers (2001) showed similar findings in a survey of 1300 undergraduate at a large state university. In this study students reporting better relationships with faculty were more likely to feel they had made strides in math and science, as well as in problem-solving ability, general intellectual ability, and career development.

In their study (Micari & Pazos, 2012), posited the more a student felt he or she had a positive relationship to the professor, defined by such factors as looking up to the professor, feeling comfortable approaching the professor, and feeling that the professor respects the students, the higher the student's final grade as well demonstrating a greater confidence to successfully complete the course.

Cox (2009) demonstrated the ways in which students' lack of confidence connects to avoidance strategies that prevent full engagement in fulfilling the role of college student. She reports this lack of confidence leads to attrition and poor performance. The important point from

Cox is this: “certain students require a specific kind of validating academic environment to overcome their fear of failure and complete their coursework (p. 78).

Some research has found academic self-efficacy is a better predictor of course outcomes than both academic aptitude and study behavior in junior high, high school and college students, leading some scholars to suggest in education-related areas the term is better understood as “academic self-efficacy” (Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). This construct refers to a student’s confidence in his or her own abilities to meet desired academic goals such as achievement, persistence, transfer (Torres & Solberg, 2001). Self-efficacy beliefs ultimately relate to the question the student asks themselves of “can I do this?” (Swanson & Woitke, 1997).

Higher levels of self-efficacy encourage successful performances on specific tasks, increased persistence in the face of challenges, and increased willingness to engage new tasks (Makela, 2014). Solberg, et al., (1993) assert one’s academic self-efficacy is reflective of his or her beliefs in their competence and academic aptitude to acquire, retain, and apply knowledge (i.e., on exams, papers, or in classroom dialogue). Their findings are consistent with Bandura’s (1986) explanation of self-efficacy is “people’s judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances” (p. 331).

Such beliefs (self-efficacy) influence the courses of action people choose to pursue, how much effort they put forth in given endeavors, how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles and failures, their resilience to adversity, whether their thought patterns are self-hindering or self-aiding, how much stress and depression they experience in coping with taxing environmental demands, and the level of accomplishments they realize (Bandura, 1997). Not surprising, self-efficacy is important not only to the social and academic adjustment of students

but to their overall wellness and personal adjustment (DeWitz & Walsh, 2002; Solberg & Villareal, 1997).

Bandura (1986, 1997) hypothesized that self-efficacy beliefs are created and developed as students interpret information from four sources, the most powerful of which is the interpreted result of their own previous attainments, or mastery experience. It is because of those past experiences, students are better able to confidently answer the question “Can I do this?” Once students complete a given academic task, they then interpret and evaluate the results obtained, and judgments of competence are created or revised according to those interpretations. When they believe that their efforts have been successful, their confidence to accomplish similar or related tasks is raised; when they believe that their efforts failed to produce the effect desired, confidence to succeed in similar endeavors is diminished. Experienced mastery in a domain often has enduring effects on one’s self-efficacy. Building on Bandura’s hypothesis, Ritchie (2016) found in judging self-efficacy beliefs, a student looks inside and ask themselves how confident they are that they can do a specific (academic) task. Their answer is based upon different factors involving their experience and understanding at that given moment.

Self-efficacy has also been shown to predict students’ college major and career choices and has been shown to predict students’ academic achievement across academic areas and levels. (Brown & Lent, 2006; Pajares & Urdan, 2006). Bean and Eaton’s (2001) study exploring college student retention found students entering college are more reflective of their past educational experiences (pre-K through 12) and their own academic aptitudes. Of particular note, this includes an assessment of their academic self-efficacy, past behavior, and normative beliefs. These experiences and interactions of students are filtered through two lenses, internal to the institution, and external to the institution. The internal lens describes structure, social, and

academic landscapes of the institution; specifically, this means relationships with students, faculty and administrators. Through this interaction, students begin making meaning and assessing their experiences. This process centers around three concepts: 1. their belief in their ability to control their environment and desired outcomes; 2. coping behaviors; meaning, their ability to fit in and adjust to their new environment; and 3. self-efficacy: their confidence in their academic and social abilities. Bean and Eaton postulate as a student's self-efficacy increases, so too does their academic and social integration (Wood, Hilton & Johnson, 2014).

### **Mentoring and Self-efficacy**

Research shows a strong positive relationship between the amount of career assistance from a mentor and mentee self-perception of success (Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979). Termed career self-efficacy, such positive self-perceptions refer to the extent to which people believe that they are capable of successfully managing their careers and succeeding in the future (Gallup 2014; Higgins, Dobrow, & Chandler, 2008). These opportunities exist because as Kram (1985) proposed, mentoring provides individuals a means to discuss openly concerns about self, career, and family, and in the process gaining knowledge, skills, and competence, essential components in developing self-efficacy.

Transformational mentors empower by building self-efficacy in mentees. They achieve this by providing mentees with challenges that lead to continuously greater success experiences and increasing self-confidence. The art of transformational mentorship involves persuading students and faculty of their capabilities and creating a work environment characterized by excitement and positive emotions. (Brown, Daly, & Leong, 2009; Johnson, 2007b). Bowlby (1979) observed humans seem the "happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage

when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise” (p. 103).

Findings by Alva and Padilla (1995) suggest support from family, friends, faculty, and / or staff can shape community college students’ perceptions and attitudes regarding their abilities, thereby influencing their academic performance. Nora, Cabrera, Hagedorn, and Pascarella (1996) found support and encouragement from family and friends are significant predictors of persistence decisions among community college students. Once again, support from mentor figures builds self-efficacy, and shapes academic performance.

The need for self-efficacy is part of the various stages of life. Levinson, et al., (1978) posits at each stage of life and career, individuals face a predictable set of needs and concerns, characteristic of their age. These concerns can be categorized as concerns about self, concerns about career and concerns about family. As young adults launch into new endeavor, career or academic, they are concerned about competence, their ability to be successful, as well as their identity (Kram, 1985). Novice adults seek out relationships that allow them to work out these developmental concerns (Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978).

One way mentors assist in the development of self-efficacy in their mentees is through regular and constructive feedback. Feedback is needed to build a sense of competence and confidence (Kram, 1985; Tinto, 2012), a relationship with a faculty or staff member can satisfy concerns about competence and identity. When mentees encounter a faculty member who gets to know them; refrains from rejecting them as unworthy (something many students and new faculty might expect); and instead offers acceptance, conformation, admiration and emotional support, mentees self-concepts are irrevocably bolstered. When professors express this sort of confidence and positive regard, mentees themselves begin to adopt the mentor's vision as valid;

their confidence and professional esteem rise to match the mentor's view. Mentored students are more likely to adopt what Packard and Nguyen (2003) referred to as positive possible selves --- images of what one can ultimately become in life and in the profession (Packard & Nguyen, 2003). Students can adopt these positive possible selves because hearing positive appraisals can promote self-affirming beliefs that encourage increased self-efficacy (Makela, 2014).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

To date, very little research has examined students of color in community college with a focus on self-efficacy (Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). This is an important and glaring gap because the available literature indicates students of color encounter more challenges than do their White counterparts before and during college (Bui, 2002). These challenges include: lower socio-economic grouping; being a member of an under-represented ethnic group; speaking a language other than English; all impacting their self-efficacy (Bui, 2002). Students of color and other students classified as “High-risk” are more vulnerable to poorer academic performance ultimately leading to non-persistence (Bui, 2002; Schreiner, et al., 2011).

Wood, et al., (2014) reported a study examining factors that serve as coping mechanisms for Black men, found positive correlations between self-efficacy and academic success. The study participants suggested their confidence (self-efficacy) enabled them to embrace challenges in academic contexts to prove those who doubted their academic abilities wrong. Bates (2007) specifically targeted Black male community college students and Math anxiety, and their perceptions of academic preparedness. Bates found a strong relationship between self-efficacy, students’ perceptions of their own academic preparedness and math anxiety. Bates additionally found self-efficacy had an inverse relationship on math anxiety --- as self-efficacy increased, math anxiety decreased.



Wood, et al., (2014) in their study examining the correlation between self-efficacy and social integration for students of color in the community college called for college practitioners to instill the importance of relationships including student-faculty interactions and those between students and their academic advisors.

### **Social Capital**

We live in a networked world, at least we are told as much. During the first week of 2017, the *New York Times* ran 136 stories in which the word “network” appeared. Slightly more than a third of the stories concerned television networks, twelve concerned computer networks, ten about various kinds of political networks (Ferguson, 2017). Various other networks have become commonplace in our daily conversation from transport networks, and healthcare networks to financial networks and terrorist networks. We hear of a network of tunnels, networks of espionage, and networks of corruption. Whether for good purposes or ill, we as humans seem to instinctively understand that we can do more with one, in concert, or cooperation with each other, than we can on our own.

While it may be thought the idea of a network is a new phenomenon; indeed, the word network was scarcely used before the late 19<sup>th</sup> century (Ferguson, 2017), the idea of network, if not the word is as old as humanity.

It appears humans are “wired” to communicate, to collaborate with one another (Ferguson, 2017; Harari, 2015; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). When Aristotle observed two and a half millennia ago men are social animals, he had little more than his own powers of observation, and a familiarity of the world that extended little further than Classical Greece to support his claim. Today, the social, behavioral and physical sciences all agree with Aristotle’s claim. In the words of evolutionary biologist Joseph Henrich, our success as a species is not

owed to being bigger or stronger than our ancestors, the chimpanzees, it is owed to the “collective brains of our communities.” It is our larger brain, with our more fully developed neocortex that has allowed us to function in larger social groups of around 150 (compared to about 50 for chimpanzees). Or, in the words of sociologists Christakis and Fowler “our brains seem to have been built for social networks.” Confirming this view, historians MacNeill and MacNeill asserted the first world wide web emerged around 12,000 years ago, because of man’s unrivaled neuro network, was born to network (Ferguson, 2017).

Historically, social networks have served many purposes: economic, political, military, diplomatic. As the first type of mentoring likely occurred around ancient campfires as much as one hundred million years ago (Wilson, 2012), the idea of social capital acquired through social networks likely occurred at the same place at the same time. As Wilson (2012) explained it was at campfires ancient men were forced to behave in ways not practiced by those wandering in fields. At the campfires, these “societies” needed to divide labor, some hunting and gathering, some providing protection. The sharing of food, animal and vegetable needed to be accomplished in ways that were acceptable, and thus, ways that strengthened the trust, and the bonds of the group. These and many other similar pressures amongst the group offered advantages to those who could acquire social capital and demonstrate what today we would call “emotional intelligence” by being able to read the intentions of others, form alliances, while managing rivals. To put it simply, there were and are rewards in being “socially smart” (Wilson, 2012, p. 44).

The rewards from these historic social networks are found in the caves at Lascaux where paleolithic art was produced (Clottes, 2010), in the agricultural fields of Catal Huyuk, and in the sands of Sumer where groups of people came together to form the first civilization (Kramer,

1981). Neither the pyramids of Egypt, or the cathedrals of Europe could have been built without the cooperation of humans working together in social networks, nor could the formation of the Silk Road, a highway meant to facilitate long distance trade have been possible (Bernstein, 2009).

Individuals are often defined by who they know, and how they know them. It is often said, especially by those not advancing as quickly as they would like in their careers, “it isn’t what you know, but who you know that counts.” Supporting this belief, business networks were formed through the Germanic Hanseatic League, and in the various trade guilds of Medieval Europe ensuring quality of workmanship and affordability of prices. Successes and the value of social networks are seen through the transmission of ideas, philosophies, art, mythic (and epic) stories and religions, enabling them to be shared and spread, and ensuring their survival to the present day.

While it is understood that social networks do assist in job attainment or in advancement, social networks also assist in knowing who to take your car to for honest and reliable repairs, good places to eat, classes to take, and the best teachers from whom to take them. Having said this, social networks are not so easily reduced or quantified. Determining the value of each friendship, social contacts, and business colleagues, not to mention the value derived from living in a certain neighborhood, aside from the obvious valuation in the investment in real estate is difficult to say the least. As social networks are reciprocal (as is mentoring), so too, the investment of friends and contacts make in each other is also difficult to quantify (Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000).

## **Definition of Social Capital**

The term “social capital” is a way of defining the intangible resources of community, shared values and trust upon which people draw in daily life. Trust is essential in all facets of society: relationships, family, friendships, and organizations (Halpern, 2005; Kosfeld, Heinrichs, Zak, Fischbacher, & Fehr, 2005; Putnam, 2000). It is this trust that serves as a societal glue holding civilizations, businesses, and families together. The central idea of social capital is that social networks are an asset; it is an asset with great value (Coleman, 2000; Field 2017). Coleman asserted social capital is no different than physical capital or human capital. As physical capital refers to objects such as hammers or nails, and human capital can refer to a college education, both increase individual and collective productivity, social capital, (social contacts) affect the productivity of groups and individuals (Coleman, 2000).

In much the same way mentoring is defined by specific functions (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985), Coleman (1990) asserted social capital is also “defined by its function” (p. 303). To Coleman, social capital is not a single entity, but many different entities having two essential qualities in common: they all consist having to do in some way with the social structure, and they serve as a catalyst for actions of individuals operating within that system. In other words, social capital, like mentoring, is linked to social relationships, and is held together by the thin thread of trust.

Social capital refers to connections among individuals; social networks and norms of reciprocity and trustworthiness that arise from them (Coleman, 2000; Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005). Trust is essential in both social capital and in relationships, as well as a mentoring relationship. The ability to trust apparently is something that can be transmitted through DNA in much the same way body type or propensity is transmitted (Kenneally, 2014).

Consider the effects in Africa of the slave trade: It may be that more than 30 million Africans were taken from their homes, and their families, never to see either again. Today the continent of Africa is afflicted by many problems related to underdevelopment, many of these problems have been traced to the twin legacies of slave trade of centuries before and colonialism or imperialism of the mid-late 19<sup>th</sup> century and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. Harvard economist Nathan Nunn began to quantify the damage of the slave trade and found: (1) the countries of Africa most afflicted / affected by the slave trade, are the poorest today; (2) about 20% of slaves had been betrayed, sold into slavery by people with whom they had been close. He then hypothesized the slave trade gave rise to a culture of mistrust that is present today. Those who witnessed others swept up into a life of slavery, betrayed by those with whom they had been close, a general wariness of other's as a rule, makes sense. An African proverb speaks to this point: "You can escape your enemies, but not your neighbors and family members. So beware of those you know" On the other hand, the slave trade may have made others less trusting, but would have made them less trustworthy as well. Nunn's analysis revealed that those countries most affected by the slave trade in the past are least trusted today and are least able to trust (Kenneally, 2014, 140-146).

Once more, social capital contains a strong connection to mentoring as mentoring too, is reciprocal. Mentoring relationships, as social capital connections thrives because the mentorship responds to the current needs and concerns of the two (mentor and mentee) involved (Kram, 1985), and similarly hinges on trust (Johnson, 2016; Levinson, et al., 1978).

### **Social Capital Scholarship**

To best understand the idea of social capital, it is important to understand generally the family surrounding of capital theories. The idea of capital originates with Marx's definition of

capital --- part of the surplus value captured by the bourgeoisie (capitalists) who control the means of production, in the circulation of commodities and monies between the production and consumption processes economic capital; concern over unequal access to resources (capital), and the maintenance of power --- those in power control access to capital, control capital, and utilize same as a means of maintaining or enhancing their own status or power.

The sociologist Emile Durkheim, for instance, was interested in the ways that people's social ties served as the threads from which society was woven together. To Durkheim this interdependence of strangers in society meant that modern society: “. . . does not become a jumble of juxtaposed atoms. . . . Rather the members are united by ties which extend deeper and far beyond the short moments during which the exchange is made” (Field 2017).

By the 1960s, the idea of capital was stretched to conceive of capital in human terms. Initially developed by Schultz (1961) and Becker (1964), the idea of human capital was utilized to measure the value of workers' skills. In this sense, it is also conceived as an investment (in education for instance) with earnings as the expected return. Workers invest in technical skills and knowledge to increase their individual earning power.

The significant mentoring systems previously mentioned in this occurred in many ways to perpetuate the values, ideals of the dominant class, or to help others “fit in” through learning and then mimicking the behaviors of the dominant class whether it is the guru-disciple tradition in Buddhism and Hinduism; Elders, the discipleship system practiced in Rabbinical Judaism, and Christianity. Apprenticing under the medieval guild system, all in many ways served to perpetuate beliefs, standards, and norms of the dominant culture.

Colonial America, the idea or concept of character was the impersonation of admired values or traits in another, in much the same way an actor takes a role, until that copied trait

becomes part of the person (Smith, 1993). In this way, the individual being copied served as a “mentor” to the one in need. In Jacksonian America, the concept of “moral uplift” evidenced in reform organizations to address and solve social problems, connected an idea of mentoring, using people to serve as models of proper or upright behavior. One such organization, the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (AICP) utilized mentors. Members of this organization volunteered to serve as “friendly visitors” who would visit and try to form personal relationships with the poor to reduce poverty. Philanthropic organizations throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century prospered in America because the middle classes believed the best way that they could serve the poorer classes, whether they were economically poor, morally or behaviorally poor was by forming benevolent relationships with them. This same idea or concept continues to the best days through such organizations as Big Brothers and Big Sisters (Smith, 2013). An underlying premise to the idea of social capital, or networks, when used in this way, is that those in need would be so much better off if they could only be like us.

Social Capital is a social relations resource that representing the quality and quantity of information, resources, knowledge and skills, shared among individuals in relationships or special networks. These networks involve expectations of reciprocity, going beyond an individual relationship, and expanding to wider networks whose relationships are governed by trust and shared values (Coleman, 1993, 2000). Sociologist of friendship, Claude S. Fischer noted, “Social networks are important in all of our lives, often for finding jobs, more often for finding a helping hand, companionship, or a shoulder to cry on” (Coleman, 2000, p. 20)

The first known mention of social capital was by a progressive-era reformer, L. J. Hanifan. Hanifan’s description of social capital anticipated nearly all the critical pieces of future interpretations, yet no contemporary commentators of Hanifan’s took note of this

conceptualization until the postwar (1945) era. Social capital referred to important “tangible substances” such as “good will, fellowship, sympathy, and social intercourse among the individuals and families” that comprise a social unit. Without such support, the individual is on their own, and helpless. On the other hand, interactions between the individual and neighbors gives to the individual “an accumulation of social capital, which may immediately satisfy his social needs” and will lead to a substantial improvement in the living conditions of the individual and the community (Coleman, 2000, p. 19).

Social capital --- social networks with the associated idea of reciprocity comes in many shapes and sizes. Coleman (2000) suggested an individual’s family represents a form of social capital, as does a Sunday school class, regulars on a commuter train, college roommates, civic organizations, friends or followers on social media.

Interest in the concept was stimulated largely by the work of James Coleman and Pierre Bourdieu in the late 1980s. While the term “Social Capital” originated as early as 1920, the original theoretical development of the concept “social capital” did not appear in print until 1986, when Pierre Bourdieu published “The Forms of Capital” (Portes, 2000). Bourdieu chose the word capital carefully. Field (2017), asserted Bourdieu saw social capital as behaving in similar ways to the more traditional usage of the word. Individuals use social ties or networks in a similarly self-interested way as they used trade to make a profit.

Bourdieu defined social capital as the aggregate of actual or potential resources linked to possession of a durable network of essentially institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition. This group membership provides members with the backing of the collectively owned capital. Relations may exist as material or symbolic exchanges. Social capital is made up of social obligations or connections and it is convertible, in certain conditions, into



economic capital. Bourdieu's main concern in conceptualizing social capital was power and domination. This will lead to one of Bourdieu's criticisms of social capital: that these networks and social ties are used to perpetuate the dominant culture or class, at the exclusion of the underrepresented.

### **Benefits of Social Capital**

*The Atlantic* asked George Vaillant, the longtime director of the Harvard Grant study (a longitudinal study designed initially in 1938 to learn about optimum health and the conditions that promote them), what the most important finding of the study had been. Maintaining that our lives are shaped and enriched by relationships, his answer: "the only thing that really matters in life are your relations to other people" (Vaillant, 2012, pp. 24). Social psychologist Roy Baumeister affirmed, "Whether someone has a network of good relationships or is alone in the world is a much stronger predictor of happiness than any other objective predictor" (2005, p. 109).

Social capital, or support systems are a predictor of happiness because our emotional stability is formed through these interactions with others. The limbic system, a sort of open loop allows people to come to the emotional rescue of others. Research in intensive care units, for example has shown the comforting presence of another person lowers the blood pressure and slows the secretion of fatty acids that block arteries (Berkman, et al., 1992; Halpern, 2005). Studies reveal those suffering from chronic physical or mental illnesses have a smaller support system from which to draw, and the quality of support is also less (Halpern, 2005). The inverse is also true: people who are less socially isolated tend to have better health (Halpern, 2005). Rosengren and her colleagues found (1993) while three or more intensely stressful situations (such as serious financial difficulties, losing a job or a divorce) triple the death rate in middle-

aged men who are socially isolated, these incidents have no impact whatsoever on men who cultivate many close relationships (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Halpern, 2005; Vaillant, 2012). It is clear as Gilbert (2013) asserted, having caring relationships with others is key to being happy, and is beneficial to our physical and emotional well-being.

This open loop process in our brain has been described by researchers as “interpersonal limbic regulation.” Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2002) found when this limbic regulation occurs, one person transmits signals that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, and even immune function of another. It is this open loop design of the limbic system that means other people can (and do) change our very physiology, and this, change our emotions. Supportive, intimate relationships serve as a buffer against the vicissitudes of life. People who are socially isolated are more susceptible to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) following a traumatic event, more likely to become depressed when under stress and remain depressed longer than those who have this support (Halpern, 2005; Vaillant, 2012). It is not that social contact prevents you from getting sick or protects you from becoming depressed or stressed; it is rather that social capital, support systems help you survive them intact (Gilbert, 2013; Halpern, 2005; Vaillant, 2012).

Supportive relationships are able to modify or counteract the effects of stress in humans in at least four ways: (1) The presence of supportive relationships implies the individual is less likely to be exposed to stress; (2) Social support modifies the consequences of stress; in fact, support systems serve as a buffer against the effects of stress; (3) Social support shapes people’s behavioral reactions to stress; (4) A person’s basic reactivity to stress is affected by the quality of their supportive relationships early in life (Halpern, 2005). Putnam (2000) affirmed of the

various domains affected by social capital, none is as important or as well established as in the case of health and well-being.

### **Mentoring and Social Capital**

A function of mentoring (Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979) is defined as career functions. Career functions are the aspects of the relationships that strengthens advancement or “learning the ropes” (social capital) in any organization. Without sponsorship of a mentor stemming from acquired social capital, individuals are likely to be overlooked for promotions regardless of his or her competence and performance. This sponsorship is important, as individuals gain “reflected power” from their sponsors (Kram, 1985).

Reflected power takes the form not of words from the mentor about the mentee, but the knowledge that the mentor through their connections and achievements is empowering to the mentee thus creating opportunities for movement and advancement. Relationships that support career development enable an individual to address the challenges encountered moving through adulthood and through an organizational career (Kram, 1985; Roche, 1979).

Levinson et al., (1978) observed among many roles and benefits mentors offer are social capital-related. As a sponsor, the mentor may use their own influence (social capital) to facilitate the mentee’s entry and advancement; or serving as a host or guide, the mentor welcomes the mentee into a new world, either occupational, or social, or academic. As the mentor performs the role of guide or host, they acquaint the mentee with the values, customs, and resources necessary for their success.

A further aspect of social capital is social networks; a large body of psychological literature on social support. Psychologists have spent many decades developing and refining measures aimed at tapping the supportive qualities of people’s social networks, including the

extent to which they feel belonging, and receive emotional and practical support (Berkman & Kawachi, 2000; Halpern, 2005). Bowlby (1979) once remarked humans seem “happiest and able to deploy their talents to best advantage when they are confident that, standing behind them, there are one or more trusted persons who will come to their aid should difficulties arise” (p. 103).

Ragins (2012) reported recent evidence that high-quality mentorships generate the relational skills (emotional awareness, empathic listening, and compassion) needed to build other high-quality relationships. A strong relationship with an emotionally intelligent mentor can help a mentee develop a set of relational skills and attitudes that are transportable to the mentee's subsequent relationships. The well networked mentee enjoys a considerable boost in social capital; social capital includes such resources as influence, information, knowledge, support, advice and goodwill (Ragins & Kram, 2007).

Faculty and staff mentors can and do advocate on behalf of their mentees, providing an entrée for the mentee into the world of academia; or through providing career counseling and advice; as well as providing needed tips to successfully navigate the institutional norms and mores within the college (Kram, 1985; Rhodes, 2002). It is this type of support, commonly called “social capital” that has been associated with academic success, physical, mental and emotional health beyond the contributions of family income, parental educational attainments or even household composition (Rhodes, 2002).

As the mentoring relationship is supportive, it enhances the mentee's development (Kram, 1985). The mentee's development is accomplished when the protégé uses the mentor as a model to set personal standards of performance and code of ethics. The protégé gains visibility

within the colleague network of the mentor. With this association and exposure come a degree of status and increased professional opportunities (Cronan-Hillix, et al., 1986).

As a mentoring relationship moves to more of a transformational type, it is quite natural for the mentor to provide increasing levels of social support (Higgins & Thomas, 2001). There are distinct types of social support that thoughtful mentors provide: (a) Emotional support (reassurance of self-worth; expression of support); (b) Appraisal support (Feedback / appraisal of competence); (c) Informational support (consultation and advice); (d) Instrumental support (tangible support in form of time and resources). Although much of the research on mentoring highlights the qualities and character of individual mentor-mentee relationships, most of mentees are as likely to benefit from a rich network of developmental helping relationships (Johnson, 2016).

### **Community Colleges**

Community Colleges are the “most responsive postsecondary education sector of public higher education” (Levin & Kater, 2012, p. xi), enrolling 43% of the postsecondary education student population; enrollment increased by 25% in the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; serving nearly half of the nation’s undergraduates (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; U.S. Department of Education, 2011), yet they continue to be the most understudied.

Community colleges have a complex and vital mission as they provide students affordable access to post-secondary education in the United States. The comprehensiveness of the mission of community colleges fuels the complexity of that mission. The conception among scholars is that the colleges are “non-specialized by design, their mandate is to offer a comprehensive curriculum and to serve a wide range of community needs” (Owen, 1995, p. 145). Further making the accomplishment of that mission more difficult, “unlike four-year

colleges and universities, community colleges are non-traditional or un-traditional: they do not even adhere to their own traditions. They make and remake themselves” (Levin, 1998, p. 2).

The conventional definition of the community college mission incorporates the educational functions that comprise “five traditional community college programs” (Cross, 1985, p. 36). These include: (1) collegiate and transfer education; (2) vocational education; (3) developmental or compensatory education; (4) general education; and (5) community education and service (Meier, 2013, p. 4).

The rise of community colleges coincided with the rise of a political movement in America called the Progressive movement. Ratcliff (1987) makes the case that the first public junior colleges emerged because of broad social and economic forces spawned by the second industrial revolution (1870-1920) and its aftermath (Meier, 2013, p. 7). The demands placed on America due to this second industrial revolution included training and educating workers for factories that required workers to possess better and more specialized skills.

In addition to providing job skills or certificates, the demands of the second industrial revolution created an entirely new class of employees that also needed specialized training and education: the managerial class. These individuals needed to be able to run the business concerns of the burgeoning factories. They needed to understand and possess budgetary skills, critical thinking and analytical skills.

A further consequence of the second industrial revolution was that of a boom of immigration as millions of immigrants, primarily eastern Europeans came to this country to escape forced military service, poverty, political oppression. These millions of immigrants (some 35 million over a 30-year span) needed housing and jobs (which they often got at local factories, or through patronage of the “boss system” prevalent in American cities). These immigrants also

needed an education. They needed to learn to speak and read and write English. They needed (and wanted) to learn about their new home, to become American. To respond to these needs caused by the second industrial revolution, training and educating workers and managers and providing English skills to the millions of immigrants, the comprehensive high school began to take shape as did also the birth of junior, or community colleges.

Since the early 20<sup>th</sup> century when both the comprehensive high school and community colleges began, the nation has debated the fundamental role of public education (Bragg, 2013, 188). On one hand, the purpose of public education is to educate the total person. On the other hand, the purpose of public education is to provide skills for students to enter the job market. The argument between these two positions has been one of the most important and contentious debates in the United States (Bragg, 2013, p. 188). Overlapping these two arguments: trade or educating the total person resides the issue or mission of continuing or community education.

The end of the Second World War (1945) provided further needs and ways to add to continuing or community education. Widespread liberal optimism (in much the same way the progressives at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century) about higher education's potential to stimulate economic growth, strengthen democracy, mitigate class and racial conflict, and to provide Cold War ideological munitions to the nation provided a cultural context supportive of junior college expansion (Meier, 2008) and by extension the mission of continuing education and community education.

This postwar explosion of community colleges offering community or continuing education was tied closely to the G.I. Bill and the Truman Commission. This legislation was in response to veteran demands for higher education and workforce training and had "the most direct impact on the community college mission" (Meier, 2013, p. 14). The presidential

commission (Truman Commission) asserted that community colleges “must prepare [their] students to live a rich and satisfying life, part of which involves earning a living” (President’s Commission on Higher Education, 1947, pp. 6-7). Taken together, the legislation and the presidential commission created a permanent national perception that “college attendance was a right and not a privilege,” and that community education or continuing education was a necessary public good (Meier, 2013, p. 14).

### **High-Risk Students and Persistence**

The benefits and belief that education is a public and not a private good notwithstanding, most students who enter community colleges never finish: fewer than four out of ten complete any type of degree or certificate within six years (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015). Over 80% of students entering community colleges indicated they intend to earn a bachelor’s degree or higher. Yet after six years after initial enrollment, only 15% have done so (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

Tinto’s (1975) construct suggested student integration and has served as a foundational starting point for persistence research in higher education for over forty years. Tinto posited that student retention should be viewed as a process, whereby students interact with the academic and social systems within college settings. Through these student interactions their goals and their social integration are modified, their commitment to their goals is enhanced. Tinto suggested greater levels of involvement and perceptions of incorporation in the academic areas (for instance meeting with faculty, advisors; studying with students; using campus services); and social opportunities (for example participating in clubs, organizations; involvement in sports; establishment of campus friendships) all lead to greater connectedness to campus. In exchange for that sense of connectedness, students who become acclimated to the academic and social



surroundings of the campus have greater levels of commitment to their goals and the institution, and as a result, a greater likelihood of college completion and success.

In studying college completion rates four decades later, Tinto (2012) continued to emphasize institutional responsibility and integration as factors for college completion, and on the necessity to “shed light on the role played by the academic and social environment of an institution on the success of its students” (p. viii). The terms retention and persistence are interchangeable, Tinto asserted, as the former represents efforts by the institution to retain students through graduation, the latter represents the students view and intent to persist in progress completion (Tinto, 2012).

Further research validates Tinto’s theory, finding the positive effect that academic integration has on student success (Flowers, 2006; Hagedorn, Maxwell & Hampton, 2001; Tinto, 1975, 1988, 1993; Wood, Hilton, & Johnson, 2014). Academic integration occurs through mostly through academically meaningful activities (Kuh, Kinzie, Shuh, & Whitt, 2011), and student commitment to the intellectual life of the college through frequent, quality interactions with faculty, staff and peers (Astin, 1993; 1999; Tinto, 1993). The relationship between retention and social integration has been less clearly defined for community college students, researchers have identified a relationship between academic integration and retention at two-year institutions (Mertes, 2015). Wood found (2012) this academic integration has far greater importance for the success of community college students and their persistence. Bailey and his colleagues (2015) suggested the difficulty in navigating the degree process for many community college students increases the need for social know-how, self-efficacy and support systems to enable these students to be successful.

Recent research reveals much about the needs, conditions and preparedness of students in higher education. College students labeled as “High-risk” particularly have been the subject of extensive research, most of the research focused on the obstacles they encounter in earning a college degree. The literature defines “High-risk” as those students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002). Personal characteristics that may place a student at risk for not succeeding in college are identified as those features that locate the student in a population without a long or necessarily successful history in higher education. Examples of such students include students who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary education or students with low socioeconomic status. Students of color who enter predominantly White institutions also may be high risk because of the challenges they face from marginalization and discrimination (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Torres, 2003). Horton (2015) identified homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy, serious health issues, domestic violence, or transiency, as well as low test scores, disciplinary problems and learning disabilities as additional factors affecting student success and persistence.

Literature specific to community college students includes descriptive studies that attempt to describe a typology of students more or less likely to persist (Crisp, 2010). These typologies affecting persistence are as follows:

- Being a non-Asian minority student (Feldman, 1993);
- Enrolling part-time (Cohen & Brawer, 2003; Feldman, 1993; Schmid & Abell, 2003)
- And / or having earned a low grade point average in high school (Feldman, 1993);
- Or having earned a low grade point average in college (Brooks-Leonard, 1991; Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003);

- Community college students who work off campus, do not actively participate in campus activities, or delay entry into higher education are less likely to persist (Crisp, 2010; Hoachlander, Sikora, & Horn, 2003).
- Findings by Schmid and Abell (2003) suggested other typologies affecting college persistence: community college students who have children at home, are single parents, are financially independent, and / or fail to earn a high school diploma are less likely to remain enrolled in college. On average, compared to undergraduates at elite institutions, community college students are more often employed, more likely to have young children, and less likely to have family financial resources (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015).

Despite significant efforts to enhance the success of high-risk students, their rates of persistence to graduation continue to lag substantially behind other students. Consider the findings from recent research:

- Only 26.2% of students who take at least one remedial course graduate from college, compared to a 59.4% graduation rate for students who are not required to take any remedial coursework;
- First-generation students graduate at one-third the rate of students whose parents have college degrees;
- First-generation students have a higher risk of dropping out and not returning for the second year of college;
- First-generation students have poor pre-college preparation, lower career hopes, lack of family support, lack of peer and faculty support, fear of the college environment, and poor study skills or habits (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000;

Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). The foregoing is due to the fact that the parents of firsthand knowledge of the college experience, and thus generally are unable to help them directly with college tasks (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005).

- Less than 29% of low-income students graduate, compared to 73% of high-income students and 55% of middle-income students;
- African American and Latina/o student graduation rates lag 16 to 25 percentage points below the rates of Asian Americans and European Americans (Chen, 2005);
- Whites graduate at a rate 19.2% higher than Blacks and 25.1% higher than Hispanics. An example of socio-economic inequality is that students who come from middle-income and upper-income families (\$76,000 or more) graduate 57% higher than students who come from low-income families (below \$25,000; [Smith, 2013, pp. 17-18}).

As degree attainment is considered by many to be the definitive measure of student success (Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, & Hayek, 2007), it appears that American higher education has more to do to ensure students admitted to college are successful.

The failure to persist in achieving a college degree does not merely affect the institutions of higher education, it also can severely affect the future social and economic attainments of the students themselves as educational underachievement is a key link in the cycle of disadvantage (Halpern, 2005). This has not always been the case as there was no significant income differentials between non-college and college graduates even throughout the 1970s. Beginning in the 1980s, the income differential started between college and non-college graduates began to grow. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the median American with a graduate degree is part of a family making

\$93,000 annually. The median person with a college degree is in a family making \$75,000. The median American with a high school diploma is in a family making \$42,000 and the average high school dropout is in a family making \$28,000 (Haskins & Sawhill, 2009).

Understandably, the effects of these income differentials influence the graduation rates, hence success of future generations in higher education. A child born into a family making \$90,000 has a 50 percent chance of graduating from college by age twenty-four; a child born into a family making \$70,000, has a one-in-four chance. A child born into a family making \$45,000 has a one-in-ten chance, and a child born into a family making \$30,000 has a one-in-seventeen chance (Douthat, 2005). Income levels of the parents affect not only student likelihood of graduation from college, parental income levels also affect and limits what colleges the students are able to attend. In a survey conducted by Anthony Carnevale and Stephen Ross, of the top 146 top U.S. colleges it was found only 3 percent of the students there came from families in the bottom economic quartile. Seventy-four percent came from families in the top quartile (Douthat, 2005).

Astin's Involvement Model (1979) and Tinto's Student Integration Model (1975, 1987) in their own way recognized students bring to their college of choice a number of characteristics, experiences, and commitments including academic preparation, parental educational attainment and aspirations for their children. So many of the struggles community college students have in persisting to degree completion are catalogued or tracked by institutions such as academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics, such as students who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary education or those from a low socioeconomic status, or students of color who enter predominantly White institutions who often are challenged by marginalization and discrimination (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Torres, 2003).

### **Hidden Barriers to Retention**

Additionally, there are a myriad of “hidden” barriers to completion institutions are unable to track or catalog, factors not noticeable or obvious, or requested on a college application form. These barriers because they are unseen act as phantoms menacing student success, cutting across race, gender, ethnicity, culture, and are found in the complexities of individual student backgrounds, home life, socio-economic status and life and school experience (including traumatic experiences). These phantoms are as profoundly responsible for attrition as are the traceable markers indicated in the literature.

The following examples have been recounted to the researcher in his role as community college faculty member. In that capacity, the researcher in that capacity has known many community college students who have significant responsibilities for transporting younger siblings (or their own children) to and from elementary or middle schools due to the work schedules of the parent(s). While often these familial responsibilities devolve upon young adults, studies indicate Latino and other immigrant parents expect their children to prioritize family needs over personal needs (Sy & Romero, 2008). Often, due to budget cutbacks, the before and after-hours school programs have been curtailed, impacting the time the younger child can be left at school, which in turn dictates college student availability and attendance. These familial responsibilities can and does interrupt college instruction, causing the student to miss explanations or assignments and vital concepts, contributing to falling behind, leading to frustration and an eventual withdrawal or a failing grade (Dennis, Phinney, & Chuateco, 2005; Sy & Romero, 2008). Certainly, as degree pathways are followed, the irregularities of the student’s life may cause them to be unavailable when an infrequently offered course is scheduled, delaying at best the student’s ability to complete the degree, and, in the experience of

the researcher has caused students to transfer ahead of a graduation date. Often these responsibilities also include tending for their sibling(s) when sick, or sent home due to illness or misbehavior, and may also include representing the parent(s) for behavior or academically necessitated teacher conference, once again interrupting consistent attendance in needed courses.

The financial pressures facing community colleges especially are not always measured by an institution yet are keenly felt by the student and can negatively affect persistence, no less than any other factor. One African-American female student recounted how she “slept on the floor of her sister’s house, with her four-year-old child, and had been doing so for nearly half of the semester. A Caucasian male student had come up on successive days to eat some of the food the instructor had on hand for hungry students. After several days, the student, feeling a bit embarrassed, offered this explanation: “I moved away from home about 3 months ago, and I have lost fifteen pounds.” When he was congratulated on his weight loss, the student explained further: “it is easy to lose weight when you are living on Top Ramen every day.”

International students, while tracked by institutions pose not only academic problems: trying to master a foreign language in a strange land, being able to read, write at a college level in that second language, but also bring with them other equally significant social and cultural problems. Beyond the academic considerations, social integration in the campus, as well as outside the campus often poses problems for these students (Harris & Hawley, 2005; Tinto, 1975).

The researcher / faculty member has met students from virtually every continent, many of whom have no real social support once they arrive in this country. For example, several early 20’s aged unrelated Saudi students had been sent here by family members when they were 18, with no relatives or support systems in America waiting for them. When asked how they

managed, they replied similarly, “I would walk down the street, and if I saw a picture of something that looked good, I would go in, and order what I saw on the picture.” Or the 65-year-old student from Senegal, who reports he has not seen his family (wife, children and grandchildren) since 2005, and he lives alone. He mentions and gives thanks for the support of his employer who “has been very good to me” and three faculty members who “are my friends,” but also reports having problems with his landlady, who “is not a nice lady” and, he may have to move in the middle of a semester. The young Vietnamese student who identifies loneliness due to their “not being a Vietnamese community” where she lives and weeping as she expresses how lonely she is.

Then there are the psychological or emotional scars international students often bring with them. Many of these students have seen virtually every kind of catastrophe known to man. This is particularly true for those who spent time in any of the many refugee camps around the world. In 2015 alone, a total of fifty-nine million people around the world had been displaced from their homes, according to the United Nations, more than at any time since World War II (Thorpe, 2017). For those student’s common daily experiences in refugee camps include rape, parent loss, and exposure to extreme levels of violent acts (Thorpe, 2017). A female Serbian student told the researcher / faculty member how she was raped in a UN refugee camp when her homeland was beset by government sponsored ethnic cleansing in the 1990s. A young Burmese female, due to the longest running civil war in the world, more than sixty years (Thorpe, 2017) informed she was in a Thailand refugee camp for approximately fourteen years (she was 19 at the time of the visit). When she was asked about life in the refugee camps, her answer was simple: “during the day, it wasn’t too bad. But at night we all got scared, because we believed the Burmese were going to come to kill us.” Helen Thorpe (2017) explains Burmese had been



subjected to extreme forms of persecution by the Burmese military including bombs, land mines, rapes, beheadings, indiscriminate butchering, entire villages burned to the ground. These refugees sought asylum in neighboring Thailand where they were there treated like illegal immigrants, held in enclosures that served as prison camps. One Burmese student observed simply in the refugee camps, “you have no dreams.”

Having escaped those traumas, refugee camps proved to be safe havens for their occupants. Camps such as the one at Dadaab in Kenya have been described as a “groaning, filthy, disease-riddled slum, heaving with people without enough to eat. Crime was sky high and rape was routine” (Rawlence, 2016, p. 36). The effects of this type of daily existence on the refugees cannot be adequately calculated. One chronicler of life in refugee camps reports the following that for them (the refugees)

life was only a process of waiting. . . . in such circumstances people are more inclined to act without consequences, without limits . . . . there was no building anything since both the people you loved or the people you hurt could soon be gone. . . . life had no meaning (Rawlence, 2016, p. 107).

A young female from the Congo when asked about what life in her home country was like told the faculty member this horrific story of “two armed, masked men, attacked our home when I was about 10. My older sister (she was 13) and I ran for our lives.” When she was asked what happened to her parents, she replied, “we don’t know; we were too afraid to go back home. We were homeless for about 3 years, but what was what got us to America.”

With reference to African children and adolescents such as the Congolese student mentioned above, empirical studies have found evidence of the development of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), among other disorders, because of war atrocities and related

human rights violations. In the aftermath of the Rwandan genocide, a survey by the United Nations Children's Fund found that 95.5% of the 3030 eight- to 19-year-old individuals interviewed had witnessed violence during the war, and 79% reached the cutoff score for clinically significant symptoms of PTSD. Exposure rates were similar in an adult sample (94.1%), whereas 24.8% were found to meet PTSD symptom criteria (Mels, et al., 2009)

One study conducted between 2007 and 2008 amongst secondary school pupils from 13 schools throughout the Ituri district. Of 1041 respondents, 989 (95.0%) reported having witnessed 1 or more traumatic events. On average, the adolescents had been exposed to 4.71 potentially traumatic events, whereas 98 respondents (9.4%) reported a total of 9 or more traumatic experiences. Among the sample, 72.4% reported the violent death of family members and friends (with prevalence rising to 86.6% in rural areas), and 65.7% reported witnessing someone being killed; adolescents who had been kidnapped by armed groups (18.6%) and had witnessed (33.2%) or experienced (9.7%) sexual violence (Mels, et al., 2009).

A Ugandan female told the faculty member about being a student in a Ugandan boarding school. She relates that in the boarding school "they beat you." She says that the great challenge in Ugandan schools is to do well enough so that "they don't beat you, but not so well, that they beat the other kids." Or of course, the female Muslim student who informed her teacher the day after the 2016 presidential election that she would not be attending classes that day because "she no longer felt safe."

Scars and tragedies are not limited to international students, but cut across racial, ethnic, gender and age divides. In fact, exposure to traumatic events is quite common, with estimated lifetime rates ranging from 26 to 92.23 percent in men, and from 17.7 to 87.1 percent in women

(Moser, Hajcak, Simons, & Foa, 2007). Based on extensive research, Oliff (2012), found 80% of Dutch people encounter a traumatic event in their lifetime. Examples of these types of events include unexpectedly losing a family member, been in a serious car accident, lived through a major fire or some calamity (natural disaster), been in a work-related trauma. Others have experienced more interpersonal trauma such as armed robbery, rape, domestic violence, sexual or physical abuse in childhood, a terrorist attack, or torture, or some other war-related traumas (Oliff, 2012). A young, Caucasian male reported to the faculty member that he wanted to be a lawyer specializing in intellectual property law “like my dad did.” The faculty member followed up by asking what the dad did now (who should have been about in his late 40s). The student replied that his father was dead, and that he was with him when he died. He then went on to relate how the father had died. The student was about 5 and the family was living in Minnesota in the winter; the father got the family van stuck on icy railroad tracks, and the car was t-boned by an on-coming train, killing the father, and the 3-year-old sister of the student. The student went on to relate that the only reason he was alive, was he was sitting on the opposite side of the car when the accident occurred. A young, lucky to be alive African-American male, and single father, explained to the researcher he struggled in school during high school, joined gangs in his teen years, only to leave the gang life behind, when one night, he was shot in the head.

A young Hispanic male related how his mother died of cancer during his 8<sup>th</sup> grade year, and how her death sent him careening away from school, and into drugs for refuge. A Hispanic male student, in presenting his research paper proposal for his history class, recounted how his brother was shot to death by a policeman from a nearby police department five years previously, yet the shooting still haunts and motivates the student. A Hispanic female student described the trauma brought upon her family when her 14-year-old brother was found drowned at the bottom

of their apartment complex swimming pool. Upon further inspection, the deceased brother was found to have sustained two broken legs. Shortly after this tragedy, the mother and father divorced, fracturing the family even further.

Studies reveal a history of abuse has been associated with an increased likelihood of dropping out of college (Wright, Crawford, & Del Castillo, 2009). A female (Caucasian) student recently related how the county removed her from her Autistic, emotionally unavailable father, following the suicide death of her mother, and as she ricocheted from foster family to foster family she spiraled into self-destructive behavior.

Relationship violence can happen in a broad range of relationships including those with friends, acquaintances, stranger, and partners (Forke, Myers, Catalozzi, & Schwarz, 2008). Two female students withdrew due to on-campus, and in one case, off-campus stalking incidents. Another Caucasian female student of the researcher informed him that on her first day of courses in an out-of-state university, she was sexually assaulted, and between the trauma, and the legal issues arising, she needed to withdraw from that university for the entire year. A Hispanic female student had missed two classes of the researcher. She explained that she had missed because “her boyfriend couldn’t keep his hands to himself.” When the faculty member didn’t seem to understand the comment, the student was more explicit: “it’s hard to come to class when you are covered in bruises. In their study, Forke, Myers, Catalozzi, & Schwarz (2008) found almost half of the students they surveyed, had experienced relationship violence at some point in their lives, more than one-third had experienced violence before college, and one-quarter had experienced violence during college.

In the events leading up to seeking asylum in a refugee camps, teenagers fled after family members had been attacked with machetes until they choked on their own blood, or had their

homes burned down only to find the decapitated body behind it (Alexander, 2013). Vividly terrifying memories such as those experienced by students in their home countries or in refugee camps, or through the witnessing of acts of violence or the trauma these events cause, are emblazoned in the emotional circuitry of the survivors (Goleman, 2006; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2014). Human cruelties as evidenced in war, or violent crimes, assault, abuse, or bullying, stamp the memories of the victims with a sort of emotional template, bringing a warning when anything vaguely like the attack itself (Goleman, 2006). Researchers found people still coping with the effects of traumatic events such as those found in the preceding paragraphs are likely to have increased activity in the amygdala. The amygdala is the part of the brain that assess dangers, putting into motion the “fight or flight” sensors (Gilbert, 2013; Goleman, 2006; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2014; Thorpe, 2017). Goleman (2006) wrote: “In the brain’s architecture, the amygdala is poised something like an alarm company where operators stand ready to send out emergency calls to the fire department, police, and a neighbor whenever a home security system signals trouble” (p. 16). While this part of the brain protects us against danger, ensuring survival of the societies, when activity in the amygdala increases, activity in the frontal lobe region of the brain decreases. While the amygdala is the reactive, more emotional part of the brain, the frontal lobe region is the more contemplative. It is this part of the brain where most types of learning occur. When someone is in a triggered state (increased activity in the amygdala), concepts or academic techniques can be repeated, but learning does not occur as readily, regardless of how engaging the instructor or the material is (Thorpe, 2017).

These and countless other stories, real-life experiences of community college students while not captured or tracked by institutions of higher education, certainly are contributing factors to struggles with persistence, as the other barriers identified in the literature. It is for these

and many other reasons researchers point to the need for increased college know-how, self-efficacy or support systems, especially for those disadvantaged groups served by community colleges, such as minorities, first generation students, and single parents (Bailey, Jaggars, & Jenkins, 2015; Crisp, et al., 2017; Smith, 2013).

Dowd and Coury (2006) found that students with higher grade point averages (presumably not needing as much academic help) as well as those financially dependent on their parents (by their own admission) had significantly higher odds of completing their Associate degree than those with lower grade point averages or financially independent. Additionally, in this study, older students (perhaps students not in community college to earn a degree, or in greater need of academic assistance), single parents (this demographic is important due to the possibility of increased responsibilities and economic hardships), those who had not declared a major (undecided) or those in vocational programs had significantly reduced odds of completing their community college education.

Some researchers posited struggles of community college students have more to do with environmental factors occurring well before entering higher education but lie in socio economic inequalities found in their family life. Following two decades of observing how families work, Lareau (2011) found better educated families and lower-class families have different theories and models about how to raise children. Children in educated families are raised in an atmosphere promoting learning experiences. The children raised in this environment know how to navigate the world of organized institutions, what Smith (2013) called the “hidden curriculum.” Students coming from a middle-class background, Lareau asserted know how to talk casually and comfortably with adults, how to look people in the eye when speaking to them, and thus, how to make a good impression. Children born into a web of these attuned relationships know

how to join in conversations with new people and read social signals, they see the world as a welcoming place. Parents more involved with their children generally seem to encourage in the child higher aspirations, both occupationally and educationally (Halpern, 2005). On the other hand, children born into a web of threatening relationships can be fearful, withdrawn or even overly aggressive. They often perceive threats where none exist (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013; Lareau, 2011).

Not surprisingly, these students have greater access to social capital, greater access to support systems and how to use them to their advantage. Children from a middle-class background, due to their extracurricular activities such as piano lessons, organized sports know how to interact with adults, and how to use adults to further their advancement. Middle-class parents also see institutions, such as church, business, or educational, as instruments to serve them and their children. This sense of “entitlement” empowers the child to feel comfortable approaching teachers, coaches, etc., as almost an equal, advocating for themselves, learning how to maneuver the twists and turns of organizations (Lareau, 2011). It may be this advantage given to children of more involved parents that explains why those children have higher educational and career aspirations (Halpern, 2005). Through this continued and continuous parental involvement, high aspirations do not seem particularly high to the child or to the parent, but normal and attainable, within their grasp (Lareau, 2011).

The issue of parental involvement serving as an imperative to vocabulary development, critical thinking skills, career and educational aspirations leads to perhaps the more controversial finding in the literature regarding single parent homes. Many studies have found, in terms of educational outcomes, two parents are better than one; or in other words “structural or network social capital counts” (Halpern, 2005, p. 145), Presumably this is so, because doubling the

number of parents accessible to the child increases the amount of parent child involvement and interactions

Beyond vocabulary, differences between low- and high-income children in reading and math achievement are much larger now than they were several decades ago, as are differences in college graduation rates (Ziol-Guest, Duncan, & Kalil, 2015). According to Farah and her colleagues (2006), it is not just vocabulary that is affected in poorer homes. Stress hormone levels are also higher in poor children than in children from middle class homes. This increase in stress hormones affects a variety of cognitive systems, including memory, pattern awareness, cognitive control which is the ability to resist obvious but wrong answers, and verbal facility. Wang's (2009) research with small mammals has found that animals raised without a father present were slower to develop neural connections than those raised with a father present, and as a result have less impulse control. The above demonstrates, that poverty isn't only about a lack of money and opportunities. Poverty and family disruption also alters the unconscious, the way people perceive and understand the outside world.

So while the research is clear that first-generation students have poor pre-college preparation, lower career hopes, lack of family support, lack of peer and faculty support, fear of the college environment, and poor study skills or habits (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991), the experience of first generation students varies considerably depending on income level. Thayer (2005) notes first generation students from middle income backgrounds find the adjustment to college less difficult than first generation students from ethnic minorities or low-income backgrounds.



The cumulative effects of these conditions and consequences of income levels and college achievement are obvious. Students from the poorest quarter of the population have an 8.6% chance of getting a college degree. Students in the top quarter have a 75% chance of earning a college degree. These and other related factors caused by the economic conditions of the student and their families led Cunha and Heckman (2009) to report 50% of lifetime earnings inequality is determined by factors present in the life of a person by age eighteen.

Rhodes (2002) and Crisp (et al., 2017) asserted mentors are a valuable asset to lower-income youth and college students as either group may have limited access to positive role models outside of immediate family, and absent these role models may believe their opportunities for success are also limited. Rhodes (2002) suggested these benefits may extend to middle-income youth as well, positing that even among some of these youth, certain occupations and adult skills may seem beyond their abilities or opportunities. Mentors serve as tangible examples of career success, modeling behaviors and competencies their mentees or proteges may wish to emulate.

It is not just vocabulary levels that are affected by a lack of parental interaction. Our emotional stability is formed through interactions with others. The limbic system, a sort of open loop allows people to come to the emotional rescue of others. Scientists conduct a type of experiment they call “still-face” research. They ask a mother to interrupt her interactions with her child and adopt a blank passive expression. Babies find this extremely disconcerting. They tense, cry and fuss, making a strenuous effort to regain their mother’s attention, and if there is still no response, they too, become passive and withdrawn. This demonstrates a baby organizes their internal states by seeing their own minds reflected at them in the faces of others (Noe, 2009).

Research in intensive care units has shown the comforting presence of another person lowers the blood pressure and slows the secretion of fatty acids that block arteries (Berkman, et al., 1992; Halpern, 2005). More surprising, Rosengren and her colleagues found (1993) while three or more intensely stressful situations (such as serious financial difficulties, losing a job or a divorce) triple the death rate in middle-aged men who are socially isolated, these incidents have no impact whatsoever on men who cultivate many close relationships (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002; Halpern, 2005; Vaillant, 2012).

This open loop process has been described by researchers as “interpersonal limbic regulation.” Lewis, Amini and Lannon (2002) assert that when this limbic regulation occurs, one person transmits signals that can alter hormone levels, cardiovascular function, sleep rhythms, and even immune function of another. It is this open loop design of the limbic system that means other people can (and do) change our very physiology, and this, change our emotions.

Supportive relationships are able to modify or counteract the effects of stress in humans in at least four ways: (1) The presence of supportive relationships implies the individual is less likely to be exposed to stress; (2) Social support modifies the consequences of stress; in fact, support systems serve as a buffer against the effects of stress; (3) Social support shapes people’s behavioral reactions to stress; (4) A person’s basic reactivity to stress is affected by the quality of their supportive relationships early in life (Halpern, 2005).

Human brains are formed by relationships (Gilbert, 2013; Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013). Each relationship and interaction, each person encountered, each situation experienced is reflected in human’s brains. This means the brain is adapting and adjusting itself and the rest of the body to its environment. The more situations and interactions experienced, the more data that

is input to the brain, the more connections are made. Regrettably the reverse is also true (Karr-Morse & Wiley, 2013).

Research conducted by John Bowlby suggests why human brains form and connections or synapses made more frequently. In the 1950s and 1960s, John Bowlby outlined the approach to human development that he called the attachment theory. This theory focused on the quality of the attachment relationship in terms of both accessibility and affection parent in soothing and regulating emotions of an infant. Bowlby recognized that, from the day of birth, the brain is *biologically designed* to respond to the care and kindness of others (Gilbert, 2013). Attachment, even as early as age one, generally correlates well with how well a person does in school, how they get along in life, and how they form relationships in life.

Children securely attached have parents that are tuned into their moods and desires. Mothers soothe them when they are upset and play with them when they are happy. This does not mean the parents are perfect. But if the overall pattern of behavior is reliable (as is true in any relationship) the child feels secure.

In 1944, Bowlby undertook a study he called Forty-Four Juvenile Thieves on a group of delinquents. He found a high percentage of the boys had been abandoned when they were young, and suffered from feelings of anger, humiliation, and worthlessness. These feelings came out in frequent statements of “She left because I am no good.”

Watching these kids withhold affection and other coping strategies to deal with the sense of abandonment, Bowlby theorized that kids need safety and exploration. They need to feel loved by those who care for them, but they also need to go out in the world and take care of themselves. While safety and exploration seem at first glance to be in opposition to each other, Bowlby believed they were, in fact, interconnected. Bowlby argued the safer a person feels at

home, the more likely a person is to venture out with confidence to explore new things. Bowlby put it this way: “All of us, from cradle to grave, are happiest when life is organized as a series of excursions, long or short, from the secure base provided by our attachment figures” (Cozolino, 2014, p. 139).

McAdams argued (1993) this background of security or insecurity is important for future relationships because children develop a narrative tone, which influences their stories for the rest of their lives. Children gradually adopt an enduring assumption that everything will turn out well or badly (depending on their childhood). They thus lay down a foundation of stories in which goals are achieved, hurts healed, peace is restored, and the world is understood.

Much of life then is shaped by integrating the billions of stimuli we encounter into sophisticated models, which are used to anticipate, interpret, and navigate through life (Harrari, 2015). Rhodes (2002) asserted social interactions, such as the interaction between mentors and mentees, even in ordinary conversations, plays a major role in honing mental abilities.

Perhaps a great unseen barrier to retention are the students themselves: their own unique goals and motivations for entering into a relationship through enrollment at an institution of higher education. What have been called “Novice adults” (Levinson, et al., 1978), are now called “emerging adults” (Arnett, 2015). Novice adults had some tangible benchmarks in their transitioning from the world of adolescents to the world of adulthood. These tangible benchmarks included moving away from home, getting married, starting a family, and becoming financially independent. In 1960, 70% of American 30-year olds had accomplished these things. By 2000 fewer than 40% had done the same. In the place of these more material achievements, emerging adulthood is characterized in Arnett’s (2015) study by five main features: (a) Identity explorations (finding an answer to the question “who I am?”); (b) Instability (in all aspects of life

including relationships, work, and living accommodations); (c) Self-focus (obligations to others are not as important); (d) Feeling in-between (similar to the descriptions of Kram and Levinson, a feeling of being in transition); (e) Possibilities / optimism (a sense that one can transform their lives).

To these emerging adults, higher education, college, is seen as a means to an end. In a nationwide Clark poll, 78% of all 18-29-year old's agreed that "one of the most important keys to success in life is a college education" (Arnett & Schwab, 2012). So, school for them takes on a greater importance or significance than their previous educational experiences. Unlike high school, there are more course choices, passing courses requires more participation and engagement, leading to at least, more frequency of assignments, not to mention the student (this is truer of community college students) is paying to attend college (Arnett, 2015). By the same token, college, according to the nationwide poll is for accomplishing the tasks of life before them. First and foremost, college is a place to find out what the student wants to do as their life's work. Of the emerging adults polled, 86% said it is more important than ever to get education or training past high school in order to find a job in today's economy (2015). Yet in the same survey, 61% identified college as offering "the potential to have fun while attending more school" and 50% reported seeing college as a way to avoid "adult responsibilities for a few more years" (2015).

Those who did not pursue education after high school, 68% identified cost or affordability as their reason. For the emerging adults who chose not to pursue education beyond high school, many are waiting, looking for something (a career or purpose) to resonate with them: 57% reported not knowing what they wanted to study (career-related); 39% stated they have not pursued more college because "they didn't think it would be necessary for their job /

career.” Many of the emerging adults chose not to pursue additional education due to personal or familial reasons: 51% said they did not pursue education after high school due to family responsibilities; and slightly more than a third each (35% and 34%) did not pursue education after high school due to mental health, or physical health concerns (2015).

Despite the high percentage of respondents identifying college as important for their life, and the chance of finding a good job (86%), college for many emerging adults is, like most other facets of their life is a meandering road, rather than a straight, uninterrupted path. Only 59% of students who enter a four-year university or college have graduated six years later (Arnett, 2015). Among the 25-29-year old’s, just 30% have obtained a bachelor’s degree; even for many who do get a bachelor’s degree, it takes them five or six years to get their “four year degree.”

Upon entry into college, most emerging adults have only the vaguest of ideas what they want to study. They know that attending college is a good thing. They know that attending college is a necessary step to having career choices, and that they are more likely to make more money than someone without a college degree. Yet for many emerging adults, attending college is a sorting out the many choices (career and relationships) in front of them. In short, attending college is seen as a means of identity exploration (Arnett, 2015).

The times have changed since Kram and Levinson described 18-30-year olds as “novice adults.” Now with many choices of adulthood in front of them, and life expectancy increasing, these once “novices” are now adults that are “emerging” and are thus choosing to take their time in becoming an adult, forestalling arriving at this developmental destination until they reach 30. This process for them includes meandering through college (the process of meandering, while important to the student, also increases the possibility of dropping out), experimenting with majors, experimenting with relationships, and with possible careers. Kram (1985) and Levinson

et al., (1978) would agree with Arnett (2015) regardless of the classification this period of 18-30 is a period of transition.

Relational ties are essential sources of support especially during periods of major transition, and throughout the ongoing process of career development (Kram, 1985). Levinson et al., (1978) asserted as college age students navigate from adolescence to adulthood, they enter a period of major transition. Levinson and his colleagues argued it is during this transitional period of a young adult's life a relationship with a more experienced adult is vital. It is because mentoring experiences contribute in a crucial way to ushering mentees into adulthood (Johnson, 2016), Russell and Adams (1997) stated the formation of a mentoring relationship should be considered a major developmental task of the college and early career years. It is through a mentoring relationship a young adult gains support, guidance, and counsel as he or she accomplishes mastery of the world of adulthood (Kram 1985).

### **Gaps in the Literature**

The success and retention of high-risk students has been explored from the perspective of their comparative lack of family support (Guillory & Wolverton, 2008), their academic under preparation (Ishitani, 2006), and their lack of cultural capital (Walpole, 2003). The limited research on factors contributing to the retention of high-risk students has tended to focus on the programs and services designed to assist these students (Colton, Connor, Schultz, & Easter, 1999).

The importance of mentoring relationships in education, the large body of mentoring research involves students attending four-year institutions, or students in graduate programs, rather than students attending community colleges (Crisp, 2009; 2010). Much of the research on student faculty mentoring is overwhelmingly focused on the graduate level. This is because

student faculty mentoring relationships are an inherent part of graduate training models for many disciplines. Graduate school is viewed as an extension of the apprentice master model of learning a trade; as such, it follows that the relationship between mentor and protégé is of critical importance. Graduate level mentoring relationships are qualitatively different than those at the undergraduate level because mentors are likely to be more invested in their graduate student protégés than their undergraduate ones due to the length of the relationship and the fact that many graduate student protégés will become colleagues with their mentors after graduation (Sedlacek, Benjamin, Schlosser, & Sheu, 2007).

Consequently, while the literature discussing persistence is extensive (Arbona & Nora, 2007; Cox & Orehovec, 2007; Ostrove & Long, 2007; Rhee, 2008), researchers call for additional persistence research specific to community college students (Bailey & Alfonso, 2005; Pascarella, 1999; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1998).

Researchers repeatedly identified the need for a more comprehensive understanding and integration of theoretical models for community college students (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Napoli & Wortman, 1998; Pascarella, 1999; Wild & Ebbers, 2002) models remain underdeveloped (Crisp, 2010).

These benefits of a community college education, and to community college students notwithstanding, the retention of college students continues to concern and perplex college administrators. Since 1980, access to college has more than doubled from nearly 9 million students to almost 20 million in 2011. By the same token, college completion rates overall, have increased only slightly (Tinto, 2012). Research reveals less than one-third of community college students earn an associate's degree or certificate from their initial institution (Tinto, 2012). Community college students are 10% to 18% more likely to drop out of college than students



who attend four-year institutions, even after controlling for factors such as background, ability, high school grades and aspirations toward a college degree (Dougherty, 1992).

Studies on college student retention over the past 40 years have properly focused on the importance of the first-year experience, academic performance, self-efficacy, clear, early academic goals as important keys to student retention (Baker & Siryk, 1984, 1989; Pantages & Creedon, 1978; Wessell, Engle & Smidchens, 1978). Yet, despite the vast literature on the college dropout process, much remains unknown about why college students do not persist (Tinto, 2012).

Within the framework proposed above of behaviors associated with enhancing student retention, the classroom and faculty are at the center of a student's educational life and in turn at the center of institutional action, for student success. The classroom for non-residential institutions that comprise most of community colleges, is the one place, and perhaps the only place where students meet each other and the faculty and engage formal learning activities. For the great majority of students, success in college is most directly shaped by their experiences in the classroom (Tinto, 2012). Therefore, developing, enhancing, strengthening relationships between students, especially those defined as "High-Risk" and faculty or campus personnel should correlate to student success and persistence. It isn't just the relationship developed that is a key to retention, but the academic and social deficiencies such a relationship impacts. Two under consideration in this study are self-efficacy, and social capital.

## **Conclusion**

At the heart of mentoring is relationships; indeed, mentoring itself is relational (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978). In addition to mentoring, the other variables examined as affected by mentoring in this study, are at their root, also informed or affected by

relationships. Self-efficacy, an individual's confidence in their ability to perform certain tasks is formed as a reflection of how others see the individual, and that vantage point is relational to trust (Bandura, 1977). Social capital or support systems are those reciprocal (relational) ties between individuals, formal or informal; social, professional, personal, or familial, that hold society together (Field, 2017; Halpern, 2005; Putnam, 2000). Student persistence in higher education is also impacted by relationships; relationships between the student and the institution (Tinto, 1975) as well as relationships with faculty and staff (Barnett, 2011; Schreiner, et al., 2011).

Chapter 3 will address the methodology used and the justifications, collection and analysis necessary to address the research questions listed above. Chapter 4 will detail the results of such an analysis. Finally, chapter 5 will conclude with a discussion and implications for the findings for practitioners and researchers in higher education in general, and community colleges more specifically.

## CHAPTER 3

### METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this chapter is to present the process used to conduct the study, as well as a justification for the research process selected. This chapter outlines the proposed implementation and execution of the research study including the research design, instrumentation, sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis. This study's purpose is to examine the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student's self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study is an extension of the study, "The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence" (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

#### **Research Foci**

This research was guided by the following specific foci that was addressed through data collection and analysis:

1. How did faculty and staff mentoring effect high-risk community college students' self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?
  - 1a. How did mentoring affect the decision of high-risk community college students to persist?
  - 1b. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student self-efficacy?
  - 1c. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student support systems?
2. According to high-risk community college students who were mentored, what personal characteristics do effective mentors possess?
3. How do faculty and staff mentors recognize in themselves the same personal characteristics of effective mentors as described by high-risk community college students?

## **Research Design**

To properly investigate the purpose statement and address the research questions, a qualitative study in the phenomenological tradition was selected. The essence of this study was the importance of relationships (Levinson, 1996), specifically how mentoring relationships between students and faculty was important in the students' desire to persist.

Qualitative method was an appropriate choice for conducting this study centering on relationships as relationships are at the core of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013). This methodology emphasizing the importance of relationships has been underutilized in examining the mentoring relationship. Examining the literature, Bozeman and Feeney (2007) found that most of mentoring research is quantitative. In their research review, over 90% used survey-based methods and less than 20% triangulated multiple data sources (Haddock-Millar, 2017).

Effective qualitative inquiry hinges on relationships developed between researcher and the participants. Even the ability to collect and interpret data fully relies on the researcher-participant relationship (Hays & Singh, 2012). These relationships develop as researchers and participants have face-to-face interaction over time, making it possible for the researcher to learn about the problem or issue from participants and engage in the best practices to obtain that information (Creswell, 2013).

The current study extended Schreiner's (2011) study to community colleges. Schreiner utilized a qualitative design. Qualitative research is exploratory in nature (Hays & Singh, 2012), as phenomena being described tend to be exploratory in nature when researchers examine topics that either have not been examined or need to be examined from a different angle (Hays & Singh, 2012). Creswell (2013) commended the use of qualitative research to develop theories when partial or inadequate theories exist or do not adequately capture the complexity of the

problem under examination. Schreiner et al., (2011) utilized an exploratory design to establish theory; for this study, as it is an extension of the previous work, a phenomenological design is an appropriate method.

Phenomenology is used to “discover and describe” the meaning or the essence of the lived experiences of the participants (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 50). In order to do this, the researcher creates a trusting relationship with the participants in much the same way as a mentor does with a mentee (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985).

### **Setting or Context**

Qualitative research occurs in a naturalistic setting; it allows the real world to unfold for the participants in their everyday environments (Patton, 2015). The intention of qualitative researchers is to immerse themselves, and rid themselves of an expert status, and the immersion takes place by reducing the distance between researcher, participant and context. Or as Creswell (2013) explained it is impossible to separate what people say from the place where they say it.

The setting for this study took place at a designated Hispanic Serving Institution (HSI) community college located in a downtown urban area of a large city in the Mountain west area of the United States. Table 1 compares demographic information of the participating institution with national averages as provided by the American Association of Community Colleges (AACCC 2017).

Table 1

*Demographic Data*

<b>Demographic</b>	<b>Participating Institution</b>	<b>National Average</b>
Full-time students	26%	38%
Part-time students	74%	62%
Male	42%	44%
Female	58%	56%
Reporting as Minority	52%	52%
Reporting specifically as Hispanic	31.4%	23%
Pell Eligible	47%	38%
First Generation College Student	69%	38%
Median Age	24	24
Full-time faculty	104 (25.8%)	
Part-time faculty	299 (74.2%)	

The demographic data in Table 1 indicate the participating school is comparable to national demographics in median age, gender, and reporting as minority students; while the participating institution has larger percentages of many categories identified in the literature as “High-risk” college students: first generation students, Pell eligible, part-time students versus full-time. As the purpose of this study was to examine the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on “High-Risk” community college students, the participating institution provided a sufficient sample adding to the trustworthiness of the study findings.

This study adhered to the features of a phenomenological study and employed the interview as the sole data collection method. The intent behind utilizing interviews was to gain insight on community college students' perspective on the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on the students' desire to persist. Among the several advantages of interviews in qualitative research are the first-hand experience with participants, the recording of information as it occurs, and the exploration of topics the otherwise may be uncomfortable for participants to discuss (Creswell, 2009).

Individual interviews allowed the researcher to gain meaningful and in-depth information concerning the participant's thoughts, beliefs, feelings, knowledge, reasoning and motivations about the area of inquiry. The interview questions were open-ended allowing the researcher to focus on understanding the central phenomena, the impact of mentoring, being studied (Creswell, 2013).

## **Participants**

For this study, a team of researchers was employed to interview, review protocol procedures and questions, code check, and audit data. Twenty-two successful high-risk undergraduate students from one urban community college, and 26 faculty and staff named by the student / participants as having been influential in the participants' desire to persist were interviewed by one researcher. A panel of mentoring experts reviewed the interview protocol and questions. Both sets of interviews (student / faculty and staff) were randomly reviewed for coding validity by two graduate students experienced in qualitative research from a nearby university. Additionally, one independent auditor was used to ensure the respective interview protocols are followed with exactness, and to determine the extent to which the researcher has

conducted a “comprehensive and rigorous study” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 209). Following the method utilized by Schreiner, et al., (2011) a purposeful criterion sampling technique was utilized. Through purposive sampling participants were selected for the amount of detail they can provide about mentoring experiences, and not to simply meet a certain sample size.

Students were selected on the basis of the following criteria: (a) they entered college as high-risk students by virtue of their admission test scores, their conditional admission, their placement in remedial courses, or a designation by their institution as “high risk,” (b) they are at least three semesters into their program, (c) they have a cumulative GPA of 2.5 or higher, indicating that they are currently “succeeding” in their college environment, and (d) none of the students considered for participation in the study had been a past or current student of the researcher. Students who met these criteria for successful high-risk undergraduates were randomly selected from institutional lists obtained from the registrar’s offices, learning centers, or academic advising offices on the campus. They were personally invited to participate in the study by e-mail and telephone.

During the interviews, students were asked who on campus has influenced their decision to persist and/or their ability to succeed. Once the student identified the person or persons on campus who has influenced them the most, that person or persons were interviewed. Should any student be unable to identify an influential faculty or staff member they would be eliminated from the study.



## **Data Collection Procedures**

Data were collected using semi-structured interviews conducted by one doctoral student researcher as part of the research team. Individual interviews are the most widely used qualitative data collection method because interviews provide in-depth information about a participant's thoughts, beliefs, knowledge, reasoning, motivations, and feelings about the phenomenon of inquiry (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2016).

For the semi-structured interviews, a Table of Specifications (Appendix A) was prepared, comparing interview questions with the research foci, ensuring each research foci was addressed by the student, faculty, and staff interview questions. For the student, faculty and staff interviews, a separate protocol was developed and used as a guide, or a starting point (Appendix B, and C). An advantage of the semi-structured interview was that the interviewee had more say in the structure and process (Hays & Singh, 2012). This is important in eliciting and understanding the lived experiences crucial in a qualitative inquiry, and important for use amongst High-Risk students who come from marginalized groups (Creswell, 2013). Open-ended, general interview questions focused on understanding the questions of this study—the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on High-risk student persistence, and how this phenomenon developed and strengthened student self-efficacy and support systems (Creswell, 2013).

Each high-risk, successful student participated in a one-hour audio-taped interview; each faculty or staff member participated in a one-hour audio taped interview. As no two interviews are the same, the researcher spent more than an hour interviewing in some cases (Hays & Singh, 2012). The interview protocol was structured ensuring all participants are asked the same set of questions, but each interview allowed some flexibility to explore individual perceptions in greater depth (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Prior to the interviews with students and faculty / staff, to establish trustworthiness and validity, a pilot study was conducted utilizing the interview questions with three high-risk students and one named faculty member and staff member from an institution not involved in this study. A pilot study was recommended by Creswell (2009; 2013) as a means of refining and developing research questions, data collection and procedures. Further, a pilot study

- tests the interview protocol;
- ensures the wording of the interview questions are unambiguous, and inoffensive;
- tests that the questions utilized elicit data yielding the answers anticipated;
- provides a sample identifying the length of the interview

Further, as part of the interview protocol, and researcher foci were submitted by email for review by a panel of mentoring researchers (See Appendix E). The panelists were

- Dr. Brandy A. Brown, Assistant Professor, and Program Director of Organizational Leadership, University of Arizona South;
- Dr. Bob Garvey, Chair of Business Education, at York St. John University Business School;
- Dr. Laura Lunsford, Director, Swain Center, University North Carolina, Wilmington.

The electronic comments from this panel of experts has been attached as Appendix E at the end of this study as Appendix E. The findings obtained through the pilot study, and from the panel of research mentoring experts was reported, and as appropriate, incorporated into the final instruments used for the study (Creswell, 2009), and these instruments received approval from the research institution's IRB, as well as the participating institution's system office prior to conducting the study.

The pilot study was conducted at a community college within twenty miles of the subject institution. Three students were randomly selected and compensated with a sandwich and a soda in respect of their time and assistance. These student interviews from the pilot study did in fact assist with the validation of the interview questions, as there were two questions that the researcher felt unsure of using, or the order in which these questions appeared. The pilot study based on the student responses helped to resolve the matter. The remainder of the student interviews from this pilot study also verified the value of the questions used, as the questions assisted in revealing the type of thick data needed and hoped for when the interviews are conducted with the students of the participating institution.

The interviews with three named faculty and staff mentors at the pilot study also revealed validation of the interview protocol and questions. The faculty and staff interviews from the pilot study did not lead to any alterations in the interview protocol.

All interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Patterns and themes were constructed through a content analysis of the transcripts, and codes were developed accordingly (Miles & Huberman, 1994). In addition, to increase the transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the study, an audit trail of the data collection and analyses procedures was created.

The narratives of both the students and the campus personnel were used to identify students' perceptions of the behaviors and attitudes of influential personnel, as well as the faculty and staff's self-perceptions of the behaviors in which they engaged with students. Taken together, these narratives and the interpretation of their collective perceptions led to the identification of themes.

**Data selection and gaining entrée.**

In selecting the participants, time, and location for their individual interview, the researcher began with the end in mind (Covey, 1989) considering the end result of the project, because “without a proper foundation, what you do to collect (and analyze) data, cannot be trusted” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 222). The researcher conducted individual interviews, selecting participants as “. . . interviewees who can best answer the questions” (Creswell 2013, p. 164), representing the characteristics identified in purposive sampling.

**Power Imbalances**

More and more interviewing in qualitative research is seen as a moral inquiry (Creswell, 2013). In qualitative research, the relationship between the researcher and the participant is the conduit to collect and understand the data gained (Hays & Singh, 2012). As such, the researchers / interviewers need to bear in mind how the interview adds to knowledge and the human situation; how and in what ways an interview may be stressful for the participant, whether or not the participant has a say in how the interview is interpreted, how thoroughly or critically the participants will be interviewed, as well as what, if any consequences there are for the participant(s) and the groups to which they belong.

Since many of the students in this study come from marginalized groups and the researcher is an older White male, greater care was taken to be aware of and mitigate potential “power imbalances” before, during, and after the interview process. Failing to do so, may affect the relationship between the researcher and the participants, a relationship that lies at the very heart of qualitative inquiry (Creswell, 2013). By the same token, not being sensitive to these potential power imbalances harms the participant, which goes against the intent of this study as

well as it goes against a main tenet of human subjects research: to do no harm (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Hays and Singh (2012) recommended the following practices to minimize ethical dilemmas in qualitative data collection:

- Maintain an ongoing informed consent process;
- Discuss in advance with members of the target group any issues that are sensitive and relevant to the consent process to minimize the hierarchical nature of providing informed consent;
- Spend time learning about the populations and settings you are studying, particularly when research involves vulnerable populations;
- Form partnerships with community organizations and share power positions in research design decisions. Be a good guest.
- Anticipate and plan to the extent possible, potential participant reactions to content and process during data collection. For example, Waldrop (2004) recommended making a list of community resources available to participants.
- Combine both online and offline data collection methods to allow for depth, privacy, and authenticity of data. For example, consider using the internet and online communities to recruit participants, but collect data offline.
- Whether using online or offline methods, create a process, wherever possible, in which participants can relate data responses in an anonymous manner. Consider use of pseudonyms;
- Use trustworthiness strategies to assist in managing ethical dilemmas (e.g., reflexive journaling, member checking, triangulation of investigators, peer debriefing)

- Strike a balance between personalizing and distancing yourself from the research topic and setting;
- Remember to “give back” to participants. DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) remind researchers to not exploit the participant for personal gain of data or access;
- Provide adequate protections for participants and third parties with respect to confidentiality;
- Do not approach participants by presenting a study as a method for them to gain self-awareness of the injustices they face, as this may be taken as patronizing and damaging and leave them feeling more vulnerable;
- Be aware of any previous experiences participants may have had with researchers. Whether negative or positive, seek to understand and value their experiences (p. 96).

Being aware of potential power imbalances, the researcher took steps to mitigate sources of imbalances in gaining entrée, and throughout the interview process and data analyzation process. The researcher sought to create a relaxed interview environment, by selecting an area free from any identifying office or personal items, and invited students to participate in the study, allowing them to select times convenient to their schedules. Further, no past or current student of the researcher in their role as a full-time faculty member was eligible for the study, avoiding the possibility of receiving answers the participant believes, based on previous interactions, the researcher wanted to hear. The interviewer / researcher sought to create a relaxed, comfortable, even slightly informal interview, by taking time to get to know the student briefly prior to the “official” interview by asking them to talk about themselves, their background, family, and their hopes, dreams for the future. During this time, the researcher provided a lunch meal from an on-campus vender, selected by the student, or a gift card from a food provider chosen by the student,

signifying the student had choice, and their voice was recognized and valued in the entire process. Historically, the sharing of a meal, breaking bread is recognized cross-culturally as signifying and inviting a more personal shared intimacy among participants. The interview process was one of learning for the researcher as well, and using field notes, and a reflective journal, the researcher had time to reflect after each interview about their biases, seeking to honor and keep the voices of the participants at the forefront. These methods helped the researcher reflect on any unanticipated power imbalances as well as participant reactions to the steps taken to learn whether these steps were sufficient or implement others should additional measures have been needed. The foregoing was a summary of steps taken; the following paragraphs explain in more detail the research method processes.

The selected students from the pool of respondents were invited to individual, one-on-one interviews conducted at a convenient time for the student and in a quiet conference room in the student life area of the campus. Reservations were made by the researcher through the administration of the campus for each individual interview. The room was a deliberate choice – the small conference room in the student life area was a familiar meeting room and non-threatening location for students.

During the interview, the researcher facilitated the meeting and created a comfortable environment to promote open communication and reduce the risk that the interviewees were not able or willing to express their experiences accurately or thoroughly. One way that this entrée was accomplished was to share a meal with each participant obtained from a food provider on campus. Stemming from our hunter-gatherer past, sharing a meal has been an important means of conveying or establishing closeness throughout history (Durant, 1935).

Providing a meal for each participant accomplished the following necessary goals and objectives. First, providing of a meal acknowledged in some way, the contribution of the participants, both their time and the insights they provided (Creswell, 2013). This is important as qualitative researchers are admonished to be aware of ethical considerations by being mindful of the participants, by “giving something back” (Creswell, 2013; Hays & Singh, 2012). Providing a meal and eating together is also, as mentioned before, a cultural way of increasing or conveying intimacy which will provide an entrée for the researcher and increase participant comfortability. While a meal was offered, all student participants chose a gift card from a local food provider of their choice.

Lastly, as many of the High-Risk students participating in this study came from historical marginalized groups, taking their food or gift card requests, rather than providing something for them, was a further step in honoring and recognizing the uniqueness of their voice (Creswell, 2013). The interviewer / researcher was not in any supervisory or instructional capacity with the interviewees reducing the possibility that the interviewees may wish to impress the interviewer; either of which would negatively influence the outcomes of the interview (Hays & Singh, 2012).

Prior to the day of the individual interviews, the researcher planned the questions, the order in which the questions were asked, and a strategy to facilitate the interviews. Additionally, the researcher solicited and received feedback on the questions and the sequence to mitigate potential bias (Hays & Singh, 2012).

### **Description of data collection.**

After establishing the logistical requirements for the conducting the individual interviews, the researcher returned to the theoretical framework of the study, by developing and explaining the protocol for the data collection. The protocol included the collection of basic



information about the session, such as time, date, and location. It also documented the collection of informed consent from each participant (See Appendix D), and the protocol included an opening script that was read by the researcher to the participants. Keeping with Hays and Singh's (2012) recommendation, the script included the following:

- an explanation of the purpose of the study,
- an explanation of the purpose of the individual interview as part of the research design,
- the agenda for the individual interview,
- the descriptions of the roles of the participants and the facilitator,
- information about participants' rights and responsibilities,
- ground rules for appropriate behavior during the individual interview.

Before the individual interviews began, the researcher provided each participant with a copy of the research summary to keep. The summary was a one-page document describing the framework of the research study and the purpose of the individual interview in the study. The summary also included the contact information of the researcher for participants who would have like more information about the study or the research findings.

Each session was recorded with the permission of the participant and was subsequently transcribed following each interview session. Prior to the beginning of the interview, each participant read and signed the informed consent form for the study (a sample of which is in Appendix D). The names of the participants were not be stated at any point of the recording; their names were initially coded based on the sequence of interviews (student one through student twenty-two, Faculty and staff one through twenty-six). Students were informed verbally and through the informed consent form (a sample is located in Appendix D) that their identity

would not be revealed at all phases of the study. Following completion of all interviews, the student participants were blind copied on thank you emails.

The researcher participated in the individual interviews and observed the setting and the interactions with the participants. While no video recordings were made of the individual interviews, two independent audio recordings of each interview were made by the researcher. The audio recordings were stored in a password protected, Internet-based electronic file accessible only to the researcher. The audio recording was independently transcribed into a word document, by a transcription firm, the transcription verified by the researcher to the audio tape. The researcher completed field notes based on the established protocol during the individual interviews.

### **Data Analysis**

The steps in the data analysis of this study were generally based on Creswell's (2013) spiral of movement through analytical circles and adhered to his belief that collection, analysis, and report writing are not —distinct steps in the process - they are interrelated and often go on simultaneously in a research project.

The initial phase of the data management included the accumulation and organization of the data from the twenty-two student interviews, and twenty-six faculty and staff interviews into computer files. The choice of transcribing the data verbatim by the researcher after each individual interview with students was deliberate to capture and reflect on the essence of their experiences through the nuances of meaning, the individuality of each participant, their attitudes, emotional clues, and values associated with the phenomenon.

The second step in the analysis was immersion in the transcripts—reading, re-reading, analytic note-taking, thinking, exploration of ideas, identification and connection between

insights and emerging strong patterns, discovery of hidden meaning, and finally, the selection and application of a group of coding methods. To gain this type of familiarity and understanding, Creswell (2013) suggested listening and reading the transcripts at least five times. An initial analytic review and a combination of techniques was applied in the text analysis to identify shared meaning, through word repetitions, key concepts, comparisons, use of metaphors and other figures of speech, as well as through searching for hidden or missing information (Creswell, 2013).

The next step in the analysis was comprised of determining meaningful units, the interpretation of the data, the organization into codes, then categories and subcategories, and subsequently, into themes as outcomes of coding (Saldana, 2013), related to the research questions of the study. Finally, the clusters of meaning (Miles & Huberman, 1994), or categories was identified through the analysis, represented information related to constructs inherent to the study, as well as conceptually interesting and providing new information (Creswell, 2013). Saldana 's *Coding Manual for Qualitative Researchers*, as well as Schreiner's original study served as resources in the approach, design, and the selection of coding methods.

Throughout the individual interviews, the researcher developed field notes, which were guided by a protocol. The assumptions of the researcher were informed by his current employment as a community college professor and department chair, and his involvement and familiarity with students, staff and faculty through this employment. The researcher anticipated some consistency of data between participants of the individual interviews performed in this study. These assumptions are known as "initial codes" and evolved as the transcripts generated were reviewed and coded.

Shortly after each individual interview was completed, the researcher indicated his final reflections within the field notes and then transcribed the audio recording of the interview. Poland (1995) asserted that valid transcription enhances trustworthiness and is critical to the quality and rigor of qualitative research. The recordings were listened to at least five times as Creswell recommended (2013) as part of the transcribing process, comparing the audio with the transcribed text to ensure accuracy. In the process of transcription and listening to the recordings codes or themes naturally emerged.

According to Hays and Singh (2012), a code is “a label or tag that chunks various amounts of data based on the defined case or unit of analysis.” (p. 299). The researcher kept the conceptual framework and research questions at the forefront when coding but will also remain open to potential modifications (Creswell, 2013).

The aim of qualitative research is to yield thick description, or ample detail about the research process, the context and the participants. Thick description is not simply providing more detail or description. It is providing a comprehensive and focused picture of a behavior or occurrence that includes relevant psychosocial, affective, and cultural overtones. The end goal of thick description is to provide enough interpretive depth and detail that the reader can generalize findings to a narrowed context or can replicate the study in another setting.

It was further expected the interviews would reveal the individuality of each experience in the participants' own voice. Creswell's (2013) recommended the application of analytic writing and data analysis, therefore, this study started from narrow units of analysis (significant statements) and moved on to the broader units (meaning units), and finally on to detailed descriptions of what the participants experienced, and how they experienced it (p. 79).

Throughout the entire process, language would be an important conduit for obtaining information about phenomena that are not always directly observable, easily defined, or previously explored (Hays & Singh, 2012). Creswell admonished staying true to the language used by the participants by writing in a “literary, flexible style that conveys stories . . . without the restrictions of formal academic structures of writing” (Creswell, 2013, p. 48).

Member checking has been identified as an important strategy for establishing trustworthiness (Singh & Hays, 2012). Following data analysis, an e-mail was sent to each individual interview participant. The e-mail would share the transcript from the participant's interview. This would help to determine if the essence of the interview was correctly captured (Hays & Singh, 2012). If the participant disagreed with the transcript or had more to add, a second interview may be conducted, or could be added in their emailed response. This step was important in establishing the validity and trustworthiness of the data. Because of the member check, there could have been, but was no modification of the themes.

To obtain completeness, not confirmation, the goal of triangulation (Hays & Singh, 2012) both sets of interviews (student / faculty and staff) were randomly reviewed for coding validity by two graduate students experienced in qualitative research, colleagues, Dean Roughton, and Adam Hutchison. Additionally, one independent auditor (Appendix L) was used to ensure the respective interview protocols are followed with exactness and determined the extent to which the researcher conducted a “comprehensive and rigorous study” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 209). This strategy is referred to in the literature as stepwise replication and can take many forms including the one the researcher selected for this study: utilizing one investigator for data collection (auditor) and a separate team for data analysis (Hays & Singh, 2012).

The two individuals selected to validate the initial coding performed by the researcher found coding to be like the coding performed by the researcher using the code book provided. The differences were in method, rather than in substance. The researcher chose to code in a line by line method, the code checkers utilized a block method, assigning a code for a given paragraph. Either method is acceptable as a reliable means of coding qualitative data and reflects the coders own biases or preferences. The difference in technique or method is found in frequency of the appearance of codes, not the codes themselves.

### **Bracketing**

Bracketing is a method used in qualitative research to mitigate the potentially harmful effects of unacknowledged preconceptions that may color the research process, while increasing the rigor of the project (Tufford & Newman, 2012). It demonstrates the validity of the data collection while allowing the reader to assess the validity of the research purporting to be free of researcher bias (Ahern, 1999).

In the phenomenological tradition, the researcher reveals the lived experience, the phenomenon of the participants (Creswell, 2013). Bracketing, suggested Drew (2004), is a process whereby the researcher sorts out the qualities of the phenomenon that belong to the researcher so that the lived phenomenon of the participant can emerge less obstructed. Bracketing, acknowledges it is not possible for researchers to be totally unbiased or objective (Ahern, 1999), and is a self-reflexive process requiring the researcher to be honest and vigilant about their own perspective so that readers can understand the position of the researcher, even as the researcher brackets or suspends their biases as the study proceeds (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

Tufford and Newman (2012) found a lack of uniformity in the definition of the term “bracketing” across the literature, encompassing such words or terms as beliefs and values,

thoughts and hypotheses, biases, emotions, preconceptions, presuppositions and assumptions about the studied phenomenon Bracketing addresses the idea of why and in what ways the researcher is invested in the research topic.

In the current study, the researcher has identified through self-reflection areas that could potentially cause bias. Through the primary employment of the researcher for nearly seventeen years as both a part-time and full-time faculty member, there is bias toward community colleges and their mission. As the researcher is employed at an institution that serves many students classified as “high-risk” there is a bias in their behalf, reflecting nearly a decade of frequent out of class interactions with them, hearing their stories, and witnessing their struggles as they navigate the “hidden curriculum” of higher education, often with only themselves as their support systems. Two stories illustrate this point: Recently, while meeting with a 65-year-old student from Senegal, the researcher in his role as a faculty member, was advised by the student that he hadn’t seen his family since 2005 as they remained in Senegal. The researcher was further informed that the student lived alone, with no roommate, completely alone. When the student was asked how he was able to persevere without any form of emotional support, the student named three part-time instructors employed at the college, and said in his broken English, “These are my friends. I do it for them.”

Another even more recent student visit with the researcher in his role as a faculty member, brought him into contact with a young female international student from Vietnam. As they conversed, the student mentioned that there wasn’t much of a Vietnamese community where she lived. The researcher offhandedly asked if she sometimes felt lonely. The student then broke down in tears indicating through her tears, yes, she was very lonely.

There is no doubt that nearly ten years of meeting with hundreds of students' multiple times throughout each semester, and the personal relationships formed by these interactions may bias the researcher towards the benefits of faculty or staff and student mentoring interactions. It is true that the literature supports such biases in a general sense. The challenge for the researcher is in ensuring the voices of the students and faculty or staff interviewed are free to confirm, alter or deny research findings in their own unique and personal "lived experience."

There may be an added cause of researcher bias. The researcher's own "lived experience" as a beginning college student. When the researcher entered higher education at a local community college near his home forty years ago, he sought to establish relationships with faculty. He was unsuccessful in so doing and felt from the initial interactions that he was somehow intruding, they did not have time for him, and did not seem to appreciate his desire to engage them in general course-related conversation. At that time, the researcher, as a seventeen-year-old, didn't have a sufficient work ethic to be successful in the world of higher education, nor did he have a support system outside the classroom, as one parent had deceased, and the other parent had a high school education, but had gone no further. These factors coupled with a lack of support systems from his faculty, led him to withdraw from the community college in each of two semesters, to not return for over a decade as he concluded that he simply wasn't smart enough. The actions of this young man reflected the findings (at nearly the same time as the struggles of the student) of Tinto (1975), Schreiner and her colleagues (2011) posited students enter institutions of higher education, but they leave unsuccessful relationships. These lived experiences may cause in the researcher in his role as a faculty member, a desire to be there for his students, to form relationships with his students in ways his faculty members weren't there for him when he needed them.



The life experience of the researcher, a desire to mentor students a desire that may have filled a mentoring void in the researcher's life is consistent with findings from a qualitative study by Philip and Hendry (2000) in which they identified four general explanations for why adults become natural mentors: (1) enabling mentors to make sense of their own past experiences; (2) gaining insight into another person's life; (3) establishing a different type of relationship (cross-generational); and (4) building skills in providing a helping relationship.

Additionally to acknowledge and mitigate potential biases, the researcher wrote a reflective journal (Appendix I). Following each interview, to express feelings and honestly address these viewpoints and the related biases, and to guard against those biases affecting interpretation of the words and the lived experiences of the participants themselves, the reflective journal is a valuable resource (Creswell & Miller, 2000).

### **Data Saturation**

Data saturation for the purpose and scope of the study was continuously evaluated throughout the interview process. Data saturation was established after forty-eight interviews. This evaluation was made through reexamination of the interview transcripts and through revisiting the derived categories, their complexity the nuances of meaning, the emerging patterns, and the emergent themes describing the phenomenon through the perspectives of the participants.

### **Limitations**

- Inexperience of the researcher: Qualitative Research quality is heavily dependent on the individual skills of the researcher and more easily influenced by the researcher's personal biases and assumptions (Creswell, 2013);

In qualitative inquiry researchers try to get as close as possible to the participants (relationships) being studied. This is how knowledge is known --- through the subjective experiences of people. The only way to mitigate the inexperience of the researcher is to do the work, and then to immerse themselves in the task of understanding the meanings of the participants. This suggests an intimate familiarity with the tapes of interviews and transcripts, listening and verifying one against the other for accuracy, as well as listening and reviewing field notes for hidden meanings, nuances in actions, body language and vocal inflection of the participants. It therefore becomes important to conduct studies in “the field” where participants live and work. This type of immersion and familiarity by the researcher of both the process and the data gained from the process, as well as working closely with the researcher’s dissertation committee, increased the experience of the researcher and improved the quality of the final product.

To obtain completeness, not confirmation, the goal of triangulation (Hays & Singh, 2012) and to mitigate researcher inexperience, both sets of interviews (student / faculty and staff) were randomly reviewed for coding validity by two graduate students experienced in qualitative research.

Quality of Participants’ responses: Participants may well fall prey to either “give the researcher what they think he wants to hear” or feel uncomfortable, or not be truthful, any scenario either of which will affect the quality of data;

While the researcher ensured no situation existed that could affect the relationship between the researcher or participant, and thus, affect the interview and data gained, from verifying that the participants’ have not been or were now enrolled in any course the -researcher taught, to not

conducting the interviews in the researcher's office where the participants could be affected or sense a change in the power dynamics, that would cause the participant to provide answers to please the researcher, or provide answers or material of little or no use, the researcher reserved the ability to either a) schedule follow up interviews for clarity; Or b) to amend the number of participants to a larger sample, or c) as qualitative inquiry is evolving (Creswell, 2013), to amend the questions, in either case, it is hopeful such amending will yield more usable data.

- Problems involving the maintenance of confidentiality.

The nature of collecting depth and detail of personal stories places "risks" in breaching confidentiality (Waldrop 2004). "Qualitative data are, however, 'live,' encompassing tapes and transcripts of interviews as well as the researchers' notebooks and journals, all filled with purposefully thick and rich descriptions. Coding does not always remove identifying information" (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 244).

The researcher took steps to insure confidentiality or anonymity by creating pseudonyms for each of the participants throughout the study, and by using a password protected file to keep data and interviews accessible only to the researcher. The possibility existed that in describing participant comments and background, the identification of a participation is possible. All participants were made aware in the Informed Consent document of the steps taken to protect their confidentiality or otherwise maintain their anonymity, but also were made aware that there were some minimal risks.

Additionally, one independent auditor (Appendix L) was used to ensure the respective interview protocols are followed with exactness and determined the extent to which the researcher conducted a “comprehensive and rigorous study” (Hays & Singh, 2012, p. 209).

## **Conclusion**

The preceding chapter presented the process used to conduct the study, as well as a justification for the research process selected. The proposed implementation and execution of the research study including the research design, instrumentation, sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis was outlined and followed. This study’s purpose was to examine the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student’s self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study was an extension of the study, “The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence” (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

The findings to the research foci, a discussion regarding the design aligning with the purpose of the study, and a demonstration of the importance of this study will be discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 4

### RESULTS

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college students' self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Using the well-established construct of mentoring as discussed in the literature review (Chapter 2), this study focused on the lived and shared experiences of the participants: high-risk community college students and the faculty and staff influential in the student's decision to stay in school as identified by the students themselves (Creswell, 2013). In-depth interviews were conducted, utilizing open-ended questions, and follow up questions designed to elicit from the students, faculty, and staff responses and perceptions relating to the phenomenon under study. Consistent with the purpose, this phenomenological, qualitative study was guided by the following research foci:

1. How did faculty and staff mentoring effect high-risk community college students' self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?
  - 1a. How did mentoring affect the decision of high-risk community college students to persist?
  - 1b. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student self-efficacy?
  - 1c. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student support systems?
2. According to high-risk community college students who were mentored, what personal characteristics do effective mentors possess?
3. How do faculty and staff mentors recognize in themselves the same personal characteristics of effective mentors as described by high-risk community college students?

The purpose of this chapter is to present the study findings analyzed and derived from the collection of data obtained through a series of 48 interviews conducted over the course of approximately 5 weeks. Interviews were conducted with 22 high-risk community college students. Interviews were then conducted with twenty-six faculty and staff named by the high-risk students as being influential in the students' desire to persist. The students and faculty and staff are from a community college located in a downtown urban area of the Mountain west region of the United States.

### **Categories and Topics**

This first attempt at coding, yielded 37 codes or categories. These codes or categories were created after a review of the field notes of the researcher, and through researcher expectations ("initial codes") based on the Schreiner study (2011) and analysis of mentoring literature discussed in Chapter 2. Continued immersion in the audio and written transcriptions increased the number of categories or codes to 53. Following the suggestions of Creswell (2013), a "winnowing" of codes or categories occurred, looking for redundancies or inefficiencies in these initial codes and categories. This winnowing process combined codes or categories eliminated unintentional redundancy (for example, accessible and approachable initially were two categories, but combined later as they convey a similar meaning) and culminated in the identification of 33 descriptive categories or topics, a number within a range suggested by Creswell (2013). These topics, clusters of meaning, reflect the perspectives of all participants through their stories and feelings, their lived experiences of the phenomenon under study.

Because of the continuous immersion in the data, each of the 33 categories or "codes" were refined to subcategories of the 4 themes that emerged. These subcategories produced a

more precise representation and understanding of both the “what “and the “how” of the phenomenon under study (Creswell, 2013) and captured the voices of the participants as they described their lived experiences.

### **Description of Categories**

The 33 categories resulted from a combination of first and second cycle coding methods. As suggested by Hays and Singh (2012), a short description of each of the 33 categories is offered and found in Appendix K.

### **Themes**

This section is devoted to the definition and descriptions of the 4 emerging themes of this study. These themes emerged from the students, faculty and staff descriptions of the various facets of the phenomena under study, from the effect of mentoring by faculty and staff on high-risk community college students, to how and why mentoring produced self-efficacy, support, and a desire to persist in higher education by the student.

**Theme One:** High-Risk Community college students are unprepared for college completion prior to entering college.

Theme one is fundamental to research foci #1, the effect of mentoring on high-risk community college students. Theme one establishes the need for a mentor. While across the literature there is no one accepted definition of what a mentor is or does (Jacobi, 1991), a baseline for the roles or characteristics of mentors and the functions of mentoring may be found in this definition:

Mentoring is a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student or faculty member. A mentor provides the mentee with knowledge, advice, counsel, challenge, and support in the mentee's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession” (Johnson, 2016, p. 23)

Mentors can and do act as guides and role models, teachers and sponsors of less experienced mentees. Faculty and staff mentors can and do act in guiding students through the logistics of college generally, and the functions or outcomes of their specific courses. Faculty and staff mentors can and do act as role models and sponsors of students in modeling specific professional behaviors, or by sponsoring students into other areas of academia, or as an entrée to other faculty or staff personnel.

These mentor characteristics or mentoring functions are recognized and utilized if a need for them is identified and valued by the mentee. Theme one identifies the need for such a guide, teacher, sponsor or role model by high-risk community college students. Theme one identifies the lack of preparedness to graduate college evinced by high-risk community college students prior to their entering college, and the many and varied types of unpreparedness as well as the many and varied reasons for this unpreparedness.

Nineteen of the 22 students indicated some feeling of unpreparedness to complete college when they began college. The degree of unpreparedness was found in the various responses ranging from, “not prepared. Zero amount prepared” (Nicole) to “I don't think I felt prepared to graduate college at all because it took a lot of coaxing on my own part really to even attempt to attend college” (Kim). One student (David) indicated his feeling of unpreparedness came from



his most recent educational experiences in high school, indicating that to him, “College was always gonna be a leap of faith” due to his academic struggles in high school. Additionally, there was not much support offered to go on in higher education because he had been told, and then began to believe “college and schooling is for some, where it's not for other people.” Since he struggled in high school, “there's no way college is gonna be for me either.”

Another student was even more direct in their response, “I wasn't very prepared all, I wasn't really sure what I was getting myself into” (David). For many, even completing the process of enrolling was analogous to a leap of faith, completing the registration process was a victory in and of itself, “It was a huge leap to just come back to school in general, and I felt like that was kind of like a win in itself” (Anjelica).

A returning older student (Kim) did not see her entry into college with graduation as a goal or an expectation; rather, she saw college as more an experiment to see whether or not she could actually “be” a college student, thus fulfilling a life-long dream. She just wanted to see if it was something I could even do, so at that point, I really was not thinking about graduation at all, it was just like let me just fulfill a lifelong dream that I've had and let me see where I land. It took a lot of, "You can do this, at least try ... "

Two of the remaining 3 that indicated initially feeling prepared for college, but as the interview progressed indicated that soon after beginning college, “I thought I knew what I wanted to do, and I felt I had the skills and the mindset for a college student. Later, I learned that I changed my major nine times and it was not as prepared as I thought” (Sherika). One student (Johanna) indicated due to her lack of confidence “I knew it was gonna be a struggle.”

One said she felt “pretty prepared” for college but attributed her level of preparedness to having completed a stint in the military. Reflecting on her past experiences, she stated that in high school she was “totally a different person. In high school, “I was lazy. I didn’t want to do anything” (Sariah).

The data gleaned from student interviews revealed many reasons for these feelings of unpreparedness for college on the part of High-risk community college students. These reasons will be explained more fully in this theme, and include, first, family instability, resulting in lack of support for the student by parents or other care givers, often leading the student to assume greater responsibilities for themselves and often, for younger siblings; second, poor academic preparation in high school, (often brought about because of the instability at home) either through student indifference (“I was social,” “school was always hard for me”; “I joked around a lot”; “I was an athlete”; “I didn’t understand why I was learning this”) on the part of the student, or on the part of the high school (“high school was just pretty much like a blank paper for me that didn't say college in there”); the data also revealed a third reason, significant personal issues played an important role in college unpreparedness.

One interviewee dealt with complex issues stemming from homosexuality in 9th grade; two students struggled in high school with the effects of drug / substance abuse. One of those two students struggled with methamphetamine addiction for over 10 years. Of these three students, these issues were too great for two of them, as they subsequently dropped out of high school.

The fourth reason students felt unprepared for college was dropping out of high school or delayed entry in college (“I hadn’t written a academic paper, or any paper in over 15 years”); a

fifth reason was a general unfamiliarity with the academic demands of college (‘what would be expected of me’), as well as an unfamiliarity with what Smith (2013) called “the hidden curriculum” of college: financial aid, scheduling, degree pathways, required courses, the length of time to complete a degree, even navigating the vastness of a college campus seemed overwhelming to High-risk community college students, causing one student to wonder “what had I gotten myself into?”

Perhaps fundamental to the feelings of unpreparedness for college completion on the part of High-risk community college students is (6) being first generation college students. One student (Lisa) explained the significance why being a first-generation college student adds to the feeling of being unprepared and overwhelmed. The student reports not having an educational support system, “I can't go back home and ask a simple question, ‘What should my introduction have for my thesis sentence?’” These issues taken singularly or together contributes to a lack of confidence in the success of the student even before they begin the application or walk into a college class, as poignantly summed up by this student (Monique), “I just didn't feel myself capable of learning college-level subjects.”

**Family instability.** Nineteen of the 22 students interviewed indicated some type of family issues or instability contributed to their feelings of unpreparedness to complete college, or affected their education, casting doubts on their ability to complete. These issues ranged from family responsibilities such as caring for younger siblings, getting them to and from school, to providing care for parents or family members when illness strikes. One student (Marisabel), shared her experience when a parent became ill, and its impact on her and her education, when the parent needed to be hospitalized “I'll have to not sleep, because I would go to the hospital

with her, so that, then the next day I'd have school, or I'd have to do tests, or something like that.”

Due to family struggles and instability, two students interviewed reported spending significant time of their lives in foster care. One student (David) reported, essentially “growing up in foster care” from the time he was 13 “about the time that school actually became very important.”; “moving around a lot” going from foster home to foster home, and school to school. The lack of consistency in both home and school affected his education as each school had its own standards and curriculum taught. His lack of having an educationally supportive home environment provided no academic efficacy or social capital regarding education from which to draw conveyed an attitude of college wasn't for them, and it isn't “gonna be for me either.”

For the other student interviewed (Kristina) who spent a significant amount of time (from ages 9-17) in foster care, her educational experience was also unsatisfying even as the student poignantly recalled as she spent much of her younger days “in foster care and living in shelters and I was homeless, so I spent a lot of time in ... I didn't really go to school.” The effect on that student's preparation for college in the environment described as being taught basic skills such as balancing a checkbook, basic addition and subtraction. “They don't prepare you to exit the system. They prepare you to work but they don't prepare you to go to college. Nobody talks to you about college.”

Another student (Sherika) reported having been a good student in high school but didn't receive the preparation for college she needed due to a tense family situation with her mother, a single mother. The student needed to “set the path” for her younger siblings, and then, at 17, her “my mother was diagnosed with a mental medical disorder. A multiple personality disorder” The

disorder demonstrated that her mother could not be fully available emotionally for her family, and the student remembers her senior year in high school being “very busy and arguing a lot” but the student was unable to receive the mentoring and advising that she sorely needed; this lack contributed to a lack of college preparedness, which in turn led to sense of drift and to dropping out of college for a time.

Another student (Jack) spoke feelingly about the significant struggles he endured with his mother and stepfather, and how those struggles and the dysfunctional relationship, the lack of parental support he received at home affected him and his education at a particularly vulnerable and uncertain time in his life. The problems at home, a stepfather, “a manipulative alcoholic” who “beat my mother and molested my sister” coupled with a lack of educational support in high school, contributed to his dropping out of high school, and returning to education at the age of 32.

**Academic preparation.** Eighteen of the 22 students interviewed for this study reported feeling unprepared to complete college, due to believing they were academically unprepared from their previous educational experiences, including acquired student work habits.

The students interviewed for this study acknowledged a general understanding that college would be “somehow” different from high school, although they were not always certain how that difference would manifest itself, they were certain that they could not be successful in college without some changes to past practices. Often, it felt as if the students interviewed were haunted by memories of high school, knowing they needed to change, but fearful that they would be unable to change. For them, an expressed fear was that the outcomes of college would be no different than the outcomes from high school. For Emily the fear of college being like high

school meant “I start and I don't do well, so I stop. That was my biggest fear. High school was hard for me. I didn't have interest in what was being taught, and so I didn't follow everything.”

Johanna was unsure what to expect in college, she knew that it would be different than high school but felt confident that “if I did the work, I could graduate from college.” Yet, the ghosts of high school haunted her. She knew that she could perform at the level she had performed in high school if she wanted to be successful, “just coming from high school and not probably having the best attendance and then coming to college and thinking how was that gonna play out in college.”

While she didn't know what to expect, she did know that she couldn't be as she was in high school where “you really need to do your work, turn things in by the due date.” She believed that in college the teachers would not be as lenient with due dates as they were in high school, so she would have to “expect more of myself and just change that aspect of myself instead of being more nonchalant about work. I have to be more on top of my work.”

This lack of academic preparedness, even with the understanding or belief that things would be different, and that her own personal habits as a student needed to change as well, had a negative effect on her own personal academic efficacy, which also affected her belief in her ability to complete college, “coming into college I wouldn't say that I didn't feel confident that I couldn't do that. I would say that I knew it was gonna be a struggle.”

Her first year in college revealed that she did struggle in the transition from high school to college, particularly in “my grades and probably attendance. I didn't fail all my classes in my first year, but I didn't do as good as I could have.” Fortunately, she was able to make necessary

changes in subsequent semesters, as she now knows that to “expect of myself, and you could probably see that reflected in my work.”

Monique reported her first three years of high school were “rough.” In her own words, this was because she “was a mess.” A review of her transcripts showed “a lot of F’s.” In her senior year, she moved, left the negative influences of friends behind and became a more focused student. These struggles, even with the newly discovered focus as a student, “made me nervous applying for college.” Katalina echoed the previous thoughts when she said, “I felt when I came to community college, we were behind on the level. I was not prepared to that level that we entered here. I felt behind.”

Anjelica spoke with emotion about the effect her academic struggles in school had stating that she was not a good student starting in elementary and moving through high school, and how that affected her academic efficacy. “I’m going to get emotional, I really, for a long time thought I wasn’t smart, because I struggled so much and I always felt behind.”

**Significant personal issues.** Sometimes this lack of academic preparation is caused as has been shown by family issues relating to instability, sometimes, as has been shown, this lack of preparedness is caused by individual choices made by the student, such as not focusing on academics in exchange for focusing on other pursuits, be it athletics, social, or as student’s have said, “not being a good student.” Sometimes this lack of academic preparation is caused by significant personal issues in the student’s life. Ten of the 22 students interviewed identified significant personal issues occurring in their teen years, specifically during high school, a time best described by one student as being “rough and tumble on identity” which led to either early departure from high school, or at the least, it caused a meaningful distraction away from

academic concepts and outcomes, leading, in the words of one student, “feeling behind” upon entering college.

Three of the students identified struggling with depression during their formative teen years. Anxiety and depression in the case of one student, led her to first miss large amounts of class time, which in turn caused her to fail four classes. The impact of these experiences caused her to seriously doubt her abilities as a student, and it was in her abilities as a student that she had always found a sense of purpose, a sense of identity, thus, these failures had consequences extending beyond the classroom, “my worth and my value was in being a good student, and so I’m doing poorly in these classes and so I’m really not that great of a student, I guess, so why even try.”

Another student struggled with a different type of identity during his 10th grade year that affected his academic performance and preparation. This identity was not pertaining to his status as a student, indeed he was “actually an exceptional performer in school throughout elementary and middle school. I was an honor roll student.” The aspect of his identity with which he wrestled, was his sexual identity. At the same time, as he was starting to understand and deal with who he was, his “social life and family life got complicated very quickly, and I failed 10th grade.” During these struggles, home was not supportive, nor did he find the support he wanted from his school, “I ran away from home, and I just gave up on the academic institution. I felt like it was not nurturing to me.”

Nor did he find much support or understanding from his community, where racism, stereotypes, and political division along social issues, negative headlines regarding homosexuality dominated the nightly news, inflaming opinion in his community,



in my area, I was, to my knowledge, one of two homosexuals out of the entire school. So I saw the world through a different lens than the rest of my peers, and I found it really difficult to find a safe space where I felt I could come into my own without fear of bullying, without fear of personal bias or belief being impressed upon me by students or by educators, or by administrative staff. I just did not feel like it was a welcoming environment. Hearing about Matthew Shepherd, and the AIDS crisis ... And I just thought, "Oh wow, my life is doomed. My life is absolutely doomed." And everyone hated gays, and there were beatings ... It was a very rough time for me to come to terms with who I was.

Another student (Anjelica) identified living "like a 1,000 lives over the preceding ten years, when she became a methamphetamine addict beginning when she was 16. In the initial stages of her addiction she reported the drug enabled her to have the focus to do her homework, and that her handwriting even improved, that was only "a very short period of time." Eventually, it took over her life, feeling as if she needed "to do this every day and I don't care if I go to school. I don't care if I see my family."

Only later, over a decade later was she able to "stare that demon in the face" and got clean and sober was she able to gain clarity of mind and maturity. It was then that she realized that she "could do anything and like this (going to college) was my next big hurdle, kind of like growing up, you know, I'm like, no, I am smart."

A significant personal issue affecting college retention and success is not having a familiarity or fluency with the dominant language spoken. For English as a Second Language (ESL) students, the academics are hard, the social interactions are hard, and adjusting to life in a

foreign country is hard. Any of which affects success on a college campus and in a college classroom, often leaving the students with a deep sense of loneliness.

Yulia is a young woman from a former province of Russia. Farsi is the language of her family, but she grew up speaking Russian. She was “lost” on her first day, a day she “will never forget.” Her palms were “sweating” as she sat in the classroom and she kept thinking, “when this class is going to end.” For her, the whole experience was “quite scary, scary in a way not because I didn't understand, but because I was afraid to feel different, and alone. I certainly was afraid to talk with anyone.”

Hang, also an ESL student explained the difficulties, beyond social challenges incurred by a second language learner. Reading textbooks and other materials, taking notes, common occurrences in college classes are really hard for her, because “I don't understand a lot of words.” The process to gain comprehension of the materials she is studying is no less difficult. It involves interpreting every word, and then connecting those words to a sentence, and take notes like that.

One of the more poignant examples of how personal issues, tragedies can affect your preparation to enter college was related by a 31-year-old Iraqi mother of four, who, the day before this interview was conducted became a United States citizen. Somewhat off topic, she was asked what it felt like to no longer be a citizen of a county that was home to her for her lifetime, and home to her family for thousands of years. Her reply caught the researcher completely off guard:

I will explain my answer, and then I will answer directly, but I will explain before. In my country, I love my country honestly, because this is the country that I born. The things that I faced, also the terrorists. I start two years, and then college over there. Three car bomb was in the college that I was. In Iraq. Literally, there is one car bomb here. All the students start to go the other way, one car bomb here. When they start to go to the middle-

It didn't matter which way they went. They dead. I saw that. I saw all the bloody body parts in front of my eyes. Still now, even if I close my eyes, I will remember that, which made me give up from going to school. I wasn't ... I did try too many times, but as soon as ... I don't wanted to start crying, because. Because I lost a friend over there, which is like, I did even asked her just to wait for me for five minutes, and we will go together. She say, "No, I have to leave," and she left forever. All this tragedy Yes. I really miss her. (So) Obviously, (becoming a citizen of another country) it's not that hard.

**Poor preparation in high school.** Thirteen of the 22 students interviewed reported feeling academically unprepared to graduate college due to the level of academic preparation they received in high school. Said Kristina, in state foster care throughout high school of the education she received, "the state doesn't prepare you to ... They don't prepare you to exit the system. They prepare you to work but they don't prepare you to go to college. Nobody talks to you about college."

Katalina echoed these experiences, her thoughts are even more noteworthy because her experiences occurred not in a state-run foster care system, but in a more traditional high school.

These experiences, believing the standards were lower left her feeling “unprepared when we entered here.”

Several students reported being “passed along,” being “socially promoted” even though they knew there were certain academic tasks they were unable to successfully or consistently perform specifically in math. For Emily, her struggles academically began before high school, in middle school, during 7th grade, “I didn't do my schoolwork because I didn't understand it. (By high school) I had pretty much given up already.” Kristina felt especially “frustrated” not being able to perform college level math functions. The consequence of her lack of preparedness was to take “the lowest math class three times” to successfully complete it.

Academic unpreparedness at least to two students extends beyond the realm of math into science and even having a comfort level or confidence in college-level writing. Student #1 discovered her lack of academic preparation in science while taking a college biology class, a class the student was failing. The student believed the cause of their struggling in college biology was not being properly prepared in high school. “I didn't know what mitosis was, for example. I didn't know nothing of that class, and I just felt like I'm just going to give up.”

This student's struggles due to her lack of academic preparedness is made more profound, when it is learned that her career path (Physician's Assistant) is a STEM heavy degree pathway, and not just a career pathway for this student, but it is “my calling.” The potential loss of her “calling” left her feeling unmotivated because “I was letting myself down” because “I don't know my biology stuff.”

Sometimes the lack of academic preparation is not caused by a lack of instruction, or by social or other distractions (drugs, home life, etc.) Sometimes the lack of academic preparation is caused due to negative interactions with instructors. What may be nothing more complicated than a personality clash between a student and an instructor may, and as Nicole reported can have longer lasting consequences.

“I was a 15 year old kid last time I was in school. I have memories of instructors that got in the way of (my) success.” This experience was “the first time I ever had a teacher wanting to belittle me,” who treated “me like I was annoying” and generally so unsatisfying that the teacher was “100% responsible” for her decision to drop out of high school. In this student’s high school experience, she felt as though she had at least one important teacher who was simply “doing their job” nothing more, and that job didn’t include wanting to see students succeed. The attitude she seemed to receive from this important high school teacher was that they didn’t particularly want to be in that school, or even doing what they were doing as a profession.

Reflecting on the experience in that high school English class, its impact on her, and how she saw education nearly thirty years later, the student said, as a result of feeling humiliated by this teacher, “He took my enjoyment of being a good student away from me. He taught me that if I wanted to have friends and be popular in school, I needed to not be as smart.”

**Late entry to college.** Academic unpreparedness can and does also take the form of returning to college many years after high school graduation. Nine of the 22 identified lack of preparation to graduate college was affected by their late entry (or return) to college. Some students, especially those for whom school has been hard, or some who are uncertain about a degree or career path, take a “gap year.” In the case of several of the students interviewed for this

study, a so-called “gap year” extended beyond the implied year. For many of these students, the additional year or years are important to find themselves through the world of work, or to develop confidence in themselves through work skills acquired prior to college entry or re-entry. As Monique explained their intention was to take “one to two years because I just wanted to rest.” This gap of one to two years extended to five years, because “I needed five years to figure out my life.”

The most common emotion associated however with this facet of college unpreparedness is fear. As Monique remarked, “It’s scary in a lot of ways.” This fear can come from the discovery that academic skills are rusty at best or lost (more frequently) and must be recovered.

I didn't know what all went into writing a good academic paper or an academic paper, period, and I was terrified. I had ideas of what a classroom would be like but I really didn't know what it was going to be, how much I would have to participate, what I would have to do. It was just all a really big unknown to me (Kim)

Late entry or re-entry to college created fear from the realization that the college experience may require more time and skills even beyond those strictly confined to writing papers and solving mathematical equations as Nicole explained, “you don't understand how to manage your time.” While that can be taught, “you don't feel prepared, you don't know what is coming your way. Navigating the system is a challenge.” This navigation includes not knowing what supports are in place, such as choosing an advisor, the right classes to take, books, help with financial aid, and even help with tutoring. “You don't know that until you're here. but those things you can't know until you're in the middle of it, or until somebody guides you. I think I wasn't prepared to graduate, because I didn't know what I was doing.”

A student is a multi-faceted personage: their duties, responsibilities extend beyond the campus; indeed, a full-time student (12 credits) spends when considering class time and homework, slightly more than 20% of their weekly lives performing student-related functions. Anjelica commented her desire that college personnel remember that there is more to her life than just being a student; indeed, “this (being a student) is extra.” For countless high-risk community college students, returning to college is extra for those who are also balancing the demands of work, parenting (often single parenting), being a family member, friend, responsibilities implied from being in a relationship. Even with an initial excitement of starting school, and the promise that academic achievement offers, there is also a fear, as expressed by Marisabel, of fitting college in with the rest of a full life, “I didn't think about how work, and my social life, and school, and all that was gonna go.”

Monique also felt intimidated of the unknown, of what was coming in terms of workload, and balancing the additional responsibilities with existing responsibilities, for instance, “I knew I was still gonna keep working. I was still gonna have a job, maintain my house, and so on,” because “you can not forget what you have already on your back.”

For other high-risk community college students, late entering or returning community college creates another type of fear, this, a social fear from high-risk community college students: the fear of being an older (non-traditional) student in a room full of younger students. Nicole explained although she thought of herself as a “self-confident person,” her fear of being in a class with younger students, some twenty or twenty-five years younger than she, the fear of being judged by those younger students caused her to experience “a lot of nervousness,” leading

her to feel as if she didn't belong. Even just attending class on the first day represented a "step into the unknown."

Kim entered college at the age of 58. Prior to entering college, she married, raised a family, and worked in the travel industry, owning a small travel agency. All her real-world experience and success did not prepare her for her first day case of nerves ("I was terrified to sit in the classroom with all young students"), nerves severe enough, one of her adult daughters volunteered to come to the campus and help her get acclimated (and calm) and "show me where the classrooms are." The first day nonetheless didn't go as smoothly as had been hoped as the student got on the wrong train, and then "walked into what I thought was my very first classroom. It turns out somehow I messed up the schedule and I never went to the first class."

For Monique, as a student entering college as a non-traditional student, the entire process, from financial aid to registering for classes, even navigating the parking and finding the correct classrooms and buildings on a large campus was a brand new, everything. I had to learn it as I go; there's no formula. You have to figure it out as you go." Anjelica similarly felt overwhelmed by the process, entering college over a decade after graduating high school, for her it was a matter of taking "baby steps for sure in starting. I graduated high school in 2004, so I came back to (college) in 2015. I didn't know where to start first."

The fear of being intimidated by the process of registration for a returning or late entering student may be more profound for immigrant students, those for whom English is a second language. The process of registering, applying for financial aid is "foreign" to them as student Feleg recounts, "the system is completely different than we have in my country (Iraq)."



The fear of the unknown extends beyond the initial registration process, parking and finding your building and your classroom, to the fear of what will happen once inside the classroom, as Kim explains, “I didn't know what all went into writing a good academic paper or an academic paper, period, and I was terrified. It was just all a really big unknown to me.”

Some of the fear dissipates as a returning student enters into a community college classroom, and there discovers, as did Nicole, a community college is generally “diverse in age, and socioeconomic status, and ethnic backgrounds, religious backgrounds.” Often, returning students are buoyed up by the “different areas of support the school offers,” strengthening a feeling of being “more prepared.”

Many, as Lisa, have an older sibling, or Kim leaned on her adult children to help them figure out the process, or revive academic skills, or the realization came from within that “I can figure this out,” as dormant academic skills return; hazy concepts taught long ago are remembered. In many cases though, a feeling expressed by Anjelica, those initial days and weeks of a semester, until the efficacy returns leave you feeling “a little bit small and alone walking into a school and not knowing anybody.”

**Uncertain career / degree path.** Often, a reason for unpreparedness given by high-risk community college students was an uncertainty or an unawareness of “how long it was going to take.” For eight of the twenty-two students interviewed, the length of time to earn a degree was affected by not having a clear idea of their career path, and thus, by extension, not having a clear degree pathway.

For Johanna, her journey into higher education began in 2008 at a liberal arts college in Arkansas. She readily confesses at that time, and for some time thereafter, she had no clear idea of what she wanted to do, or what she wanted to be. As a result of no clear pathway, and by her own admission, being “young and stubborn,” she changed majors 9 times. On one occasion she decided to be a photography major, but, “I hate taking pictures. I don't own a camera.” Three years later, while taking a break from college, she discovered her passion, and, after a few additional issues has resumed her journey through college.

Sometimes the process of determining a career pathway, and college major is a process of elimination. Trying possibilities to find the right fit, was “very beneficial.” Josh initially wanted to be an engineer. “I was like, "Oh yeah, that sounds great. Sounds fantastic." Then I tried the math class and was like, "This isn't for me." The process of finding the right fit for him took “two or three semesters,” until finally, “I was like, ‘Okay, yeah, college is good for me. I think I know where I'm going now.’”

**First generation student.** An additional factor contributing to high-risk community college students feeling unprepared to graduate college is attributed to their status as first generation college students. All the students interviewed for this study were identified as first generation college students. This status was chosen specifically by the researcher as the lead identifier in selecting the study participants as this identifier cuts across all other identifiers (race, ethnicity, gender, Pell eligible) that have been shown to be factors negatively affecting persistence in the literature.

A first-generation college student is defined as a student neither of whose parents graduated from either a community college or from a four-year college or university. While all

the students interviewed were first generation college students, several of the faculty and staff interviewed as being influential in the student's desire to stay in college identified themselves as first generation college students. Amongst three of the students interviewed, their parents did not complete grade school. All but one of the students interviewed indicated no resistance by their parents or family members to the student being in college.

Mentor Leah indicated that to them, it is important for faculty and staff to realize the previous "experiences being in school, their experience in the past with school." Particularly what they know as opposed to someone who comes from a family where all have gone to college. Families with an expectation of college have an approach to learning, an understanding of what to do in the classroom. Understanding what it means to study, to be organized, your understanding of success. This and more is passed on through "your parents had they gone through college, and the expectations." None of this in the opinion of Mentor Leah is innate: "someone has got to teach you. A lot of these kids (first generation college students) never get taught."

Monique indicated she has had no one providing encouragement or support for her college journey, "I had nobody in the back saying, 'Yes, you're gonna do it. Yes, you're gonna do it.'" Whatever support or motivation for her success in college had to come from her, and her alone. When asked by the researcher why wasn't her family more supportive of her decision, her response was succinct: "I cannot answer for them. I don't know. I'm sorry." Kim indicated not a lack of resistance to her attending college due to her parents not having attended, but because in their culture, women did not attend college or get educated beyond public education.

Lisa poignantly stated she is her own support system in college, and that being her sole support system is very difficult, “I felt like I have no guidance. I have no guidance at home. I’m pretty much my only support system right now.”

All but student Monique indicated their parents and family members demonstrated support in one way or the other by their parents, generally taking the form of verbal support, one indicated that her parents were providing her financial support so that she could stay in school and focus on her studies. The students who did discuss their status as first generation college students were always positive in their discussion of their parents. If there was a negative association from the student’s point of view, the negative related to either the student having lower college or career goals or lacking a parent or someone within their close circle of friends who could explain, or otherwise help them navigate the coursework or processes (financial aid, etc.) leaving the student to “figure it out for themselves.”

The idea of preparing for college was difficult for Lisa. On the eve of her graduation from high school, “I didn’t know where to start looking into colleges or what were, let’s say, the degrees that was offered. I didn’t know none of that.” The reason for her lack of understanding or knowledge about college, degrees offered, etc., was a simple explanation: “because in my household, we didn’t discuss anything about that. I had to find that on my own.”

Mentor Melinda, mentioned by students as having been influential in their decision to stay in college explained the challenges by first generation students and its impact on college persistence in this way, “In my experience, a lot of them are first generation, so when it comes to help. . . Their support systems around them are either not supportive or toxic or don’t know how to help.

One student (Isabella) uses as her college support system, in the absence of knowledgeable parents and family, her “smoker buddies” who she says are “more supportive and social and talkative than my actual ... other people around me.” This support group is formed due to a common habit (smoking) but stays together because they share other commonalities “a lot of them come from where I've come from.”

Beyond even a shared background or similar life experiences, these students come together and provide support one to another because of the shared experience of attending college at this time of their lives balancing due dates, assignments and instructor expectations along with families and work.

The common thread through these stories and lived experiences is the need of connection and support from another human being that understands what the student is experiencing so that they can encourage student perseverance. Monique stated that type of support or feedback is important to receive, if for no other reason than that with more feedback, you “get pushed a little more.” Yulia came to this country alone at the age of 16, and so she “always looked for support even for someone who says, ‘You can do it.’ Something like that was very important to me.” Katalina as many first-generation students, didn't know anyone who went to college “‘cause no one in my family went to college. And I didn't really have any older friends.” In place of a support system, she used the map that was part of her student planner and came to the campus before classes started and “walked around, looked for those classrooms,” and then utilized staff at the help desk asking “where's this, how do you do this, who do I contact for this, and a lot of finding it out for myself because I didn't know who else to ask.”

Beyond the unfamiliarity of college life, assignments, professor expectations, or even the inability to provide tangible support or encouragement, for first generation students, college may seem impossible, even out of reach. Lisa has been surprised at her success thus far in college, viewing it as a “great accomplishment” for “herself and for her family.” This is because to her, “coming from a low-income family, and as a minority” “college was impossible for me as being the first student going to college and finishing high school. It's been an extraordinary agenda in my life of being in college and almost graduating.”

Absent support, guidance, experience and encouragement, the journey through college can be longer and more difficult for first generation students. As several students expressed throughout this study in one form or another, “while my parents are supportive and encourage me, I can't go to them and ask them how to write a thesis statement.”

For Yulia, the experience to and through college has been no less difficult than that of many first-generation college students. In her case, there is an added complexity not shared by the other participants in this study: she not only started college alone, but she began high school alone. She came to this country “from a completely different continent, different country” by herself as well at the age of 16. Even though for her the journey has been difficult, she readily acknowledges “my parents never had the opportunity what I have today unfortunately, they never had a chance to attend college.”

Her desire to come to this county at such a young age was to do something her parents had not done, to have something they did not have, an education, and opportunities, that she “left home at the age of 16, looking for opportunities, looking for things that was never done in the family, looking for change.” As a young girl from a Muslim country, “if I give up here in the

middle of the way (getting an education), I don't think I will forgive myself down the road, because I have something that no one in my entire family has, and they're all looking to me.”

The motivation she has to not let her family down, stemming from her awareness that “they’re all looking at me” extends to her townspeople, and to family members yet unborn: “show to my children that, ‘I did it. You can do it too,’ and not only be a good example from where I came from, because not only my family at this point, a lot of other people in my town look for that.”

One may think that it is because of the self-imposed pressure of serving as a role model, of not being in a position to give up that “I don't get to share with family what happens here ever, except the good things. I never tell them anything. They're far away.” The results of her reluctance to share her struggles with her parents so far away include having had days “in my first few years where I put the phone on mute. I covered it with my clothes, and I cried it, and I was still laughing. I made a conversation.” She relates these feelings not “to make someone feel bad, because I truly hate being felt sorry.” Nonetheless “I went through a very hard way actually” making her success in high school and her subsequent success in college at once unlikely and remarkable. The reasons for her reticence to tell her parents of her hurt, her struggles are far more complicated and involve the circumstances surrounding her entry into America.

Ten years ago, at the age of 16, she and her company of six other high school aged Russian students arrived in New York. The fee paid by their parents was dependent on how long the students stayed. Yulia’s parents paid \$15,000 for 10 months which included a place to stay (“my sleep place”), food, and education, and her return ticket.

When this group of seven teenagers arrived in New York, “nobody knew where we're going. In fact, they didn't even know what people we spoke with. Not knowing language, we were lost there. What happened, somehow, they found the school.” Thinking the worst was behind them now, when the company finally arrived in Denver, the student found herself in a one-bedroom apartment with “eight other girls.”

The living quarters offered by the company was not the only thing that was not as advertised. The education provided was not as promised either. The school only provided ESL classes, therefore “I wasn't able to complete the education I came for.” Compounding the problems, the school then informed the group that they never received the money that was transferred through another organization. “It was a long sad story.” \$15,000 is a lot of money where I come from, because minimum monthly salary is \$200. You can imagine how much my parents saved up for that.”

Alone, filled with regret because she convinced her parents to do this, “you have no place to go. You cannot go back, because you let down your family for that much money.” She started college late because she went through a long process of becoming a resident and applying for college and getting her GED. “The only other person knows about how hard it was is my husband. We got married only in November, so this is something I have never shared with anyone. Up to today, my parents don't know anything.”

Nineteen of the 22 students indicated some feeling of unpreparedness to complete college when they began college. The degree of unpreparedness was found in the various responses ranging from, “not prepared. Zero amount prepared” (Nicole) to “I don't think I felt prepared to



graduate college at all because it took a lot of coaxing on my own part really to even attempt to attend college” (Kim).

The reasons for these feelings of unpreparedness to graduate college prior to even entering college are many and varied. The reasons include being uncertain of their career pathway, academic unpreparedness, family instability, unfamiliarity with college requirements due to late entry or re-entry, being a first-generation student. In spite of these factors, or perhaps because of these factors, one clear message that came through in the interviews is the abiding conviction that college is necessary for them, necessary for the lives they want. Josh indicated that to decide to go back to school he needed “a kick” that took the form of something “really simple” so that he could “do something to myself to become a better person to be able to move forward in my life.” For him, college was the next step as it was for Anjelica who experienced similar feelings. “I just was tired of feeling like I was never going to excel in my career, so I was like, this is the next step. I have to further my education.”

One student (Lisa) saw college as a necessity in today’s society and as a means of furthering her voice or influence in the world: “Had to attend college. That’s all I knew, and that was my goal, you’re educated.” Because to this student, “Nowadays, you need that instrument. You need that sword (a degree) pretty much to battle out there.”

Two students (Emily and Katalina) saw college as important for more personal reasons relating to their families, Emily for her parents, and Katalina for her children:

(Emily) Ever since I was little, I knew I wanted to do something with my life. I’ve seen my parents struggle growing up. They work at restaurants. They never finished their high

school education in their home countries. They came here to America and just started working, working, working, and it's been that way ever since.

(Katalina) I have kids, and I don't want them to think, "My mom dropped out, so I can, too." I want them to be successful. I've personally felt how hard it is to work and get jobs when you don't have the high school diploma or GED, no education. You don't go anywhere. I don't want my kids to think, "I don't have to because she didn't."

**Theme Two:** The desire to quit college by high-risk community college students is one that occurs often in a semester and is motivated by the various causes of collegiate unpreparedness identified in theme one.

Theme two expands on the effect of mentoring on high-risk community college students by explaining the need for a mentor as addressed in research foci 1. This theme explains the frequent desire of high-risk community college students to quit college throughout semesters and points out many of the causes for this desire to quit. These causes speak to the need of mentors that can and do act as guides and role models, teachers and sponsors of less experienced mentees. Theme two identifies through sub-themes, the desire to quit college stemming from many of the forms of unpreparedness discussed in theme one. This theme directly addresses the need for a mentor as explored in research foci 1. Some of the causes for this frequent desire to quit college relate to a lack of academic efficacy, either through an unfamiliarity with college, or feeling overwhelmed due to the workload of a semester, or lack of confidence in the student's ability to complete the requested assignments. This lack of efficacy is addressed in the sub-questions contained within research foci 1.

Twenty of the 22 high-risk community college students interviewed reported having a desire to quit either a given course, or college altogether often throughout a given semester, five indicated that feeling occurred in multiple semesters for them. Lexus put it this way: “All the time, honestly, all the time.” Two students said that for them the desire to quit for them was “last Friday” (before the interview for this study; one reported that feeling of wanting to quit had occurred the previous Monday, and one additional student (Anjelica) indicated it had been multiple times over the previous week, “Yeah. It was definitely in the parking lot before I came up here (for the interview). It was last night. It was last Friday.”

One student (Kim) indicated she had not experienced the feeling of wanting to quit college said this, “I’ve exceeded beyond my wildest dreams like I just never expected to have done that well. . . but never once did I think I would not continue.” Later in the interview she did say she felt she wanted to quit college not during a semester; that feeling came, and it only happened once, on the first day of college when she felt intimidated by being surrounded as an older student by “a bunch of 20-yearolds.”

For many other students though, the desire to quit is frequent and current. The root of the desire to quit seems to be a sense of being overwhelmed for a variety of reasons. Regardless of the reasons, this sense of feeling overwhelmed is pervasive and is what drives the desire to quit college. One student (Monique) answered this way, “I think it was last week” explaining the pressure because of the semester ending and feeling the rush of due dates and finals may be responsible for the most current desire to quit.

Katalina put it more succinctly: for the high-risk community college student, “I feel that every semester has its own struggles.” Because of those many and varied struggles brought by

any semester, Feleg said about wanting to quit college, “to be honest, (that desire to quit comes) every single semester.”

Over the course of the interviews, several recurring sub-themes for the desire to quit college or a specific class emerged. Many of the causes of college unpreparedness that emerged in theme one re-emerged to serve as cause belli of wanting to leave college in theme two. The sub-themes are: (1) academic unpreparedness evidenced by becoming overwhelmed by the workload in a semester; (2) Family or personal issues evidenced through relationship struggles, illness or death of a close family member; (3) Uncertain degree or career path; and (4) poor interactions with faculty fueling a desire to drop a specific class.

**Academic unpreparedness.** While we have seen in theme one, eighteen of the twenty-two high-risk students interviewed reported feeling academically unprepared to graduate college prior to entering college, five reported that feeling academically unprepared for college led them to consider quitting college altogether.

Academic unpreparedness leading to a desire to quit college altogether for Lisa manifested itself in the form of having not been instructed in high school foundational science preparatory to courses they would be taking in college, and the resultant struggles and feeling lost led them to feeling as if “I just couldn’t handle it.” Towards the end of the semester, the student found themselves failing the course primarily because “in high school, going back to it, I didn't get any learning from biology. . . . I didn't know anything like the lifecycle of a cell.”

Academic unpreparedness may mean an unfamiliarity to perform the academic tasks required in college classes, for example, performing the types of tasks required in math classes,

or the composition of papers, whether they be research papers or other types of written submissions. Academic unpreparedness may also take the form of lacking certain out of class skills such as time management or the organization needed to be able to complete the academic requirements in a class. In this case, ability to perform the tasks is present, but the ability to organize or manage one's time is the ability lacking. "There is a lot of ... You guys tend to give us a lot of work, right, before the finals" is the way Monique describes her feelings of being overwhelmed.

David indicates he has had a few times when he has had four papers due around the same time, and he has felt "I could be at work making money right now instead of spending money." Monique asserts that it is the normal work due near the end of a semester, with the added stress of studying for multiple finals that makes it "a little overwhelming," adding, that students may not realize "the big picture" understanding that enrolling in four classes means ultimately preparing for four final exams among other assignments throughout the semester.

**Illness / family issues.** As has been shown in the first theme, family issues, including illnesses of either a family member, or of the student themselves can contribute to feeling unprepared to graduate college prior to entry. By the same token, these same types of issues can contribute to a desire by the student to quit college. As Hang succinctly stated, "sometimes it's because of family issues too."

In her case, the family issue was the illness of her grandmother, who was "really, really sick" and as a result, the student, distracted by concerns for her grandmother, "didn't pay attention when I go to class." While the student received support from friends and classmates,

when her grandmother was put “in hospice, and when I heard that I was so sad and was cried, cried, and I couldn't even stop like all day now.”

Maria's biggest supporter was her grandmother. Her grandmother saw tremendous potential in her granddaughter, which she felt the granddaughter was wasting by not being in school. Granddaughter heeded the advice of her grandmother and responded to her constant encouragement: it was my first semester back, I did really well, I was really excited about it, I was really happy, and my grandma was always the one that was cheering me on, so she was like, ‘You know, you always belonged in school, you should quit your job and you should just be a full-time student and you can figure it out.’

When her grandmother died suddenly at the end of the spring semester, right before the start of the summer semester, her loss was felt most profoundly by her granddaughter. The summer semester was extremely difficult for her: "This is my first semester without my grandma cheering me on," so her school work suffered, missing assignments, her motivation was sapped and she wanted to quit feeling “overwhelmed with dealing with grief and then dealing with all of my assignments and whatever.”

Anjelica did not have illness of a family member to deal with, it was her own illness that nearly derailed her semester, leading her to a desire to quit college. She tends to believe that her illnesses occurring at the beginning of the semester may be “just like an accumulative of my personal life and just everything has been exhausting this semester.” For her, balancing a job, family and school may have been too much for her immune system: “It's all a blur. It is. I wake up and I'm just running the whole day until I hit the bed. I work full-time.”

Mentor Connie who serves as an advisor explains the challenges of community college students that come to her for advice and guidance, a “student who actually was staying right underneath this bridge over here, he was homeless. if there were any connections that I can give him to help find him affordable housing.” Beyond homelessness, “we have students who escaped abusive relationships or abusive homes, students who fell into hard times, they had an addiction problem with alcohol, drugs.” The one consistent direction this mentor /advisor gives to her students is this: “make sure you take care of your personal life because if your life out there is a mess how do you think it's going to be in the classroom?”

While illnesses either personal or illnesses involving a family member can overwhelm high-risk community college students, illnesses may be of a more temporary nature. It appears the day-to-day grind of balancing work and school and family is unrelenting and causes high-risk students to feel overwhelmed and consider quitting college. Nicole said for her “it is not about school. School isn't the hard part.” For her, the choice she is confronted with frequently during a semester is “whether you're going to drop a class, because it's easy in that moment, or whether you're going to say, ‘Well, there's only three weeks left, so at the end of that they'll be a break, at least from school.’ But like I said, school's not the hard part.” She then shared the struggles in her personal life, what is for her “the hardest part,” and how it impacts her student life. At this point in the semester, she was three weeks from the end of this semester, and she “would really like to drop two classes right now. Because I'm overwhelmed right now. There's a lot of things that are due. It's time, and none of them are school.”

As has been said, “every semester has its own struggles,” to Feleg, while seeing those struggles as “small things” because “life is challenging everywhere,” coming here from a foreign country (Iraq) “completely different life, different. I am here by myself with my husband” and

her two small children. Part of the challenges of her semester include meeting those challenges without the constant close support of family that can “take care or help me with my kids. It's really difficult to have all these responsibilities together with the school, because school is really stress time for me.”

Lexus struggled not with school, but with her confidence due to an initial semester consumed with financial worries led her to fail the classes attempted. “Because of what had previously happened. I had failed those classes and I was like I can't fail these now.” Her lost confidence caused “so much anxiety to the point whereby the end of the semester, for about three semesters, three or four semesters, I would be curled up in a ball, shaking and crying. That's how bad my anxiety got.”

The inability of Anjelica to adequately deal with the challenges of a new, difficult work schedule led her to withdraw from all her classes. The new job schedule had her working overnights, which meant that when she should have been sleeping, she was needed to care and be present for her child. “I wasn't getting any sleep, so I withdrew from all my classes. That was really frustrating.” A subsequent change in positions provided better hours for her, and a return to college.

Josh similarly found the challenge of achieving a proper balance between life, work and school nearly impossible. The challenge of working 40-60 hours weekly, plus the demands of taking 15 credits created a situation where she was “caught up on four of my classes” but in the fifth class, “I was constantly missing assignments. I was constantly turning in just like rushed pieces of crap basically.” Struggling in one class, being constantly behind in one class had a sort of ripple effect on the other four classes as to catch up in one class meant being late on an



assignment for another class. "So, I'm trying to do like one assignment a day. I'll do that assignment and then I'll turn to like my math class. I'd look at the stuff there and be like, "I don't have time to do this today." So an assignment in one class would get pushed off, and then another. Then he would do the work quickly, not having the requisite time to double check his work, so my other grades and my other classes were definitely faltering and it was upsetting." Ultimately, he decided to "cut ways with that class and I figured that it would help my stress level and help me get back on top of the other four classes."

Isabella's desire to quit college was "last week. I had three essays due and I had two due on the same day. I'm a big procrastinator, but I still get my work done." Balancing her family demands, work and school nearly proved to be too much, and quitting even momentarily seemed the right thing to do. "Yeah. So that's why I'm like, 'Okay, maybe this is too much.'"

A semester of working overnight, raising children as a single mother left Kristina feeling "mentally, physically exhausted." For her "It's a new experience, falling behind in classes. I'm usually turning assignments in first." On top of those struggles she also has depression and sometimes has been unable to finish her courses. "I just couldn't focus. I had done poorly on an exam and I just freaked out and said, I just can't do this. I'm just gunna drop out."

Alfonso has considered quitting college "multiple times" because for him, school, no matter the grade level has been "very challenging." An inability to focus on teacher instruction "goes back to elementary school" and his academic problems were harmed even further by a 2015 accident that produced a traumatic brain injury. The effects of the TBI included "minor memory losses," and "some speech impairment" and in addition to physical therapy, he had to

take cognitive therapy. Going forward, he was “always worried that I was going to forget something inside that class. So, then my anxiety for exams in any sort would be very high.”

Sometimes the desire to quit college stems from nothing more fundamental than being physically and emotionally worn out coupled with being envious of friends or family members who aren't wrestling with classes, and due dates, and yet, seemingly are doing better financially or socially as several students noted, "I have so much to do. I have no free time, at all. I was losing sleep" (Marisabel). Lexus compared their life as a student with the lives of friends “starting these relationships and having kids and doing all that stuff” and concluded “I guess that just looks like more fun to me.”

While this next comment was uttered by Marisabel to her sister, it could have easily been uttered by any of the high-risk community college students struggling under the weight of a semester full of needs and demands, balancing work, family and school, multiple assignments, competing due dates, simultaneously feeling overwhelmed and underprepared: "Is this even worth it?"

The desire to quit college comes frequently every semester in the cases of the high-risk community college students in this study. The causes of this desire to quit college and its frequency stem from the student's sense of being overwhelmed at various times throughout any given semester. Academic unpreparedness, negative interactions with faculty occasionally are found to contribute to feeling overwhelmed. The causes more often identified by the students are outside pressures, family issues (including family member illnesses), work and life balance. This key finding corresponds with the observations from all the faculty and staff mentors interviewed for this study as being influential in a student's desire to persist.

When asked why community college students fail to complete, all 26 faculty and staff mentors indicated a one-word answer: "Life." Providing some elaboration on this faculty / staff member Patrice succinctly opined: "they drop out because they didn't find somebody to help them manage all of the things that they needed to manage in order to be successful."

**Theme Three:** Mentoring of a transactional nature by more than one faculty or staff mentor when these vulnerable students were ready to quit is responsible for their decision to stay in college. Lisa and Isabella explained the importance to them of having someone care about them and their success:

(Lisa) It was a good time, because that's when I needed the most. It made me not want to leave college because of one certain teacher or the course that I did not understand, or how that teacher played the course.

(Isabella) So I'm like, "Well, I don't think I need to finish." And I was gonna stop school, but then I'm like ... I was talking to my professors and they're like, "No, you're almost ... you're close. You can do it." I'm like, "Okay." I was close. Very, very close to letting that class go and just continue the other ones, but that class was not working out.

A faculty mentor (Patrice) observed that based on her experience, and in her opinion, the reason community college students quit college and don't persist, and thus, why having a mentor is so critical to them is that "they drop out because they didn't find somebody to help them manage all of the things that they need to manage in order to be successful."

Theme three builds upon the need for a mentor by explaining the various functions performed by mentors and explains specific effects of mentoring on high-risk community college

students. Mentors can and do act as guides and role models, teachers and sponsors of less experienced mentees. Faculty and staff mentors are shown in theme three to guide students through the logistics of college generally, or the tasks or outcomes of their specific courses. They do this through coaching and providing encouragement, thus building up the student's self-efficacy, and serving as a valuable source of support. Faculty and staff mentors are shown in theme three to serve as a source of support as they act as role models and sponsors of students in modeling specific professional behaviors, or by sponsoring students into other areas of academia, or as an entrée to other faculty or staff personnel. These functions of mentoring are addressed in the sub-questions in research foci 1.

Perhaps in recognition of this need to have someone help them manage all the things occurring in their lives, 21 of the 22 students interviewed indicated that in those tough moments when, at some point in their college career they considered quitting there were multiple faculty and staff members that were influential in the student's desire to stay in college. The one student who indicated never having a desire to quit college was still able to name a faculty or staff member considered influential by them in their college experience.

Of note in this finding is that none of the 21 students who considered quitting college could only name one influential faculty member, all named several faculty and staff they considered influential in their decision to stay in college and persist. David stated, "all of my teachers here have definitely influenced me to stay around because they are so open and they were so willing to help." One student (Jack) may have summed up the feelings of the larger group when asked was there someone, faculty or staff that was influential in your desire to stay in college, he said in almost reverential tone, "there have been many."

It is noteworthy to re-emphasize that influential members of a college community --- those who contribute to the persistence of high-risk community college students --- serve in a variety of positions. In the current study there were 20 instructors and 6 advisors identified by the students. Of those instructors identified, 16 were in a full-time position, and significantly, 4 (20%) were part-time faculty members.

The mentoring taking place as identified by students between faculty and staff and high-risk community college students occurs in informal and formal settings. Interactions occur in the faculty or staff member's office, before or after class, walking around the campus, and even occasionally, while waiting for public transportation. The mentoring performed by the faculty or staff member falls into four general categories: (1) Specific, individualized assistance (content or skills-related) to help a student pass a course; (2) Providing support and encouragement through feedback, or in interactions assisting the student to develop academic efficacy; (3) Specific, individualized assistance to help a student successfully navigate through certain logistical needs of college such as financial aid, degree pathways, etc.; (4) The providing of career or real-life guidance, or role modeling for the student.

**Specific, individualized assistance (content or skills-related) to help a student pass a course.** Specific, individualized assistance (content or skills-related) to help a student pass a course was a function of faculty or staff mentoring utilized by 10 of the 22 students interviewed. A common trait exhibited by these faculty and staff mentors and impactful to the students was a willingness to teach, to be helpful, "It was just by the way he was with the students. He always had his whiteboard and his markers and his periodic tables. He was ready. It just made me feel

like he had the motivation to teach others” (Lisa). Emily put it this way, “He’ll help you understand.”

Being observant to the needs of students and their comprehension of the material was another trait of successful mentors in providing specific, individualized assistance: “he would see the students that maybe we’re struggling and encourage them to participate more, to rewrite a paper” (Kim). Alfonso appreciated that the instructor’s effort to identify individual struggles understanding the material which would form the basis of the next day’s math instruction, “so that everybody gets it.”

The manner of instructor in providing the needed assistance was crucial to the student’s ability to ask for, and receive the assistance offered. The demeanor is authentic, genuine, and it shows. “You can tell by the way that they’re open when they’re sitting, they’re not sitting with their arms crossed, they’re sitting open. You can tell by their tone of voice.” Maria likened this type of relationship experience to crossing a bridge from one side to the other, “they kind of reach across the bridge to just help me across it. Like, “Let’s get it over together.”

To the student, the effective or successful instructor / mentor’s manner conveys a sense of not wanting “to see me do it alone, if I’m having trouble.” Kristina explains why the instructor’s manner or demeanor is so important. “When somebody treats you as an equal, I guess. I think it encourages you a little bit.”

Besides creating a comfortable environment, to Alfonso, taking that one-on-one time to talk about concepts the student was struggling with also created “a lot of trust in her.” Trust in

the mentor / instructor was born from the belief that the mentor “cared about her students and most importantly it felt like she cared about me and my education.”

From the point of view of high-risk community college students, this willingness to provide individualized assistance, to be helpful, to be observant of every individual student, seeing them and treating them as individuals, evidenced by the mannerisms of the instructor / mentor pays dividends for the student in some obvious ways, and in other, not so obvious ways.

To Alfonso this function of mentoring produces understanding, and with comprehension, confidence in their ability to perform academic tasks, “I actually understand it now. Now I exactly know what I'm doing.” Encouraging students to do better, builds academic efficacy as described by Lisa “when that happens, you want to do better.” Maria asserts “when they’re genuinely interested in what you have to say,

It enforces ... for me, it shows that I'm on the right line of thinking, it just gives me that confidence that yes, I had the ... kind of the wrong answer or wrong concept, but they were using my words, so I guess it wasn't that wrong. It just makes me feel better about being wrong.

The need for a mentor / instructor to re-enforce of knowledge, to validate the student as an individual, to be led, guided, “across a bridge” together casts some light into the mindset of high-risk community college students. There is a fear of asking “too many” questions: “Even now even though if you're in college I'm sure plenty of people still feel like, ‘Oh, I don't wanna ask about this again in class.’”

Of note is the reaction of one high-risk community college student to a bad grade, and the effect it has in their participation, and even in their membership in the class as described by Kristina, a feeling akin to shame or embarrassment, a feeling of being like “a puppy with your tail between your legs,” that produces behaviors not consistent with academic success: sitting in the back of the class, avoidance of the instructor, “you pack your bags up and go because you're so ashamed of getting a bad exam score.” It is during those moments of shame and embarrassment, when a mentor steps in and is reassuring “that's certainly helpful. I guess that's just really appreciated, when someone can kind of help inspire you.” The impact of this type of mentoring, reaches beyond the inspirational. It ranges beyond “feeling better about being wrong.”

Providing support and encouragement through feedback, or through interactions assisting the student to develop academic efficacy is a function of mentoring and is connected to research foci 1b. Sixteen of the 22 high-risk community college students spoke about the importance and power of receiving feedback in assisting them in developing academic efficacy. Kim finds value in feedback that provides an acknowledgement of “doing well in the class or just someone letting you know you did a good job and appreciating your hard work.”

David underscored the importance of “those little things that give you the boost. I mean they're more important than I thought they would be so that's for sure.” The “boost” that comes from encouraging feedback in the words of Kristina is found in first “setting aside time” to listen. The reassurance that followed “inspires me to stay in a class and want to finish my education.” Johanna also sees the value in the listening part of the encouraging interaction, “It gives you some more confidence.” The confidence in this case comes from the act of listening, “Okay,



obviously someone was listening, so someone must care a little bit about me.” Conversely, to Kristina, feedback that is not encouraging in nature has the opposite effect on them, “‘Maybe I should just drop, or I just don't know if I can do this.’ It kind of makes you not feel as good about yourself.”

Encouraging feedback is essential to provide guidance needed to improve academic performance. Encouraging feedback consequently it assists in the development of academic efficacy. Further, encouraging feedback assists in persistence. It also serves as a “boost” during a long and trying semester when given by a mentor who understood the complete situation of the student. Emily talked about the mentor who understands her situation, provided necessary encouragement and in the process, “blew her away” because in this student’s educational experience, “I never had a teacher or anybody in any kind of school tell me I'm doing a good job. To hear I'm doing a good job was like, wow, blew me away. It made me feel great.”

A well-timed word of encouragement from a trusted mentor can make all the difference in someone’s life. This was especially true in the case of Maria who was dealing with the grief caused by the death of her grandmother. The student recalls two separate occasions that were especially impactful for her to receive encouraging feedback that ultimately kept the student in college, when the student’s instructor said, "You are such a great student to have in class, you have passion and you're gonna go far in this profession." This statement was particularly impactful because the specific subject is the student’s career choice, “it really felt validating and then (another teacher) told me, on one of my papers, she was like, "Yeah, you are grad-school material." These statements inspired the student to continue to press on, to “use my grief as a sort of propeller to kind of work through school.”

Mentor Tina shared an experience with a student that told her “he was a terrible writer and then, his parents thought he was a failure, and that even his parents said, "Why are you going to school? You've got a good job as a bagger at the grocery store.” The student’s parents told the student directly, “I was too dumb to go to school.” While, according to his mentor, the student’s grammar wasn’t very good, and it looked like as if there may be a learning disability as some words were twisted around. “I remember one of the papers he wrote was he had been in a football game in high school and it was cold and he was writing about that they were walking out on the field and the mud felt like crushed up Fudgesicles under their feet” the effect of this line was electric on the mentor, “you can't say this is a terrible writer. I can teach grammar, I can't that, I can't teach imagination. I can't teach, "Hey, you should write it feels like Fudgesicles," I can't teach them that.” With his ability and her encouragement, by the end of the semester, “he was on fire. He wanted to go on and get a degree so he could teach English.”

Summarizing the importance of encouraging feedback by mentors on high-risk community college students in developing academic efficacy, David said, “I wouldn't have been able to do it if I didn't have any of my teachers telling me, ‘Hey, great job.’” Mentor Tracee maintains “it only takes one person to believe in them.” The first semester Mentor Tracee taught, she encountered in one of her students, a “total smart-ass.” She pulled him out of a class and told the student that “you've got the head for law. You can really do something with this and he went, you think so miss? He put his hand on his heart. You think so miss?” Her belief in him was followed by some stern direction made acceptable by her belief and encouragement in the student “I'm going to need you to quit goofing in the back of the class. I want you front and center. We can get you to law school.” Today, twenty years later, that student is now an attorney, and is the president of “the California civil rights lawyers guild. They help poor people

and immigrants.”

**Specific individualized assistance helps high-risk students.** Seven of the 22 students interviewed identified using their mentors to help them navigate what one mentor (Liza) called, “this crazy convoluted system,” the logistical needs of college such as financial aid or degree pathways. A system that to one mentor requires a student to have a “degree in the process of going to college, just to get through college.”

Time and money are the commodities of a student’s life (“Financial stuff always stresses people out” Lisa). Both are to be guarded, and to be used effectively and efficiently. Often for high-risk community college students an unfamiliarity with the various systems and processes within higher education puts both of those valuable commodities at peril as explained by Lisa that their mentor “was pretty much my support system that I didn't have at home.” Not that the student’s parents were unsupportive; due to being a first-generation college student, their parents were unable to be supportive in “in the educational way, because my parents don't know, because they just went to grade school, probably until 3rd grade.”

To several of the mentors who are in student advising, the process begins with asking the right questions, and helping the student define their purpose, goals and motivations for a college education. “What is your process? What do you want in college? Where do you see yourself in the future?” are some of the questions asked by (Merilee) a mentor for Lisa. In addition to those questions, Mentor Lyle is really “in why it is you are in college. It is his belief that “more often than not, a lot of students don't know why they're in college.” For Mentor Breanna, part of their role is to help the student see and understand the other facets of their life and how these could be

impacted by the requirements of a college class “I’m real with him, I say, ‘I know you’re going to have a social life. I know you got your family and where does school fit it?”

These successful mentors employ an individualized, personal touch, they “talk with you,” they “get to know you.” They spend the needed time to find out “what you need help with or anything” (Emily). “From the first day when I stepped into the campus, the day she handed me her number and her email” (Yulia). They carefully examine the student’s transcripts “what credits I did have and what did I not have” (Lisa), In the case of Emily, her mentor discovered a four-credit field biology class she had taken over the previous summer “didn’t count towards her transcript.” The advisor / mentor went “above and beyond” to find a way for those credits to be applied, and “to make that class not pointless.” These extra efforts meant a great deal to the student, without those credits, “it would’ve been a whole another class I had to take had that not- More money, more time. It would’ve made me really consider it (quitting).”

Alfonso recounted an example of one of his mentors taking “an extra step” to call the transferring institution to find out “what exact classes they accept and don’t accept.” He further reports that his mentor was “great at giving me resources.” Similarly, Emily experienced a mentor that was “good about finding out what you need and referring you those resources like tutoring.” Lisa explains the feeling having a knowledgeable mentor brings when you feel that you were being “steered in the right direction” having an answer to every question, and if not, “she would get the answer and actually get back to me.”

Other mentors, as in the case of the mentor for Lisa allayed fears about finances, helping them navigate the financial side of college, looking into financial aid, scholarships, and many other resources, causing “so much of my anxiety” to leave. This extra step of care and concern

gave the student hope that “money wasn't going to be the issue”; as a high-risk community college student, money deeply concerned Lisa “because I didn't know FAFSA was going to cover four years of college, right? I did not know that.”

For other high-risk community college students, mentors aid by explaining additional concepts important to understand in the college experience, as Yulia, an international student explains, her mentor taught her “how GPA ... I did not know what's the GPA and how it works, because it's different grading rubric where I come from” and helping them apply for financial aid, helping them to receive scholarship, and, importantly helping this struggling student find housing. “She has been amazing, and after today, when I call her (even after two years), she recognizes me by my voice.”

Mentoring in this way, breaking down the “informational barrier” is a critical piece of needed assistance for high-risk community college students to Mentor Liza because these students are “already dealing with the imposter syndrome. They already feel like they're not supposed to be here.” These institutional barriers only serve to confirm the belief in the student’s mind that college is not for them, that they don’t belong, that college is not for them. To this mentor, these barriers interfere (“that’s not why they’re here”) with the central job of the student, “they're here, in my mind, to learn history, to learn political science, to learn that stuff. That efficacy will come with time.”

On the other hand, experiences such as these that break down institutional or systemic barriers taught Alfonso “she actually cared about where I was going” and to Yulia these types of experiences showed them “how closely they pay attention to every student.” According to Mentor Liza, this type of messaging, that students are closely noticed and assisted, that college

personnel “actually care about where I was going” is vital to retaining that student. “I think that when you're unsure of where you're at, or why you're doing something, if you don't have a way to have a safe place to get information, you might lose that person.” Mentor Liza posits in addition to “imposter syndrome,” high-risk community college students suffer from “confirmation bias” a belief that they don't belong in college in the first place, and so they look for evidence to support or confirm that belief. So, if financial aid experiences a glitch, or a class is closed due low enrollment, or there are seemingly too many administrative hurdles to surmount, the student says, well, I wasn't supposed to be here anyway. “You're lucky if you get another chance.”

**The providing of career guidance through role modeling.** Eight of the 22 students interviewed for this study identified seeing their mentor as a role model that provided career or life guidance. Interestingly, several mentors see themselves as role models for high-risk community college students, in some ways serving as a model of success to a specific demographic, gender, ethnicity, etc. Mentor Lena acknowledges this responsibility, “Because you are, whether you realize it or not, you are a representative to them of what success looks like.” Mentor Carla explains role modeling is a natural and necessary outgrowth of being a mentor, and why this role modeling is so important. This type of role modeling resonates for students for whom “maybe there's nobody who's professional.” To this mentor (Carla), it is life changing when you walk in a class and you see “this (person who looks like you) in front of your classroom” and the person who looks like you is not in a service industry or a minimum-wage job, rather, they have “on a tie and a nice shirt. Boom. Your ideas and your possibilities for yourself have now just exploded.”

As identified by the high-risk community college students interviewed as part of this study, most mentors combine functioning as a role model, through providing career or academic advice. The students participating in this study that were more deeply involved in vocational or career pathways, such as Human Services, Criminal Justice or the Paralegal programs saw their mentors performing a function that can best be called career role modeling. Mentors “have helped me with my professional development” (Sherika). Psychology major Isabella affirms that it is because of the example and influence of their mentor “that’s why I like psychology,” and that “I wish I could be more like (them).” Human Services major, Maria describes how Mentor Bree encourages students to be “open” and “feel your emotions,” observing that in social work, “you can’t help others if you can’t help yourself, so you gotta work through your issues before you can even think of being a counselor.” Another Human services major, Marisabel points out in human services one of the “big things” is self-advocacy. Put another way, “make things happen for yourself.” This career attribute is “one of the biggest thing that I’ve taken from (my mentor) is that of helping yourself.”

Criminal Justice major, Monique, sees in their mentor, an “inspiration” that opened their mind to becoming a police officer, “When I see him teaching, when I saw his office, it was just an inspiration for me that maybe one day I can become that, too.” Paralegal student Josh identifies one of the strengths of the department is the desire to see students be successful in the legal profession. When the student received an opportunity for an internship, the mentor offered “send them to me first, so I can proof them.” Or the mentor keeps the instruction relevant, “So, in contract law, she would pull an example from a company that was merging or something and use that example of like, “How do you think that they would draft this?”

Josh and Nicole both in the paralegal program, describe their mentors as constantly looking for opportunities to build or enhance the student's resume within the legal profession. Josh states the involvement of their mentor "with the student population is just amazing." Nicole describes their mentor making introductions for them, taking them to a Women's Bar Association holiday party, and introducing them to different judges, all willing to share advice with the student, as they utilized their mentor's social capital. This exposure led to a job for the student with the Women's Bar Association. The investment by the mentor to the student created in the student a sense of indebtedness and a desire to not "make her look bad. I think that when somebody believes in you, you want to show them that that's not misplaced." Speaking about a mentor used for career role modeling, Maria summarizes it this way, "(my mentor) really wants us to be as best as we can be in this profession."

Several mentors also identified having had influential mentors at key points throughout their lives. These earlier impactful mentors fulfilled many of the same roles for today's mentors, as they fulfill those roles for today's high-risk community college students. Mentor Cao, a math professor recalls, "I was not a good student at all. I hate math." Having emigrated to the United States forty years ago, as part of the wave of "boat people" following the Vietnam War, Mentor Cao found himself in a strange land, with a strange language, attending a community college, "with a whole lot of Vietnamese refugees" in the same math class (ironically, the same community college that employs him as a math professor today).

The mid-term frustrated these foreign-born students because "we don't understand the term, none of us understand what we have to do" so they left the class and went to the cafeteria to have a cup of coffee" thinking their professor would forget about them. "He didn't." He came down to the cafeteria looking for each of the students and invited them back to his office. He went



through the exam with each of them and explained the various terms, and what he needed them to be able to do.

The effect of the instructor's decision to not let go of these students was profoundly felt on future Mentor Cao, "I know that someone who care for me, who want me to graduate and get a job." The caring of that instructor gave the student motivation to continue on in the class, thinking "at least he care so you don't want to disappoint him (the instructor). Mentor Cao credits his earlier mentor with his own subsequent academic and professional successes indicating he wouldn't be where he is today had that mentor not cared for him forty years ago, stating simply, "(Having that relationship) It make everything work better."

The theme of a mentor refusing to let go, and a feeling of not wanting to let the mentor down occurs during several critical times throughout future Mentor Connie's academic and personal life. As a senior in high school, future Mentor Connie had high goals: attending a prestigious out of state university, and then on to medical school. Supporting her in these goals and dreams was a high school guidance counselor. Then, the student discovered at the beginning of her senior year in high school, she was pregnant. "As soon as I found out I was pregnant I threw that application in the trash and I said, "There goes my future. I'm done. It shut my world down. I thought my life was going to be over. I was just like, I was scared. I cried."

During a tearful meeting with the guidance counselor, the student was reassured, "It may be over for Berkeley," she was like, "It doesn't mean that you can't go to college." I said, "Well what other options do I have?" The counselor first provided encouragement, "you're a bright girl," next understanding, "I do understand now your life has changed, but there's a lot of hope." Finally, the counselor provided information concerning much needed resources such as childcare assistance, food stamps, "there's everything to help you get on your feet." While the student was

still understandable skeptical about her future, nonetheless, “I felt that I couldn't let her down either.” Reflecting on that experience, and the motivation it inspired, our future credits the compassion of the guidance counselor, and believing in her at a time when the student was unable to believe in herself that was responsible for “helping me persist towards my goals.”

**Theme Four:** The best mentors possess a combination of interpersonal traits. The most frequently mentioned valued faculty / staff mentor characteristics are (a) authenticity; (b) compassion; (c) sense of humor; (d) accessibility / approachability; (e) a sincere desire to see students succeed.

Individual relationships are built and nurtured through the conscious creation of a welcoming classroom and/or office environment which is an extension of the interpersonal qualities and characteristics of the faculty and staff mentors. Thus far, this study has shown that high-risk community college students enter college unprepared to graduate college for a variety of reasons. Because of feeling underprepared and overwhelmed, this study has also shown that high-risk community college students frequently consider leaving either a specific course, or quitting college altogether unless they find someone, a mentor who can and does help them navigate the course or the logistics of college. These specific mentoring functions in turn help high-risk community college students develop confidence, academic efficacy, while providing needed support systems that help them persist.

The fourth theme of this study, rather than focusing on the mechanics of mentoring, or the academic and social needs for faculty and staff mentors, focuses on what makes the relationship between the mentor and the student work. This theme focuses on the interpersonal skills, characteristics, or relational traits of these influential mentors as seen by both the faculty and

staff mentors and the high-risk community students who named them. The findings in this theme directly connects to research foci 2 which addresses the question of what interpersonal characteristics do influential faculty and staff mentors possess according to the students affected by these interactions.

The influential faculty and staff mentors themselves were similarly interviewed and asked about their effectiveness with high-risk community college students. This directly connects to research foci 3 which asks if the influential faculty and staff mentors saw in themselves the attributes described by the students in research foci 2. All faculty and staff mentors interviewed were pleased, but surprised that they had a positive impact on the lives of their students. Many expressed wonder and evidenced bewilderment when asked to describe what they did in their work with their students, expressing as Mentor Kathleen or Mentor Reese did, “I have no idea, and I hope your study will tell me.”

As mentoring is essentially a relationship, the interpersonal traits or attributes most often identified by the students in describing their influential mentors, and faculty and staff mentors when describing themselves are those traits or attributes found in other healthy, productive relationships. Authenticity, accessible or approachable, compassion, friendly, helpful, and possessing a sense of humor.

**Authenticity.** Twenty of the 22 students interviewed for this study noted authenticity as a trait or attribute possessed by their influential mentors. This “authentic self” is conveyed to students through the appropriate sharing of personal stories or experiences. Kim recounted witnessing this trait by her influential mentor on the first day of class, when the professor “told an amazing story of how she got to be where she was on that day and she was wonderful.” From

this sharing of personal stories, the student was “filled with so much hope and confidence that I just remember being there, thinking if she could do that, I could do that.” As a result of that authenticity, the student affirms, “I just knew that she was going to do everything to make sure I succeeded.” Twenty-three of the 26 faculty and staff mentors described themselves as authentic, and saw the value of being authentic in their interactions with their students. Mentor Merilee explains the underlying reasons she tells “her story” to her classes, a story that includes dropping out of high school, living in a trailer park, and becoming a welder before finally becoming a lawyer, “they see themselves in me.”

In addition to sharing personal stories, for Mentor Rick, being authentic means admitting that he does not know everything, which to him is a way of modeling to students, “you don't have to know everything” either. He firmly believes “students can smell a phony right away.” Whereas, “if I come in as my authentic self, they recognize that very quickly too.” He believes this authenticity reduces barriers that could exist in the classroom between professor and student, and the students know “I'm someone they can approach. I've had more students than I could ever possibly count share with me their struggles, share with me traumas.” By being his authentic self, by taking on the role of “lead student” he intentionally rejects a position on any type of pedestal, “I have no interest in being on a pedestal. I want to be on their level.”

By getting “on their level,” Maria suggests there are other benefits for student success and retention as well, “It lowers the fear factor. Here, it makes them more human.” Katalina feels encouraged when professors share their own stories, their own struggles, “how she uses her own personal stories from home, kind of encourages me, 'cause I'm like, Oh I'm not the only one going through that.”

**Accessible or approachable.** Twenty of the 22 students identified accessibility or approachability as a characteristic or trait demonstrated by their influential mentors. As has been commented on previously, the previous trait, being authentic assists in conveying an attitude of approachability or accessibility, as it is one way to “break down barriers” between faculty or staff and student. Kristina provides what to them accessibility and approachability means as demonstrated by their influential mentor, “anytime you have a question, he's there. And he's definitely been very helpful.”

Maria emphasized how important it is for the faculty or staff member to invite repeatedly, to come and talk to them. Monique commented about the necessity for the faculty or staff member to initiate the contact, “they approach us, even before we want to talk to them.” Not only come to office hours, but to take advantage of multiple ways to contact the instructor or staff member should the need arise. “Email me, here's my phone number if you need, if there's an emergency, text me, talk to me before class, talk to me after class. If there's not a good time, get together with me and we'll make an appointment, and I'll come in and we'll see you.”

Twenty-three of the 26 faculty and staff mentors interviewed for this study described themselves as being approachable or accessible and recognized the importance of this trait in themselves and in their interactions with high-risk community college students. The importance of the faculty or staff member repeatedly inviting, initiating the contact is important, because some instructors make the invitation, but Maria admits, “you could hear in their voice that they don't really want you to go to their office hours.” Monique watches and waits, watching to see “their behavior and how they talk to students. Then I ask my questions. If not, I figure it out on my own.” Kristina explains that often the reticence of a struggling student has that prevents them from seeking out the professor stems from a feeling of “shame or guilt, like you didn't do

something right. Or you feel a need to explain ... You feel the need to explain why you got the bad grade.” Maria suggests it stems from being “too afraid to look dumb.”

Successful and influential mentors, whether they are faculty or staff members recognize the need of creating a welcoming atmosphere if approachability is to be believed and acted upon. Mentor Merilee utilizes Google in helping to create the right atmosphere. She looks at her class roster prior to the first days of class, and using Google, learn how to pronounce those hard to pronounce names. By taking the extra time to do this, “I know their names and I'm not slaughtering their names before I even get to know them, because that already puts them feeling awkward.” This step carries the added benefit of allowing the faculty member to call on the student by name and draws them (the students) into the class and makes them more invested.” This is important, she reasons, because “they don't want to be lost in the crowd. They want to be recognized.”

Mentor Ryan starts the process of being approachable and accessible on the first day of class, when “I shake every student's hand, and I introduce myself” and welcome them to the class. To him “that's approachability, and I'm breaking the fourth wall already. I'm not sage on the stage. I'm breaking that wall immediately. I am breaking the classroom environment already.” Mentor Reese sees creating the right tone and atmosphere on the first day is important, as he sends the message “I want students to internalize that they belong here.” The way that he weaves approachability and accessible into a sense that students belong in this community of scholars is to start every class with a genuine, warm, and enthusiastic welcome.

For Monique little things like eye contact, or the lack thereof, can become evidence that approachability and accessibility are words with no meaning. “When I had to ask a question, it was just a simple question, and he never turned around to acknowledge me. He never looked at

me.” To Lisa, a simple thing, a smile conveyed approachability, and more importantly the welcoming and consistent smile the instructor had, evidence of their approachability, “made me feel motivated for college.” But for Monique, lack of eye contact, lack of acknowledging the individual student meant, “I’m not gonna ask any more questions.” “Body language says a lot,” according to Kristina. Turning their back to you and writing on the board while you are asking a question, or “you’re concerned about your exam or something, and they’re like looking down their phone, or their watch and they’re just not paying attention, it makes you feel like you’re not important enough.” On the other hand, “when they look at you in the eye, they’re just approachable and they treat you with respect, that’s definitely an inspiration.”

It all comes down in Katalina’s opinion with the way the instructor presents themselves. If they show up early for class, talk to the students before the class begins, offer to help those struggling, “I’m here to help you if you need it,” On the other hand, there are the teachers who show up and give off the attitude of “Okay, let’s get this over with,” and then pack up their stuff and leave.” The message they send to the students is one of “I need to come teach this class, but I don’t really care if you succeed or if you fail in my class.” To Katalina, courses taught by instructors like that are “more of a survival course.” An attitude such as that has a ripple effect on the students, because when you see “that their teacher doesn’t care, so they’re like, oh, I shouldn’t care, either,” because “your motivation kind of mirrors based on your instructor sometimes.”

Mentor Cao does not come in late and leave early. This mentor always walks in to class earlier and he walks around and talks to each student. Not about math or anything that they will do that class time, but “just talk about the weather, the hair that they have, the hat that they wear, things like that.” Hopefully, he believes from those conversations, “you see a little bit of what’s

going on with that person that day. Usually they will open up for you and it's a wonderful thing for you to do, well for me to do. Because I hate to come in and just A plus B is equal to C and then go home.”

Isabella identifies the fruit of faculty and staff mentors being that aware, that attuned to their students as evidenced by being approachable or accessible and demonstrating those attributes by the environment within the classroom, an environment that values and gives respect to the students. The mentor can recognize when something's not quite right with a student. The mentor is genuinely paying attention, and not just playing a role. The mentor relates to and with the student, and the effect of what is “it made me feel safe in that environment. . . . I feel like I'm home and I don't feel uncomfortable or ... that's why I think I like school. 'Cause it can feel like another home for me.”

**Compassion or empathy.** Twenty of the 22 students interviewed identified this trait or attribute as one demonstrated by their influential faculty or staff mentors. Johanna explains it this way, “with empathy, it is a sense of connection. Empathy is that genuine connection you feel with anyone,” empathy is rare these days, Nicole suggests, because “it isn't people's default.” Sherika comments their faculty and staff mentors are all “really gentle with life circumstances, but that was mostly it was that they really cared about their students.” Mentor Jessica explains compassion or empathy through the lens of the counseling tradition. To them, compassion or empathy means, “having unconditional positive regard for everyone.”

All 26 faculty and staff mentors interviewed in this study described themselves as being compassionate in their interactions with their students. Understanding by faculty and staff that there is more to a student's life than just assignments and homework is key for Mentor Melinda and Maria. Mentor Melinda's goal is to make a connection, to get to know the students. “They're



more than just a number. They're a person, period. A person first.” When that type of understanding or empathy is evidenced, Maria feels “they understand me, so I feel like I have this support here that I can be successful.” Anjelica concurs, adding that community college students are not like typical, traditional university students, “right out of high school, this is all we do.” Typical community college students have a myriad of other responsibilities, “we are working, we are parents, we are adding this.”

Developing this sense of empathy, for Mentor Kathleen means understanding that students are “human beings with complicated lives.” Mentor Cao sees himself as being in a partnership with students, they are “companions” in a journey to acquire knowledge. Along the way in this partnership, this journey, other things that are attached to them “other obligations, families, friendship, emotion, all of that plays in that.” Mentor Cao sees his role as trying “somehow help them so that, that part of the job is easier for them and for me.” Understanding the struggles community college students face, demonstrating empathy for those situations, when they arise, those “other obligations” and “somehow helping” reduces the size of the obstacles in a student’s life, “so, that the learning can come more easily.”

Mentor Liza builds a relationship with them. “I really care about them as people. If they have a need, to me, it doesn't matter what the need is. I want to help solve the need.” Mentor Ryan begins each semester with the same goals in mind, and asks himself what conditions “do you want to set for the whole semester to make your class as welcoming as possible?” To him, that welcoming environment that speaks to empathy and compassion shows itself in the syllabus, and even in the classroom persona he exhibits. Mentor Kathleen conveys the same message verbally, and in the class syllabus from the first day of class, throughout the semester, “that I care about their lives, I care about them as people, I want to know them as people, and that I care

about their grade.” Mentor Liza takes as a cardinal belief in her interactions with students feeling as if they were truly cared for, that people on the campus cared about their success that “will impact their life.”

Showing empathy or compassion for students means for Mentor Abdullah “you either care for people or you don’t,” and starts with an awareness that all eleven of his students have at least one full-time job. Given their very real time commitments, and the math deficiencies the students possessed, this mentor came to a stark realization, “I know they're going to all fail if they just act if I'm a teacher and I stick with my job description. If I stick by my job description, they're going to all fail this Calculus class.” His solution after conferring with the students was to meet outside of class on Sundays (“the one day nobody works”). This mentor believes showing students you are there to help them and you are willing to stay late and come in early, they realize and feel as if “they're in good hands.”

Mentor Kathleen reaches out to the students throughout the semester, especially when the mentor sees concerns about student’s grade. But in the approach to the students, this mentor shows empathy and compassion, using a standard, generic email, which is a way to be sure the right message is being conveyed. This mentor does not send an email that contains a message of failure that could be received by the student as “Hey, you're screwing up,” message, which may also convey the sense that the teacher has all but given up on the students, but, “Hey, there's a way forward for this. What I say is, “I'd like to talk to you about some strategies for success in the class.” Mentor Cao sees his role as facilitating learning and providing needed support when life’s situations occur. “I give them slack. They still have to perform then. But we understand so that we can provide the support needed so that the learning will happen.”

“I'm constantly inspired by how much my students manage and still get to class and still

turn in their work,” says Mentor Reese, who provides a tangible example of “providing some slack” when life’s situations occur, in this case, a severe health problem “beyond her control” affecting a student’s attendance, a “very fascinating human being, really strong personality.”

Based on course policy and everything, the student would have failed for lack of attendance. There is one big paper and a final exam as the big outstanding things in the grade book, the student made an appointment to meet with the instructor, despite being in “agonizing pain,” asking what options remained for them and indicated they did not want to withdraw from the course. In the estimation of the Mentor Reese, “the desire, the will, the determination was absolutely there.”

“I didn't run it by anybody 'cause I didn't want anybody to tell me no. I'll ask forgiveness instead of permission.” The instructor converted the rest of the curriculum to online stuff that the student could do remotely. To this mentor, showing compassion to the student, and on the situation meant showing “a little bit of individualized instruction” meeting people where they are, and doing all within his power to not “put an additional hurdle, or a hoop, or bureaucratic nonsense to get in the way of her success.”

Forming relationships, providing consistent, frequent messaging that conveys the attitude of I care about you, and “providing some slack” that meets the student where they are when life’s situations get in the way are tangible ways of demonstrating compassion or empathy. To Mentor Bree these attributes are so important to remedy the seen barriers of retention, but also the unseen barriers to retention, the “layers of trauma they take everywhere.” These layers of trauma reveal themselves in a variety of ways, “they probably get easily distracted. Their ability to stay focused.” Triggers could and do get “easily” activated by other students, “by stories they hear, by things on campus, by a teacher looking like somebody that maybe might have harmed them. Or

reaction maybe from a teacher without even knowing that they're doing it.” These layers of trauma are “barriers to retention.” The solution to this Human Services instructor is having a compassionate “teacher or teachers taking just one more minute with them. One more minute is huge for some of these students.” Caring about these students provides them “a safe place for them to come. It calms down some of that noise going on inside. The noise from the trauma.” The noise from trauma includes such messages as "I'm never going to make it, nobody understands me. I've always heard these negative messages." Spending one more minute with them, says I care about you, “It's huge. it says to them I care about you, I see you. I see that you are a person here. Someone listening, paying attention to them, caring about them.” Mentor Marta sums it up thusly, “There's no substitute for the human touch, is there?”

**Sense of humor.** Seventeen of the 22 students interviewed for this study identified sense of humor as an important trait or attribute possessed by their influential mentors. Interestingly, only 9 of the 26 mentors interviewed for this study saw in themselves the same quality. Sense of humor, as the other personality traits identified earlier is directly related to the first characteristic identified: authenticity. Meaning, this trait as all the other relational traits listed cannot be faked or forced, and as both faculty and staff mentors, and the students themselves have stated, anything faked, or phony is suspected, detected, and the mentor’s effectiveness is damaged. As Jack affirmed, “our antennas are on high alert. We're receiving everything that's coming to us, because that's what we came here for. So we pick up on every little thing.”

For many students, humor demonstrates a sort of friendliness, to Monique “when a person jokes, it makes me feel more relaxed, comfortable.” Many students, such as Monique see humor as a door opener that makes faculty and staff “more human.” A sense of humor

appropriately applied shows, “a soft spot. That's how I see it.” Mentor Maritza agrees, using humor to show a “lighter side.” Some classes according to this mentor, appreciate it more than others. The benefit to breaking the ice in the classroom with a “chuckle” is “then they feel more comfortable and they ask more questions.”

Describing a relational trait that drew Jack to this mentor, it was humor, and especially the fact that this mentor was able to make fun of himself, “which is a trait that I share with him.” Mentor Leah suggests the trait of humor, particularly of the self-deprecating kind is a way to “really connect” with people, demonstrating that “you don’t know everything.” Mentor Rick think this is even more important, because in their experience, for many students, community college is a place “they ended up, not a destination” almost as if the student has done something wrong to end up in a community college. So Mentor Rick tries to break that stigma by “quasi-jokingly say is, "It's my intention to model failure for you all." Not all of my jokes are gonna hit. Some of my lessons are going to be abject failures.” His counsel to potential faculty and staff mentors is simple and to the point, “be yourself. Be humorous if you can. Make it relevant.” Mentor Leah explained it this way, “I make it fun. Fun is my pedagogy. It's humans. Humans like to have fun.”

**A sincere desire to see students succeed.** Sixteen of the twenty-two students interviewed for this study identified this relational attribute as an important trait possessed by their faculty or staff mentors. Indeed, it seems as if this trait is the catalyst for the other traits mentioned in this study. All 26 of the identified faculty and staff mentors mentioned this desire to see students succeed as being central to their mission in the community college. Maria identified this trait, commenting, “their core is that they want their students to succeed.”

Students in this study noted the passion, the joy in what they do that each influential faculty

and staff mentor brings to their job. “I remember thinking, you could tell he loved what he was doing. It just showed in everything he did” (Kim). “They feel like what they're doing makes a difference” said another student. Jack suggests a spirit of selflessness, of genuinely wanting to see students succeed, “it exudes from them. It radiates from them.”

Nicole asked an interesting question, “I question why a professor would choose a community college, instead of a four-year university?” Within this relational trait lies the answer to this question. Mentor Melinda said working in community colleges, with the student population served, “It is a calling.” Mentor Tracee agrees that the work in which community college faculty and staff are engaged in is a calling, and expands, we unwittingly stand *en loco parentis* whether we like it or not.” To this mentor, it is the world of the classroom that matters, it is the world “for which my soul will be judged.” Mentor Merilee sees their role as being larger than that of a faculty member. It is to be “a mentor and as an advisor, in addition to being a subject matter expert.” For Mentor Lena this work is essential to understanding them: “my life’s passion is helping people get to where they want to be.”

Influential mentors approach their jobs with a deep and profound belief in the value of education as, in the words of Reese “a beautiful transcendent thing that utterly transforms people, it certainly has for me.” Because this mentor has seen the transformative power of education for themselves, “I want the classroom space to be something that is unlike the whole rest of your life, whatever it is but this is a place where everybody is, we're going to insist that everybody belongs here, everybody's included, everybody's valuable.”

It is the sense that the work in which faculty and staff mentors are engaged they are engaged in is a calling, borne from a desire to see students succeed that caused Mentor Johnny to take up a collection upon learning that the father of one of his students had been killed, they gave

her \$200 and a card. "It's not about the money, it's about we care enough to do that. That's the kind of things, I think that makes a difference in student's lives."

This sense of purpose fueled by a sincere desire to see students succeed caused one mentor to take clothes from her closet to donate to students so that they can appear professional for job interviews, or to find summer youth program scholarships so that mothers can take summer classes, knowing that their children are receiving proper care in their absence. Thinking, "if I'm going to do the research to figure out what resources are available for me in my own world, why wouldn't I share that knowledge with them?" Or for a mentor to provide an entrée to the professional world of work and refer students, while helping these students gain social capital and professional contacts they could not have obtained any other way.

It is the sense of a calling or a higher purpose that causes Mentors Cao and Connie to see graduation as the ultimate celebration, "when you see the student to finish line, it's a tremendous award, more so than anything else. You know, that you somehow contributed to that." To these mentors, "It brings purpose to your life and a purpose to what you're doing here." Seeing these students walk across the stage to get their associates degree "is one of the most satisfying times of my life each year. Kind of a victory. I know this time I think I'm definitely going to be in tears."

It is this sense of a calling, or purpose, a desire to see students succeed that caused Mentor Tina, to speak with a student who "didn't look all right." The student told the instructor / mentor that the student was trying to get off drugs, had recently been released from jail (because of a drug addiction), was trying to do what's right, but couldn't get a job and hadn't eaten in two days. There was no familial support, "(my) dad is a drug addict, and my mom, I don't know where she is." This sense of a calling or a sincere desire to see students succeed caused the

mentor to “just cry. It made me sad that my student sitting here in class hadn’t eaten in two days.” Knowing that their department had recently had a meeting in which food had been provided, and that there were leftovers from the meeting, “we came up here and raided the refrigerator. I got her a doggy bag to go.”

Mentor Lena also spoke of crying with students. When asked when the last time she cried, she replied, ‘yesterday.’ One of her students (18-year-old and unmarried) shared with her that the student had a miscarriage about a month ago. The student hadn’t told the boyfriend who is in the military overseas. The student was afraid to tell her mother, essentially had no one, and after telling this staff mentor, she said, “I was afraid to tell you.” The mentor’s response: “That’s what I’m here for. I need you to remember, I’m here to help you navigate this because we can’t do it alone. So that was a tough day. That’s why I went home and hugged my kids.”

A question posed by Nicole began this sub-theme, “I question why a professor would choose a community college, instead of a four-year university?” The answer is found in the passion and desire of Mentor Liza who observed, “I would never give up on anyone. That if somebody is here, and they want to learn, and they want to better themselves, I am 100% on their team.” It is found in the experience and caring found in Mentor Jessica who said, “compared to other institutions of higher ed, I think the people that work at community colleges really do for the most part have that unconditional positive regard.” It is found in the devotion to student success of mentors such as Mentor Merilee who finds value in being a mentor to these students. In spite of having a law degree and being a practicing lawyer, in this calling, “I am able to change people’s lives and actually see the change and be connected to it. And that’s more important to me than winning someone a lump of money.”

Nicole answered her own question as to why faculty and staff would work at a



community college, “I feel as though the instructors that I'm speaking of specifically chose this because they wanted to see people succeed who maybe otherwise wouldn't.” The answer is ratified in the sense of purpose and urgency of countless faculty and staff mentors throughout community colleges, and given expression in the words of Mentor Tracee:

There isn't a minute to waste, you think of it, you're dealing with people many times who did not grow up with books like you did, did not grow up with two loving parents like you did. Now what can I give them? What gift in that short time? There isn't a minute to waste.

The findings to the research foci, a discussion regarding the design aligning with the purpose of the study, and a demonstration of the importance of this study have been presented in the preceding chapter. A discussion of the implications, recommendations for practice as well as for future research will be discussed in the next and final chapter.

## CHAPTER 5

### DISCUSSION

Humans have an instinctive need to collect and share information and are acting as mentors even as we are being mentored (Clutterbuck, 2004; Harari, 2015). One hundred million years ago or so, some of our earliest ancestors, surrounding a primeval campfire or other gathering place shared information about food, shelter or the location and description of some looming danger (Wilson, 2012). From those humble beginnings a practice that has come to be called mentoring emerged. Since then, numberless humans across continents, and every social divide, in turns have either been mentors or mentored. The mentoring relationship has always taken one or more forms, to share and receive information, experiences, encouragement and provide support.

Often, although not always, this relationship has been inspired by a desire from an older, more experienced person to reach out, share and care for a less experienced younger person (Johnson, 2016). Known today as “generativity”, as defined by Erikson (1980), this concept denotes a “concern for establishing and guiding the next generation” (p. 103). According to the theory of generativity, individuals are impelled by a desire to feel needed, a capacity to provide valuable assistance to others, as well as a desire to improve society, which is manifested by a concern for succeeding generations (McAdams, Hart, & Maruna, 1998).

#### **Summary of the Study**

Modern educational leaders acknowledge the value of mentoring as a remedy to problems continuing to vex administrators. Mentoring has been discussed as a way to reduce school dropout rates, increase academic achievement, self-identity, and positive self-image, reduce risky

behaviors, and facilitate career development (Crisp, et al., 2017; Jacobi, 1991; Kram, 1985; Levinson, et al., 1978; Roche, 1979).

Recent research reveals much about the needs, conditions and preparedness of students in higher education. College students labeled as “High-Risk” have been the subject of extensive research, most of which has focused on the obstacles they encounter in earning a college degree (Crisp, et al., 2017; Schreiner, Noel, & Cantwell, 2011).

The literature defines “High-Risk” as those students whose academic preparation, prior school performance, or personal characteristics may contribute to academic failure or early departure from college (Choy, 2002). Personal characteristics that may place a student at risk for failing in college are identified as those features that locate the student in a population without a long or necessarily successful family history in higher education. Examples of such students include those who are the first in their family to attend postsecondary education and those who come from families with low socioeconomic status (Fries-Britt & Turner, 2001; Schreiner, et al., 2011; Torres, 2003).

Despite significant efforts to enhance the success of high-risk students, their rates of persistence to graduation continue to lag substantially behind other students. Only 26.2% of students who take at least one remedial course graduate from college, compared to a 59.4% graduation rate for students who are not required to take any remedial coursework (Smith, 2013). First-generation students graduate at one-third the rate of students whose parents have college degrees; additionally, first-generation students have a higher risk of dropping out and not returning for even the second year of college. First-generation students have poor pre-college preparation, lower career hopes, lack of family support, lack of peer and faculty support, fear of

the college environment, and poor study skills or habits (Crisp, et al., 2017; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Schreiner, et al., 2011; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996).

For the great majority of students, success in college is most directly shaped by their experiences in the classroom (Tinto, 2012). Therefore, developing, enhancing, strengthening relationships between students, especially those defined as “High-Risk” and faculty or campus personnel should correlate to student success and persistence. The relationship developed is a key to retention as well as the academic and social deficiencies that such a relationship impacts (Tinto, 2012).

**Purpose Statement.** The purpose of this study is an exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study is an extension of the qualitative study, “The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence” (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

**Research foci.** This research is guided by the following specific foci that was addressed through data collection and analysis:

1. How did faculty and staff mentoring effect high-risk community college students’ self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?
  - 1a. How did mentoring affect the decision of high-risk community college students to persist?
  - 1b. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student self-efficacy?
  - 1c. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student support systems?
2. According to high-risk community college students who were mentored, what personal characteristics do effective mentors possess?

3. How do faculty and staff mentors recognize in themselves the same personal characteristics of effective mentors as described by high-risk community college students?

Using a qualitative approach in the phenomenological tradition, twenty-two successful high-risk undergraduate students from one urban community college in the western region of the United States were individually interviewed. Following the method utilized by Schreiner et al., (2011) a purposeful criterion sampling technique was utilized to select students based on criteria designating them “high-risk” by their institution. Students who met these criteria (first generation, having completed at least three semesters in their program, and with a cumulative G.P.A. of 2.5 or higher) for successful high-risk undergraduates were randomly selected from institutional lists obtained from the institution’s registrar’s office.

During the semi-structured hour-long interviews, students were asked to reflect upon a time they were ready to leave college, and who on campus has influenced their decision to persist and/or their ability to succeed. Once the student identified the person on campus who has influenced them the most, the faculty or staff person named, was interviewed.

Data were gathered interviews with twenty-two students, and twenty-six faculty and staff members. These data revealed four main themes. (1) High-Risk Community college students are unprepared for college completion prior to entering college; (2) The desire to quit college by high-risk community college students is one that occurs often in a semester and is motivated by the various causes of collegiate unpreparedness identified in theme one; (3) Mentoring of a transactional nature by more than one faculty or staff mentor when these vulnerable students were ready to quit is responsible for their decision to stay in college; (4) The best mentors possess a combination of interpersonal characteristics. The most frequently mentioned valued

faculty / staff mentor characteristics are (a) authenticity; (b) compassion; (c) sense of humor; (d) accessibility / approachability; (e) a sincere desire to see students succeed.

**Theme One:** High-Risk Community college students are unprepared for college completion prior to entering college.

In this study, 19 of the 22 students indicated some feeling of unpreparedness to complete college when they began college. The degree of unpreparedness was found in the various responses ranging from, “not prepared. Zero amount prepared” (Nicole) to “I don't think I felt prepared to graduate college at all because it took a lot of coaxing on my own part really to even attempt to attend college” (Kim).

Theme one is foundational to research foci #1, understanding the effect of mentoring on high-risk community college students. Theme one establishes the need for a mentor by high-risk community college students. While across the literature there is no one accepted definition of what a mentor is or does (Jacobi, 1991), a starting point for the roles or characteristics of mentors and the functions of mentoring may be found in this definition:

Mentoring is a personal and reciprocal relationship in which a more experienced (usually older) faculty member acts as a guide, role model, teacher and sponsor of a less experienced (usually younger) student or faculty member. A mentor provides the mentee with knowledge, advice, counsel, challenge, and support in the mentee's pursuit of becoming a full member of a particular profession” (Johnson, 2016, p. 23)

Mentors can and do act as guides and role models, teachers and sponsors of less experienced mentees. Faculty and staff mentors can and do act in guiding students through the

logistics of college generally, and the functions or outcomes of their specific courses. Faculty and staff mentors can and do act as role models and sponsors of students in modeling specific professional behaviors, or by sponsoring students into other areas of academia, or as an entrée to other faculty or staff personnel.

The data gleaned from student interviews revealed many reasons for these feelings of unpreparedness for college on the part of High-risk community college students. These reasons include, (1) family instability, resulting in lack of support for the student by parents or other care givers, often leading the student to assume greater responsibilities for themselves and often, for younger siblings; (2) poor academic preparation in high school, (often brought about because of the instability at home) either through student indifference.

The data also showed (3) significant personal issues played an important role in college unpreparedness. One interviewee in this study dealt with complex issues stemming from homosexuality in 9th grade; two students struggled in high school with the effects of drug / substance abuse. One of those two students struggled with methamphetamine addiction for over 10 years. Of these three students, these issues were too great for two of them, as they subsequently dropped out of high school.

The act of dropping out of high school, or otherwise delaying their entry into college (4) was also a contributory factor to feeling unprepared for college (“I hadn’t written a academic paper, or any paper in over 15 years”); (5) a general unfamiliarity with the academic demands of college (“what would be expected of me”), as well as an unfamiliarity with what Smith (2013) called “the hidden curriculum” of college: financial aid, scheduling, degree pathways, required courses, the length of time to complete a degree, even navigating the vastness of a college

campus seemed overwhelming to High-risk community college students, causing one student to wonder “what had I gotten myself into?”

**Theme Two:** The desire to quit college by high-risk community college students is one that occurs often in a semester and is motivated by the various causes of collegiate unpreparedness identified in theme one.

Twenty of the 22 high-risk community college 1 interviewed reported having a desire to quit either a given course, or college altogether often throughout a given semester, five indicated that feeling occurred in multiple semesters for them. Lexus put it this way: “All the time, honestly, all the time.” Two students said that for them the desire to quit for them was “last Friday” (before the interview for this study; one reported that feeling of wanting to quit had occurred the previous Monday, and one additional student (Anjelica) indicated it had been multiple times over the previous week, “Yeah. It was definitely in the parking lot before I came up here (for the interview). It was last night. It was last Friday.”

Theme two expands on the need for and the effect of mentoring on high-risk community college students as addressed in research foci 1. This theme explains the frequent desire of high-risk community college students to quit college throughout semesters and points out many of the causes for this desire to quit. These causes speak to the need of mentors that can and do act as guides and role models, teachers and sponsors of less experienced mentees. Theme two identifies through sub-themes, the desire to quit college stemming from many of the forms of unpreparedness discussed in theme one. This theme directly addresses the need for a mentor as explored in research foci 1. Some of the causes for this frequent desire to quit college relate to a lack of academic efficacy, either through an unfamiliarity with college, or feeling overwhelmed



due to the workload of a semester, or lack of confidence in the student's ability to complete the requested assignments. This lack of efficacy is addressed in the sub-questions contained within research foci 1.

For many students the desire to quit is frequent and current. The root of the desire to quit seems to be a sense of being overwhelmed for a variety of reasons. Regardless of the reasons, this sense of feeling overwhelmed is pervasive and is what drives the desire to quit college. One student (Monique) answered this way, "I think it was last week" explaining the pressure because of the semester ending and the rush of having multiple assignments and exams all due the same time. Feleg said the desire to quit college, "to be honest, (that desire to quit comes) every single semester."

Over the course of the interviews, several recurring sub-themes for the desire to quit college or a specific class emerged. Many of the causes of college unpreparedness that emerged in theme one re-emerged to serve as cause belli of wanting to leave college in theme two. The sub-themes are: (1) academic unpreparedness evidenced by becoming overwhelmed by the workload in a semester; (2) Family or personal issues evidenced through relationship struggles, illness or death of a close family member; (3) Uncertain degree or career path; and (4) poor interactions with faculty fueling a desire to drop a specific class.

When asked why community college students fail to complete, all 26 faculty and staff mentors indicated a one-word answer: "Life." Providing some elaboration on this Mentor Patrice succinctly opined: "They drop out because they didn't find somebody to help them manage all of the things that they needed to manage in order to be successful."

**Theme Three:** Mentoring of a transactional nature by more than one faculty or staff mentor when these vulnerable students were ready to quit is responsible for their decision to stay in college.

Theme three continues to build upon the need for a mentor by through the various functions performed by mentors and thereby explains specific effects of mentoring on high-risk community college students. Faculty and staff mentors are shown in theme three to guide students through the logistics of college generally, or the tasks or outcomes of their specific courses. They do this through coaching and providing encouragement, increasing the student's self-efficacy, while serving as a valuable source of support. Faculty and staff mentors are shown in theme three to serve as a source of support as they act as role models and sponsors of students in modeling specific professional behaviors, or by sponsoring students into other areas of academia, or as an entrée to other faculty or staff personnel. These functions of mentoring are addressed in the sub-questions in research foci 1.

Perhaps in recognition of this need to have someone help them manage all the things occurring in their lives, 21 of the 22 students interviewed indicated that in those tough moments when, at some point in their college career they considered quitting there were multiple faculty and staff members that were influential in the student's desire to stay in college. The one student who indicated never having a desire to quit college was still able to name a faculty or staff member considered influential by them in their college experience.

Of note in this finding is that none of the 21 students who considered quitting college could only name one influential faculty member, all named several faculty and staff they considered influential in their decision to stay in college and persist. David stated "all of my

teachers here have definitely influenced me to stay around because they are so open and they were so willing to help.” One student may have summed up the feelings of the larger group when asked was there someone, faculty or staff that was influential in your desire to stay in college, he said in almost reverential tone, “there have been many.”

**Theme Four:** The best mentors possess a combination of interpersonal traits. The most frequently mentioned valued faculty / staff mentor characteristics are (a) authenticity; (b) compassion; (c) sense of humor; (d) accessibility / approachability; (e) a sincere desire to see students succeed.

Thus far, this study has shown that high-risk community college students enter college unprepared to graduate college for a variety of reasons. Because of feeling underprepared and overwhelmed, this study has also shown that high-risk community college students frequently consider leaving either a specific course, or quitting college altogether unless they find someone, a mentor who can and does help them navigate the course or the logistics of college. These specific mentoring functions in turn help high-risk community college students develop confidence, academic efficacy, while providing needed support systems that help them persist.

The fourth theme of this study, rather than focusing on the mechanics of mentoring, or the academic and social needs for faculty and staff mentors, focuses on what makes the relationship between the mentor and the student work. This theme focuses on the interpersonal skills, characteristics, or relational traits of these influential mentors as seen by both the faculty and staff mentors and the high-risk community students who named them. The findings in this theme directly connects to research foci 2 which addresses the question of what interpersonal

characteristics do influential faculty and staff mentors possess according to the students affected by these interactions.

The influential faculty and staff mentors themselves were similarly interviewed and asked about their effectiveness with high-risk community college students. This directly connects to research foci 3 which asks if the influential faculty and staff mentors saw in themselves the attributes described by the students in research foci 2. All faculty and staff mentors interviewed were pleased, but surprised that they had a positive impact on the lives of their students. Many expressed wonder and evidenced bewilderment when asked to describe what they did in their work with their students, expressing as Mentor Kathleen or Mentor Reese did, “I have no idea, and I hope your study will tell me.”

As mentoring is essentially a relationship, the interpersonal traits or attributes most often identified by the students in describing their influential mentors are those traits or attributes found in other healthy, productive relationships. Authenticity, accessible or approachable, compassion, friendly, helpful, and possessing a sense of humor. These attributes and traits are intentionally modeled for students and start with the welcoming and comfortable environment created by the faculty and staff in their classrooms and offices from the very first interaction with the student.

### **Findings Related to the Literature**

**Theme One:** High-Risk Community college students are unprepared for college completion prior to entering college.

The initial finding in this study is supported by similar findings in the literature. High-risk students generally, and first generation students specifically have poor pre-college preparation; they do not enjoy the advantage of having parental or faculty or peer support, due to unfamiliarity with the college environment, these students fear the unknown, and have poor or underdeveloped study habits or academic skills (Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996; York-Anderson & Bowman, 1991). Dennis, Phinney and Chuateco (2005) found that the foregoing is true because the parents of these students lack firsthand knowledge of college work, the overall college experience, and are thus generally unable to help them understand the intricacies or implications of college assignments.

The current study confirmed the importance of family or other personal issues in college persistence by high-risk college students was also shown by Schmid and Abell (2003) who found family issues such as having children at home, or are single parents are less likely to persist towards the completion of their degree. This finding is also consistent with that of Bailey and their colleagues (2015) who found community college students in comparison to students in elite four-year institutions are more often employed, more likely to have young children, and less likely to have family financial resources.

These factors contributed to an inability to persist, pointing to a different form of college unpreparedness: an unpreparedness for the commitment demands of college coursework. Horton in 2015 found that personal issues such as homelessness, incarceration, teenage pregnancy or serious health issues, to name the most prominent findings affect college persistence and student success. These past studies notwithstanding report college students through a general lens of

higher education. On the other hand, this study focuses exclusively on high-risk community college students.

Perhaps fundamental to the feelings of unpreparedness for college completion on the part of High-risk community college students is (6) being first generation college students, as similarly found in the literature by Dennis, Phinny and Chuateco (2005). One student (#1) explained the significance why being a first-generation college student adds to the feeling of being unprepared and overwhelmed. The student reports not having an educational support system, “I can't go back home and ask a simple question, ‘What should my introduction have for my thesis sentence?’” These issues taken singularly or together contributes to a lack of confidence in the success of the student even before they begin the application or walk into a college class, as poignantly summed up by this student (#5), “I just didn't feel myself capable of learning college-level subjects.”

**Theme Two:** The desire to quit college by high-risk community college students is one that occurs often in a semester and is motivated by the various causes of collegiate unpreparedness identified in theme one.

What this current study also shows is a ratification of the assertion by Levinson and his colleagues (1978) that forming a meaningful mentoring relationship is an essential need for “novice adults.” The intrusion of family or personal issues suggests a mentoring need for high-risk community college students who possess adult-sized aspirations: someone to help them manage the accompanying adult-sized problems they bring into community colleges and can be a proverbial mill-stone unless someone can help them carry or shift the load. This study shows that managing these problems is perhaps the one key component needed to ameliorate the desire to

quit college and improve college persistence. These adult-sized problems are inescapable for them, college is, and as Anjelica reminds “an extra thing we do.” Unless students can find through mentoring effective ways to handle the non-negotiable items in their lives: jobs, children, bills, etc., the one negotiable item in their lives, college will be collateral damage.

The finding in the current study is somewhat consistent with previous findings in the literature. Previous findings discuss the results of high-risk college students’ lack of persistence. First-generation students graduate at one-third the rate of students whose parents have attended college and have a higher risk of dropping out and not returning for a second year of college (Crisp, et al., 2017; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Smith, 2013). What the previous findings do not address is the frequency with which high-risk community college students regularly wrestle with the desire to drop-out. The frequency is inferred by the fact that “the thought precedes the act” as the old adage goes, and while again these previous findings address students in higher education, this study is focused on community college students, and reveals a consistent, persistent desire to quit college, a desire perhaps more powerfully paralyzing than any series of academic tasks throughout a given semester.

The fact that this desire to quit college is driven by the various underlying causes of college unpreparedness is consistent with previous findings in the literature. There has been previously in theme one a review of some of the key literature findings pointing to a general unpreparedness to enter college by first-generation students. It is unsurprising that students with these factors affecting consistent short-term performance, ultimately affects long-term persistence skills (Dennis, Phinny, & Chuateco, 2005; Elkins, Braxton, & James, 2000; Terenzini, Springer, Yaeger, Pascarella, & Nora, 1996). Previous findings in the literature again

generally address higher education, rather than, as does this study, focus on the needs and lived experiences of community college students.

**Theme Three:** Mentoring of a transactional nature by more than one faculty or staff mentor when these vulnerable students were ready to quit is responsible for their decision to stay in college.

While studies have shown academic efficacy is a predictor of student success across the spectrum of education (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Brown and Lent, 2006; Pajarries & Udan, 2006), the influence of a mentor in helping to develop this efficacy is inferred, but not implicit. On the other hand, Micari and Pazos (2012) assert a student's relationship with faculty, including such factors as feeling the professor respects the students, seeing the faculty member as a role model was a determining factor in the student's confidence in being able to successfully complete the course. Eimers in 2001 showed similar findings in their study in a large university that showed students reporting better relationships with faculty were more likely to feel as if they had made great strides (efficacy) in such areas as math and science, critical thinking, general intellectual ability and career development.

The mentoring taking place as identified by students between faculty and staff and high-risk community college students occurs in informal and formal settings. Interactions occur in the faculty or staff member's office, before or after class, walking around the campus, and even occasionally, while waiting for public transportation. The mentoring performed by the faculty or staff member falls into four general categories: (1) Specific, individualized assistance (content or skills-related) to help a student pass a course; (2) Providing support and encouragement through feedback, or in interactions assisting the student to develop academic efficacy; (3) Specific,



individualized assistance to help a student successfully navigate through certain logistical needs of college such as financial aid, degree pathways, etc.; (4) The providing of career or real-life guidance, or role modeling for the student.

The literature supports the finding in this study that mentoring is largely transactional. The pioneering work by Kathy Kram (1985), and confirmed by many other researchers (Chao, 2007; Dougherty & Dreher, 2007; Ragins & Kram, 2007) demonstrates mentoring essentially fulfills transactional needs of the mentee: both career and psychosocial needs. These studies however revolve around the world of work, and do not address transactional mentoring functions in education.

In previous studies (Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985) researchers found the necessity of what was described as a “constellation of mentors” serving certain functions, meeting certain needs, suggesting the need for a multiplicity of mentors. The current study bears these findings out and adds to the existing knowledge as this study focuses on mentors in an educational realm. This study further explains the various mentoring functions needed by high-risk community college students ranging from the overtly transactional of helping the student gain the skills or confidence or both to pass a specific class, or how to navigate a system in higher education that is not always user friendly to high-risk students, particularly those that are first-generation students. Additionally, this study confirms the functions identified by Kram (1985) and others, namely mentors in this study performed career functions and psychosocial functions serving as a support system or a source of encouragement or efficacy.

**Theme Four:** The best mentors possess a combination of interpersonal traits. The most frequently mentioned valued faculty / staff mentor characteristics are (a) authenticity; (b)

compassion; (c) sense of humor; (d) accessibility / approachability; (e) a sincere desire to see students succeed.

This study offers several differences from previous studies that should be noted. First, while a previous study (Schreiner, et al., 2011) focuses on all levels of higher education (i.e. community colleges, state colleges, and universities), this study focuses only on community colleges. Second, Schreiner's study sampled from a variety of factors depicted in the literature as "high-risk" including first-generation, Pell eligible, minority, etc., this study focuses only on first-generation students, as this sampling offers a more comprehensive look at the study body, as the first-generation status cuts across all other demographic or economic markers. Third, Schreiner's study addresses the characteristics of the influential faculty and staff mentors, this study focuses on those characteristics in a supporting role, with the main emphasis being on how those mentors and those characteristics assisted high-risk students in developing self-efficacy, provided support systems, and how, taken together all contributed to the student's direct decision to stay in college.

The findings in this study are similar to those found in other studies dealing with winning relational attributes. For example, studies involving graduate students and medical school students, the most frequently cited attributes of excellent mentors include, intelligence, expertise, empathy, honesty, a sense of humor, compassion, dedication, generosity, enthusiasm, patience, flexibility, and caring (Clark, Harden, & Johnson, 2000; Cronan-Hillix, Davidson, Cronan-Hillix, & Gensheimer, 1986; Johnson, 2016; Rodenhauser, Rudisill, & Dvorak, 2000). Mentees in other studies reported such attributes as communication skills, ability to read and understand others, ability to motivate, psychological stability, and honesty (Allen & Poteet, 1999; Johnson, 2016; Zey, 1984).

Personal characteristics have been found to be so important in mentoring relationships, some researchers advise mentees to scrutinize prospective mentors on these personal characteristics: honesty, flexibility, warmth, patience, healthy work habits, integrity, comfort with mutuality and vulnerability in relationships, self-awareness, communication skills, sensitivity to diversity, and capacity for trust (Johnson & Huwe, 2003; Johnson & Ridley, 2008, 2015).

Herrera and her colleagues (2000) after examining over 600 pairs of mentoring relationships, declared “at the crux of the mentoring relationship is the bond that forms between the youth and the mentor. If a bond does not form, then youth and mentors may disengage from the match before the mentoring relationship lasts long enough to have a positive impact on youth.”

In this study, confirming previous findings, the influential mentors interviewed likewise had a desire to connect with students. Many students interviewed identified a characteristic shared by these mentors of “wanting to be here” and “loving what they do.” All influential mentors interviewed registered surprise and a general unawareness of the impact they had on students, and reported such feelings as shock, or feeling vindicated or validated; Not all influential mentors handled their classrooms or their offices in the same manner, as one student reported, “they find a way to make it their own.” But all students reported the mentors having the most influence on their decision to stay in college were, as found by Schreiner and her colleagues, “genuine and authentic.” The intentionality of influential mentors found in this study began with the environment consciously and thoughtfully planned in classrooms, and offices, an environment fostering warmth, recognition of the individuality of the student, evidencing

compassion or empathy, and an acceptance, even an encouragement to feel safe in making mistakes.

**Unanticipated findings.** This study was conceived through several months of reading the literature on the importance of mentoring both professional and academic settings. Throughout this process of study and review, and as the study was developed and proposed, findings were anticipated that would be provided by the participants and covered in the research foci.

Qualitative research generally, and phenomenology specifically addresses the lived experiences of the participants. The thick, descriptive data, a hallmark of qualitative research depends upon the relationship forged between the participants and the researcher and then, between the researcher and the data gleaned from the interviews. In this process it is possible for findings unanticipated by the researcher to emerge. In this study, there were six unanticipated findings that emerged throughout the 48 interviews of high-risk community college students and their influential faculty and staff mentors. These unanticipated findings are (a) Family / Personal Issues contribute more to lack of persistence by high-risk community college students than does being academically unprepared; (b) Frequency that high-risk community college students consider quitting college; (c) Importance of feedback for high-risk community college student persistence; (d) High-risk community college students often watch interactions between other students and faculty before deciding to approach the faculty member, or not; (e) Multiple mentors for each high-risk community college student contributed to their desire to persist, not just one mentor.

**Importance of family and personal issues on persistence.** Family / personal issues contribute more to lack of persistence by high-risk community college students than does being academically unprepared. This is not unanticipated in the literature (Schmid & Abell, 2002), but

surprised the researcher given the frequency with which this factor was identified by high-risk community college students. The literature speaks about a variation of self-efficacy, called “academic efficacy.” The belief with academic efficacy is that in much the same way as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977), to perform certain academic functions, there must be a confidence in the ability of the student to perform said tasks. Indeed, many of the students interviewed in this study discussed feeling academically unprepared to graduate college prior to entering college. This finding would have been consistent with the literature and would have been no surprise. The surprise was to discover the degree to which, at least in this study, personal issues or family issues impacted college persistence. Illnesses of parents and grandparents, personal illnesses, the challenges of raising children (primarily alone), balancing work, family and school impacted high-risk community college students’ persistence more than did academic unpreparedness.

When asked why community college students fail to complete, all 26 faculty and staff mentors indicated a one-word answer: “Life.” Mentor Lyle asserted “life rises up and crushes them.” Providing some elaboration on this faculty / staff Mentor Patrice succinctly opined: “They drop out because they didn't find somebody to help them manage all of the things that they needed to manage in order to be successful.” Mentor Rick suggested “the people who think of themselves as the great gatekeepers of knowledge, “Well, they just don't care enough,” that has not been my experience. If anything, it's because they care too much.” According to this influential mentor, community college students care about holding onto their jobs so that they can provide financial support for their families. These students also trying to go to school so that they can give a better life to their family, to themselves. “Why do they drop out? I think, a lot of times, particularly with our student community, they're overwhelmed. They're just trying to do too much.”

To Anjelica, the major worries of life are non-negotiable: family, job, financial responsibilities; none of these can be taken away nor can they be lessened. The “extra” the obligation that is negotiable is the one “extra” added to an already full life / schedule: school. While academic efficacy is crucial to be successful in school, and to a certain degree, staying in school, for high-risk community college students, adults with adult-sized problems, life efficacy, or “adult efficacy” may be even more needed for persistence.

**Frequently wanting to quit.** That college students consider dropping out is not surprising. That community college students consider dropping out is not surprising, nor that high-risk community college students consider quitting college. Semesters are often best considered as wars of attrition. No semester is a sprint: all semesters are a marathon; a marathon of endurance. The assumption of the researcher was that the consideration of quitting college did occur, but it was fleeting, usually near the end of the semester when multiple assignments were due or the stress of multiple final exams. The data yielded from the interviews revealed something quite different. The high-risk community college students interviewed for this study considered quitting college “all the time.” Every semester, throughout the semester, multiple classes, or college itself. The participants in this study shared that for high-risk community college students the thread keeping them in college is a very slender thread. The reasons often for wanting to quit are unsurprising, personal and family issues, feeling academically overwhelmed are among the more common factors. One student (Monique) to mitigate the feeling overwhelmed, and wanting to quit, viewed her experience as “one class at a time.” It seems that for high-risk community college students, adults, with adult-sized problems, responsibilities, and importantly, adult-sized aspirations, a semester isn’t fifteen weeks in length; rather it is one week in length, repeated fifteen times.

**Importance of feedback on student persistence.** Both positive and negative feedback is important for high-risk community college students. “I thrive on feedback” said one student in the study. “If I don’t get some criticism, I think the instructor didn’t read my paper,” said another. Yet it is not the feedback, as much as how it is delivered; reframing negative criticisms is vital. As one student related, “my instructor will say to me, ‘he's like, "Oh, I can see you're doing this problem, but can I point something out to you?" He says, "It looks like you're doing this, but you should do this first before you do this.’ It's always appreciated when somebody approaches you in a non-judgmental (manner). I don't feel like the lowly student. I'm just another person.” This type of approach that doesn’t sacrifice course learning outcomes but seems to enhance them is viewed by high-risk community college students as a form of needed encouragement. Several students mentioned the value and importance in having frequent opportunities if need be, to master the specific skills required in a writing or math assignment. For high-risk community college students, particularly those who are returning after some years outside of education, or those who may not be as academically prepared in their most recent educational experiences, such kindnesses in what the feedback is, and how it is delivered builds efficacy that is sorely lacking, such efficacy leads to completion.

An interesting and unexpected discovery related to the importance of feedback is the reaction several students mentioned to less than hoped for grades on assignments. Bad grades on a test or an assignment is the lot of all students at one time or another in their educational career. For students with academic efficacy, while the initial bad grade itself may sting, the student is not defeated. The academic efficacy acts in almost the same way that immunities in our bodies towards illness: you get sick, but there is a resiliency built in to your physical that you recover.

The bad grade hurts, but it is not fatal. Instead, you react as Mentor Rick did, when as a college student, he received a negative response to a comment in class, he could have taken the comment and internalized it, deciding to “shut down” thinking, “the professor thinks I’m an idiot,” he took it as a challenge to “read the text more closely. I need to spend more time working on this, and that way, by golly, the next time I raise my hand in class, they go, "Oh wow, that's very insightful."

High-risk community college students without proper academic preparation or those re-entering college after some time away are not possessing academic efficacy and thus, not possessing the immunities that result from academic efficacy take negative comments differently, as did Kristina. When receiving a bad grade, Kristina reported experiencing feelings of “guilt and shame,” elaborating, “you're kind of like a puppy with your tail between your legs and you're just walking to class and you just go in and you sit in the back.” Rather than approach the instructor as Mentor Rick did as a college student, the high-risk community college student on the other hand, doesn’t say anything to the instructor, “because you feel the need to explain why you got the bad grade” in the first-place feeling consumed with “shame or guilt.”

This shows instructors will need to initiate contact with students that may be or are struggling to mitigate the effect of the negative grades or comments. Such contact should be done in a way that does not convey to students who may due to missing academic efficacy, be overly sensitive to messaging, the wrong message. In Mentor Kathleen’s contacts with struggling students, this mentor is aware and careful that the contact does not send to the student the message “Oh, the teacher's already written me off. I was already on the fence about whether or not I could be successful.” For this mentor, on the other hand the messaging is intentional: “I



want them to know that they can (be successful).” This mentor communicates a message of hope, they can come back. There's no judgment about it about them or their circumstances. “That there are ways forward in the class and that I will work with them to figure those out.” Such messages of hope to high-risk community college students, lacking academic efficacy is, as described by Kristina “reassuring,” “helpful,” and, “inspiring.”

**Students watch interactions between other students and faculty.** This surprise finding may be unrelated to lacking academic efficacy, and instead may be a purely human trait related to an instinctual survival characteristic. Upon approaching new people, new situations, our survival instincts kick in adjudging certain situations and certain people to be safe or unsafe, largely these decisions are based upon previous interactions with similar (looking, acting) people or situations.

Annette Lareau (2011) suggested income levels may also play a role in how (or if) people in positions of power are approached. Lareau found children in low income families, unlike those in middle class families have little to no outside interactions with adults. Children in middle class homes are often involved in adult-sponsored activities (e.g., youth sports, piano lessons, etc.) which produces a comfortability operating in the world of adults, feeling comfortable, for example, talking to an adult, looking them in the eye and shaking their hands, skills often absent in children from lower income homes.

Additionally, Lareau found in this study (2011) income levels also account for the ways in which institutions are viewed. In middle income level homes, institutions are seen as meeting the needs of the individual, even if lobbying the institution for help is needed. In lower income homes, institutions are not seen as helpful to their needs, but as impediments or obstacles that cannot be overcome. This difference in attitude and experience Lareau reported, is found

tellingly in education. In education, higher income families regularly involve themselves in the education of their children, advocating for them as needed. These parents are also college educated, often with advanced degrees, who can relate and understand the professional jargon used by their children's teachers. On the other hand, parents from lower income families leave the educating of their children to the "experts," the teachers. Education is considered the business of the educators, and in any event, these parents, with at the most a little college, more often than not high school graduates, do not understand the direction provided by the teachers and avoid interactions as a result.

Perhaps with this background, it may be understood why, as found in this study, high-risk community college students, "seek to get a feel" for who the instructor is (Nicole), evaluating whether they are safe to approach for help or clarification. When these students receive a (truthful yet) seemingly abrupt response to a question, "it's in the syllabus," they don't go back, rather they "figure it out on their own" (Monique). So to protect themselves, it was revealed by several students in the study, they lay back, and watch how the instructor interacts with other students, judging on the basis of those secondary interactions if it is safe to approach. Mentor Patrice instinctively understands this need and reaction. To assist her current students in feeling safe, she regularly encourages and welcomes past students to "drop by" her classroom, reasoning that to her current students, these visits demonstrates, "she isn't so bad after all" and may reassure those unsure students that it is safe to approach her for help.

This surprising finding indicates again the importance of faculty and staff to scrutinize their interactions with students, and to provide comfortable environments where students feel safe to explore needs, ask questions, and in other ways be comfortable "not knowing." Mentor Ken frequently challenges himself to remember "what it was like to not know," Mentor Rick tells his

students he will frequently “model failure” all designed to, as Mentor Ryan stated, “break down barriers of what a college class is supposed to be.” After these and other acts designed to create a welcoming and comfortable environment, faculty and staff mentors, must initiate, must invite in writing (in the syllabus and class announcements) and through verbal invitations.

These initial interactions and the environment intentionally created by faculty and staff mentors is vital if future interactions are to occur. For mentoring relationships to firm and develop, there is either an explicit or implicit admission of a need for mentoring, or confession of a vulnerability by the mentee in order to receive the desired assistance from the mentor. Such an admission either implicit or explicit is a confession of weakness and can only occur if it is to occur at all in an environment where the student feels safe, an environment where the student feels as if they can trust.

**Multiplicity of mentors are used.** When conceptualizing this study, and based on the literature review, it would be anticipated high-risk community college students had one influential mentor either faculty or staff that helped them be successful and persist. The literature is clear: in business, in education, throughout history, regardless of the age or background of the mentee, mentoring works (Eby, Rhodes, & Allen, 2007; Johnson, 2016; Kram, 1985, Levinson, et al., 1978).

The unanticipated finding in this study is that in every case, save one of the twenty-two students interviewed, students effortlessly named not one mentor, but multiple mentors influential in their desire to complete a class, and ultimately complete their college program. As one student, in a tone that can only be described as a mix between reverence with gratitude, said “there have been many.” These mentors represented all sides of the academic edifice, student services and academic instruction. The mentors did not need to be full-time faculty or full-time

employees to make a difference in the lives of high-risk community college students, they needed to foster a safe and welcoming environment and then respond to the spoken or unspoken need of the student.

Upon further reflection, as has been reported in this study, high-risk community college students enter higher education unprepared to graduate, the unpreparedness takes multiple forms. The student throughout their educational experience needs to address this unpreparedness, instilling some form of academic efficacy, or as Mentor Patrice put it, “find someone (support systems) to help them manage all of the things that they needed to manage in order to be successful.” As the needs of high-risk community college students are varied, and occur throughout their educational experience, more than one mentor will be needed at equally critical junctures in the student’s academic and personal life if they are to persist.

### **Implications**

The findings of this study as expressed in detail in chapter 4 and summarized in chapter 5 yielded nine implications for community college administrators, faculty and staff. They are: (a) Administrators should enhance relationship opportunities for faculty and staff to mentor community college students by considering the impact of administrative initiatives on relationships between faculty, staff and students; (b) Community colleges should increase advisors, decrease advising caseloads and increase time spent with each student to perform a holistic, intrusive advising of students; (c) Faculty and staff hiring committees should consider redesigning job descriptions to go beyond content or the performance of specific skills, emphasizing the willingness and ability to authentically relate with students; (d) Faculty and staff currently employed should be consistently encouraged and trained to develop interpersonal characteristics known to enhance relationships with students; (e) Community colleges should

foster a mentoring environment by capturing and celebrating the good work faculty and staff mentors do in working with students.

It is recommended that administrators should enhance relationship opportunities for faculty and staff to mentor community college students by considering the impact of administrative initiatives on relationships between faculty, staff and students. Kram (1985) suggested for any mentoring program to be successful, administrator buy-in is critical. Buy-in according to Kram does not mean simply verbal support. It suggests providing time for faculty and staff to have the time needed to develop student relationships, to nurture those relationships throughout a semester and beyond. Several faculty members in this study referred to demands on their time, their “myriad of responsibilities’ preventing them from getting to know all their students. It also implies allocating necessary funds to compensate adjunct faculty members, who carry much of the teaching responsibility, and thus carry much of the student interaction opportunities to develop and enhance those relationships. In this study, four faculty members named as being influential to a student’s desire to persist were adjunct or part-time faculty. These valued and capable instructors can and do make a difference in the lives of community college students, and these relationships should be enhanced for those who have the time and the willingness to participate.

Administrators should well consider evaluating the impact of their initiatives on the limited time and resources of faculty and staff, and if the benefit of the initiative outweighs the cost of limiting student access to faculty. Initiatives however well intended should be weighed with this ultimate cost in mind. A reorientation of thinking may need to occur suggesting more impact on retention can be had by meeting with a student for 30 minutes, then a two-hour meeting with faculty and administrators about retention.

As faculty particularly have a service component in their performance reviews, administrators need to redefine what constitutes service to the college. Mentor Shawna indicated their annual review was based on the leadership they provided on various committees, not necessarily on the work they do with students, as anything involving students was considered part of their teaching responsibilities. While committees and policies and programs are necessary, they are means to an end, they are not ends in and of themselves. Administrators could and should clear any ambiguity by in word and deed explaining that service to the college includes out of class service to students.

It is recommended to increase mentoring opportunities for staff, community colleges should increase advisors, decrease advising caseloads and increase time spent with each student to perform a holistic, intrusive advising of students. Navigating “this crazy convoluted system” is daunting for staff well-versed in the nuances of financial aid or course pathways, as Mentor Liza reported. This mentor concluded, “they (the students) would have to get a degree in the process of going to college, just to get through college.” For high-risk community college students who are often already overwhelmed with course work and balancing the demands of work and family, the logistics of college, deadlines and more paperwork may prove to be too much. As Mentor Liza reminded “that's not why they're here. They're here, in my mind, to learn history, to learn political science, to learn (that) stuff.”

Advisors are a logical initial “point of contact” for students that are knowledgeable about the back office needs of being a student. Advisors can work students through the process of deciding why they are in college as does Mentor Lyle for example, and guide them through the labyrinth of transfer agreements, course pathways.

Building relationships take time, and when caseloads are around 800 as mentor #10 reports, there is not enough time to provide the necessary guidance needed by many community college students. Mentor Jessica suggests a caseload of approximately 200 as is found in the governmentally funded TRIO program would provide advisors with the necessary time to get to know the students, develop relationships with a contact person often seen by a student before the student ever meets a faculty member. Properly cultivated, the advisor can be a relational source of support throughout the student's time in the institution. As has been seen throughout this study, family or personal issues, or the lack of college familiarity that comes from being a first generation student, are often at the root of a student's decision to withdraw from a class or from the institution. Smaller caseloads will provide time to create and build relationships and give the student one more source of support and encouragement from which to draw. More advisors, either through training willing faculty members on at least the academic side of advising which could also be counted as part of the service component to the college, or through hiring more advisors would result in smaller caseloads and would augment in much the same ways as increasing tutors for math and writing added layers of support to both faculty and students. It should not be surprising that the influential mentors named in this study that serve as advisors, save one, operate in programs that require smaller caseloads

In order to improve the quality of mentoring interactions, it is recommended that faculty and staff hiring committees should consider redesigning job descriptions to go beyond content or the performance of specific skills, emphasizing the willingness and ability to authentically relate with students. When Mentor Mike was hired to teach, he believed teaching content was 100% of the job. After several years working in the community college system, this influential mentor believes content is only about 75% of the job, the rest being support, encouragement, life

coaching as well as coaching students to develop skills needed to demonstrate mastery of the content. The students interviewed for this study did not report having trouble understanding content of courses, nor did they identify content-related problems as causes for wanting to quit college. These successful students reported wanting to quit due to feeling overwhelmed with the demands of life, or being overwhelmed with not knowing how to balance or manage time and multiple assignments. None of those problems identified by the twenty-two high-risk community college students are in-class problems; they are out of class problems that can and do affect in class performance.

Hiring committees should consider student needs for mentoring when reviewing faculty and staff hiring practices in both the job description and through the interview process. Job descriptions for student contact positions should emphasize emotional intelligence or interpersonal skills, as well as the need to connect in class and out of class with students in an authentic way as much content or skills. In the final interview process, the delivery of content or performance of job-related skills should be as well as demonstrations of the meaning of student success, an awareness of special in and out of classroom needs of the student population served, how students can be authentically connected with, and an understanding of why that is important to their success.

The frequency and quality of mentoring interactions by faculty and staff should be consistently encouraged, and current employees should be trained to develop the interpersonal characteristics known to enhance relationships with students. Mentor Mike and Mentor Jessica are both trained therapists in addition to being faculty members at the institution. Both spoke in their interviews of the importance of treating each student with “unconditional positive regard,” while at the same time asserting that this ability can be taught. Throughout the student



interviews, students repeatedly spoke about their need to feel valued, to be recognized and treated as individuals. They spoke then about the reciprocity that comes from an investment in them as individuals, not just as students, as Maria indicated, “when someone invests in me and cares about me, I feel like I don’t want to let them down.”

Given the benefits of recognizing students as more than just students but as real human beings, as Mentor Liza opined, “treating them like individuals, not just as a number to get them in and out of the office as quickly as possible, but to actually get to know them” Existing faculty and staff, those particularly in student contact positions should be regularly trained in the attributes of successful mentoring, emphasizing the development of “unconditional positive regard” for students. Other training topics could and should be introduced including emotional intelligence, social capital, self-efficacy, challenges of first-generation students, to name a few.

This type of training and creating a nurturing and encouraging environment is desirable, because as Eby and Allen (2007) suggested, mentoring is hard work. As is true of any relationship, there is considerable personal and emotional investment made by faculty and staff. Mentor Lyle points out that he regularly rides an emotional roller coaster, riding the highs with students when they come in to share a scholarship or some other achievement, and then suffering the lows when a student comes in to share information about an unplanned-for pregnancy, a job loss, or the latest dysfunctionality manifesting itself within their family. Mentor Connie relates often crying with her students. When asked about “the last time she cried,” her reply, “yesterday.”

It is recommended to foster a mentoring, supportive environment, community colleges should capture and celebrate the good work faculty and staff mentors do in working with students. Several faculty mentors spoke about feeling unvalued and unappreciated, and all

expressed surprise that they had a positive impact on student retention. Mentoring is reciprocal, meaning it is a relationship that gives and nurtures both sides of the relationship. Community college administrators should actively work with faculty and staff and students in capturing stories of retention and celebrating successes. Such a celebratory and supportive atmosphere encourages all parties, and truly helps mentoring to be reciprocal in ways that extend beyond the immediate circle of mentors and mentees.

### **Recommendations for Future Study**

This study involved high-risk community college students utilizing the designation of first generation students to identify high-risk students. The challenges of first-generation students are known. What is not known is if the challenges faced by first generation students are the same as those students who may have other high-risk markers as identified by the literature, e.g., Pell eligible, single mothers, ESL students, etc., but are not first-generation. Thus, the challenges of high-risk community college students, and the findings in this study may be skewed to the unique challenges faced by first generation college students. Further studies would benefit by focusing on other high-risk markers, to identify if the challenges are similar and if the impact of faculty and staff mentors is as significant

This study focused on successful high-risk community college students to examine the impact of relationships in assisting the development of self-efficacy and support systems, and how mentoring affected persistence. This study assumes, and the findings confirm it is the connections formed between faculty and staff and students that influenced academic success and persistence. A further opportunity for research is to discover whether the reverse is true. That is, is the determinate cause of students dropping out of community college that they did not develop

relationships with a faculty or staff member. Utilizing high-risk markers as identified in the literature but focusing on those who have left college after an initial semester or two, research could reveal the impact of relationships, or the lack thereof on the student's decision to leave higher education.

A third possibility for future research is to more fully examine the rich data contained in community college mentoring relationships. There is a glaring gap in what we know about community colleges, their students, their faculty and staff. Given that these institutions are becoming the entry point to higher education for many "high-risk" students, retention or persistence data, the challenges and needs (both academic and social) of these students should concern community colleges themselves, as well as four-year universities and state colleges, and, naturally, researchers.

## **Conclusion**

Relationships matter in all aspects of our lives and give our lives substance and meaning (Levinson, 1996; Levinson, et al., 1978; Vaillant, 2012). In the same way DNA affects the size, shape and working of our bodies, relationships provide interactional DNA and affect how we see ourselves and others and respond to the world around us. Relationships, this interactional DNA, affects our political, social, and moral views in untold ways. The effects of relationships convince us of our abilities to try and succeed as well as providing ample evidence to not put forth the effort because we will not be successful. This interactional DNA stemming from our relationships, often stamps us as to whether or not we will be law abiding, or if a life of crime and punishment will be our future. Relationships, this interactional DNA shapes our career and educational choices and our friends and future relationships, including those relationships that are perhaps the most important of our lives, and as demonstrated by the Harvard Grant Study

(2012), relationships effect our ability to recover from illness, sometimes the types of illnesses or diseases we contract, and even the quality and duration of our lives themselves.

Mentoring is relational (Johnson, 2016), and fulfills certain important life and professional functions (Kram, 1985). It might be said that mentoring is one source of much of this “interactional DNA” that makes it the sum and substance of our lives. Anciently, Gilgamesh sought out a mentor, Utnapishtim to teach him about something for which he had no familiarity, and no other resources from which to draw, in the process, encouraging and guiding and calming his fears. Mentor (Athena) appeared to Telemachus, the son of Odysseus, young adult aged man-child lacking in support systems, and in self-efficacy. Mentor’s role was to build up the confidence (efficacy) of Telemachus and put some courage in him. The poet Virgil led and guided his protégée Dante on a perilous journey through unfamiliar and frightening areas, the rings of Hell. In Dante’s day, these rings of Hell had names such as greed, gluttony, limbo and lust. In our times, for high-risk community college students the rings of Hell have such names as, Statistics, English, Chemistry and degree pathways. In much the same way anciently Utnapishtim provided knowledge, Mentor provided courage and Virgil provided guidance, community college faculty and staff mentors provide the same needed gifts to “high-risk” community college students, first-generation college students who are similarly unprepared and unfamiliar.

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**APPENDIX A**  
**TABE OF SPECIFICATIONS**

<b>Research Foci:</b>	<b>Data Sources</b>
3. How did faculty and staff mentoring effect high-risk community college students' self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?	Interview SQ 3 Interview F / S 1, 2, 3, 6
1a. How did mentoring affect the decision of high-risk community college students to persist?	Interview SQ 4 Interview F / S 2
1b. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student self-efficacy?	Interview SQ 2, 4, 5 Interview F / S 4
1c. How did mentoring affect high-risk community college student support systems?	Interview SQ 2, 4, 6 Interview F / S 5
4. According to high-risk community college students who were mentored, what personal characteristics do effective mentors possess?	Interview SQ 4, 7 Interview F / S 2
5. How do faculty and staff mentors recognize in themselves the same personal characteristics of effective mentors as described by high-risk community college students?	Interview F / S 2, 6

**Note: Interview SQ refers to Interview Student Question; Interview F / S refers to Interview Faculty and Staff Questions**

**Student Interview Questions are found in Appendix B  
Faculty / Staff Interview Questions are found in Appendix C**

## APPENDIX B: STUDENT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Protocol – Individual Student Interview ----

**Researcher:** William Ashcraft

**Date:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Participant #1:**

- **Signed Informed Consent**

**Location:**

**Sensitizing Concept:** What is the effect of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?

**Description of Setting:**

.

**Opening Script:**

*Welcome*

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is William Ashcraft and I am a doctoral student and researcher at Old Dominion University.

I look forward to our discussion and hearing what you have to say. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

*Purpose of Study*

Before proceeding, I would like to ask that you review the documents in front of you. First, you will see a brief description of my study. The purpose of my study is to learn about your perspectives of the effect of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Through learning from you I hope to better understand the role faculty and staff mentoring plays in community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Your insights today will be instrumental in advancing my study and understanding of how community colleges can best assist student retention and success.

## *Agenda*

Over the course of the next 60 minutes, I will be asking you a series of approximately 8 questions and I will be recording your responses.

## *Role of Facilitators and Participants*

I am the researcher for this study and will therefore be facilitating this interview. My role is to ask you probing questions and learn from our dialogue. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate to let me know at any time. Your role as a participant is voluntary. Please know that you are not bound in any way to continued participation. If at any time you would like to discontinue participation in the study, please let me know and you will be removed from the study.

## *Participants Rights and Responsibilities*

In order for me to fully gather your thoughts and opinions, I would like to stress that there are no right and wrong responses to the answers. I am here to better understand your perspective about the role of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. While remaining respectful of the opinion you share, your honest perspective will help me tremendously as I move forward. Lastly, please know that you have every right to not respond or pass on any question for which you are not comfortable responding. Your time and perspective are very much appreciated. Do you have any questions before I get started with the interview questions?

## **Interview Questions/Observation Notes:**

**Think about your time during college in answering these questions.**

1. How prepared did you feel to graduate from college when you started?
2. Was there ever a time you were considering leaving college?
  - a. If so, tell me about why you felt that way. (RF 1b, c)
  - b. Follow up (if not mentioned): Was there anyone on campus (faculty or staff) who was helped you decide to not leave, to stay? (RF 1)
  - c. In what way(s) were they instrumental in your decision to stay? (RF 1a, b, c, 2)
3. Who built your confidence that you could be successful in college?
  - a. Follow up: what did they do specifically that made you feel confident? (RF 1b)
4. What other supports were available that made you feel successful as a student (RF 1c)?

5. What about them, their personality that has influenced your decision to stay / or convinced you that you can be successful in college (RF 2)?
6. What resources or advice was most helpful to you in remaining in school (if they didn't quit) (RF 1, 1a, b, c)
7. What advice would you give other community college students who may be ready to quit, to leave college?
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic?

## APPENDIX C: STAFF / FACULTY INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

### Protocol – Faculty or Staff Interview----

**Researcher:** William Ashcraft

**Date:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Participant #1:**

- **Signed Informed Consent**

**Location:**

**Sensitizing Concept:** What is the effect of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence?

**Description of Setting:**

.

**Opening Script:**

*Welcome*

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is William Ashcraft and I am a doctoral student and researcher at Old Dominion University.

I look forward to our discussion and hearing what you have to say. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

*Purpose of Study*

Before proceeding, I would like to ask that you review the documents in front of you. First, you will see a brief description of my study. The purpose of my study is to learn about your perspectives of the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Through learning from you I hope to better understand the role faculty and staff mentoring plays in community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Your insights today will be instrumental in advancing my study and understanding of how community colleges can best assist student retention and success.

### *Agenda*

Over the course of the next 60 minutes, I will be asking you a series of approximately 6 questions and I will be recording your responses.

### *Role of Facilitators and Participants*

I am the researcher for this study and will therefore be facilitating this interview. My role is to ask you probing questions and learn from our dialogue. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate let me know at any time. Your role as a participant is voluntary. Please know that you are not bound in any way to continued participation. If at any time you would like to discontinue participation in the study, please let me know and you will be removed from the study.

### *Participants Rights and Responsibilities*

In order for me to fully gather your thoughts and opinions, I would like to stress that there are no right and wrong responses to the answers. I am here to better understand your perspective about the role of faculty and staff mentoring community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. While remaining respectful of the opinion you share, your honest perspective will help me tremendously as I move forward. Lastly, please know that you have every right to not respond or pass on any question for which you are not comfortable responding. Your time and perspective are very much appreciated. Do you have any questions before I get started with the questions?

### **Interview Questions/Observation Notes:**

**Think about your work with students and answering the following questions.**

1. Please describe what you do to help community college students stay in school (RF 1)
2. In student interviews, you were identified as being important to a students' desire to stay in college. What is it you do that makes students feel they can finish school (RF 1, 1a, 2, 3)?
3. Based on your experience and in your opinion, what are the most frequent reasons why community college students drop out of school (RF 1)?
4. Tell me about a time in the last year (or that really stands out to you) when you helped a student develop confidence in his or her academic abilities (RF 1b)?
5. Tell me about a time in the last year (or that really stands out to you) when you provided support for a struggling community college student (RF 1c)?



6. What resources or supports have most helped you to support students to complete college (RF 1,3)?

**APPENDIX D: INFORMED CONSENT LETTER-****Informed Consent Document****OLD DOMINION UNIVERSITY**

**PROJECT TITLE:** An Exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence

**INTRODUCTION**

The purposes of this form are to give you information that may affect your decision whether to say YES or NO to participation in this research, and to record the consent of those who say YES. The project entitled The Impact of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence

**RESEARCHERS**

**Principal Investigator:** Dr. Mitchell Williams, PhD, College of Education, Department of Education Foundations and Leadership

**Investigator:** William E. Ashcraft, MA, College of Education, Department of Education Foundations and Leadership

**DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH STUDY**

The purpose of this study is to explore the effect of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student's self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. This study is an extension of the study, "The Impact of Faculty and Staff on High-Risk College Student Persistence" (Schreiner, Noel, Anderson, & Cantwell, 2011).

If you decide to participate, then you will join a study involving research of the impact of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Student participants are expected to take part in one (maximum of 60 minutes) primary interview. Once interviews are transcribed and data analysis has taken place, participants will be asked to review analysis for validity purposes; this review should take no more than 30 minutes. If you say YES, then your participation will last for no more than 90 total minutes which includes one face-to-face interview and an e-mail exchange. The interview will take place in a conference room at the participant's college. Approximately 20 community college students (from one community college) will be participating in this study.

Faculty / Staff participants are expected to take part in one (maximum of 60 minutes) interview. Once interviews are transcribed and data analysis has taken place, participants will be asked to review analysis for validity purposes; this review should take no more than 30 minutes. If you say YES, then your participation will last for no more than 90 total minutes which includes one face-to-face interview and an e-mail exchange. The interview will take place in a conference room at the participant's college.

Approximately 20 community college students and 20 faculty and staff personnel (from one community college) will be participating in this study.

### **EXCLUSIONARY CRITERIA**

Failure to participate in the scheduled interview(s) would keep you from participating in this study.

### **RISKS AND BENEFITS**

**RISKS:** If you decide to participate in this study, there are no known risks associated with this research. However, as with any research, there is some possibility that you may be subject to risks that have not yet been identified.

**BENEFITS:** There are no known benefits to you that would result from your participation in this research.

### **COSTS AND PAYMENTS**

The researchers want your decision about participating in this study to be absolutely voluntary. The researchers are unable to give you any payment for participating in this study.

### **NEW INFORMATION**

If the researchers find new information during this study that would reasonably change your decision about participating, then they will give it to you.

### **CONFIDENTIALITY**

The researchers will take reasonable steps to keep private information, such as interview transcriptions, field notes, and audio recordings of the interviews, confidential. The researcher will remove identifiers from the information, names of participants and college name, store information in a locked filing cabinet prior to its processing, and store all electronic data on a password protected computer. The results of this study may be used in reports, presentations, and publications; but the researcher will not identify you. Of course, your records may be subpoenaed by court order or inspected by government bodies with oversight authority.

**WITHDRAWAL PRIVILEGES**

It is OK for you to say NO. Even if you say YES now, you are free to say NO later, and walk away or withdraw from the study -- at any time. Your decision will not affect your relationship with Old Dominion University, or otherwise cause a loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. The researchers reserve the right to withdraw your participation in this study, at any time, if they observe potential problems with your continued participation.

**COMPENSATION FOR ILLNESS AND INJURY**

If you say YES, then your consent in this document does not waive any of your legal rights. However, in the event of any harm, injury, or illness arising from this study, neither Old Dominion University nor the researchers are able to give you any money, insurance coverage, free medical care, or any other compensation for such injury. In the event that you suffer injury as a result of participation in any research project, you may contact Dr. Mitchell Williams at 757-683-4344 or Mr. William E. Ashcraft at 303-253-0985, Dr. Jill Stefaniak, current chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Committee, at [jstefaniak@odu.edu](mailto:jstefaniak@odu.edu) or 757-683-6696, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

**VOLUNTARY CONSENT**

By signing this form, you are saying several things. You are saying that you have read this form or have had it read to you, that you are satisfied that you understand this form, the research study, and its risks and benefits. The researchers should have answered any questions you may have had about the research. If you have any questions later, please contact:

Dr. Mitchell Williams, [mrwillia@odu.edu](mailto:mrwillia@odu.edu), 757-683-4344

Mr. William E. Ashcraft, [washc001@odu.edu](mailto:washc001@odu.edu) 303-253-0985

If at any time you feel pressured to participate, or if you have any questions about your rights or this form, then you should contact Dr. Jill Stefaniak, current chair of the Darden College of Education Human Subjects Committee, at [jstefaniak@odu.edu](mailto:jstefaniak@odu.edu) or 757-683-6696, or the Old Dominion University Office of Research at 757-683-3460 who will be glad to review the matter with you.

And importantly, by signing below, you are telling the researcher YES, that you agree to participate in this study. The researcher should give you a copy of this form for your records.

<b>Subject's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
---	-------------

INVESTIGATOR'S STATEMENT

I certify that I have explained to this subject the nature and purpose of this research, including benefits, risks, costs, and any experimental procedures. I have described the rights and protections afforded to human subjects and have done nothing to pressure, coerce, or falsely entice this subject into participating. I am aware of my obligations under state and federal laws, and promise compliance. I have answered the subject's questions and have encouraged him/her to ask additional questions at any time during the course of this study. I have witnessed the above signature(s) on this consent form.

<b>Investigator's Printed Name &amp; Signature</b>	<b>Date</b>
--	-------------

**APPENDIX E: CORRESPONDENCE WITH PANEL OF EXPERTS**

Dear Dr. Brown:

I hope you are well --- I am sorry to re-send this (hopefully I am not pestering you), I thought that perhaps with the Holidays, and the spate of emails you receive, my initial request may be floating near Jimmy Hoffa, so I would send again.

If your availability has changed since we spoke in October, please advise.

Thank you again so much ---

Bill

**From:** Ashcraft, William  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 04, 2018 3:23 PM  
**To:** 'brandyabrown@email.arizona.edu'  
**Subject:** Interview Questions / Dissertation

Dear Dr. Brown:

We met at the Mentoring Conference this past October at the University of New Mexico, and you very graciously consented to review my interview questions for my dissertation.

I have attached for your convenience, my Table of Specifications, my Informed Consent and my Protocols.

Should you need anything further, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Thank you so much for your time, your expertise and your comments.

Best,

Bill

William Ashcraft  
Professor of History

Dear Bob:

Thank you so much for your reply!

To respond to your question:

I intend to NOT use the term High-Risk on any student accessed forms (protocol, informed consent, etc.) for the reasons you suggest. I realize that could be (probably is) inflammatory, and do not wish to create barriers in any way!

Thank you again so much!!

Bill

**From:** M Garvey [mailto:[r.garvey@easynet.co.uk](mailto:r.garvey@easynet.co.uk)]  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 11, 2018 9:08 AM  
**To:** Ashcraft, William  
**Subject:** Questions

Dear William, Thank you for your email. I am sorry that it has taken me a few days to reply - lots to catch up on after the holiday period here! Overall, I think your interview schedule looks fine and should help you to probe what it is you are hoping to find. I do have one question, for the student interviews, how would they feel about knowing that they are 'high risk'? Do they know this and accept it? I hope this was helpful? Best wishes, Bob

Professor Bob Garvey  
Managing Partner  
The Lio Partnership  
13 Blakeney Place  
York  
YO10 3HZ  
E: [r.garvey@easynet.co.uk](mailto:r.garvey@easynet.co.uk)  
M: 0044 (0) 7798754366  
Skype: robert.garvey7  
Twitter: @RobertGarvey6  
LinkedIn: <https://www.linkedin.com/in/bob-garvey-664a94/>

Dear Dr. Garvey:

We met at the Mentoring Conference this past October at the University of New Mexico, and you very graciously consented to review my interview questions for my dissertation. I particularly enjoyed our conversation about the Female Mentor and the Adventures of Telemachus!

I have attached for your convenience, my Table of Specifications, my Informed Consent and my Protocols.

Should you need anything further, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Thank you so much for your time, your expertise and your comments.

Best,

Bill

William Ashcraft

Dear Dr. Lunsford:

Thank you so very much for your time and energy in my behalf.

I doubt that I could ever do anything for you, but should such an opportunity arise, I trust you will call on me.

All the best to you!

Bill

**From:** Lunsford, Laura [mailto:lunsfordl@uncw.edu]

**Sent:** Monday, January 08, 2018 8:26 AM

**To:** Ashcraft, William

**Subject:** Re: Interview Questions - Dissertation

Dear Bill, so nice to hear from you.

Your questions look great. My suggestions are contract changes. I recommend you go through the intro part and make it as short as possible for people don't get lost. I made some suggestions on the student protocol along those lines.



I also encourage you to add a memory prompt on both protocols and provide suggested one for you. I retrieve some of your questions to focus on behaviors and asked about questions in a common timeframe for best comparison. It is always better to ask them what is helpful to them rather than to ask what they think would be helpful to others. In other words people inflate what they say about others. Take or leave any suggestions and good luck. Let me know how goes.

All the best, Laura

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**From:** Ashcraft, William <[William.Ashcraft@ccd.edu](mailto:William.Ashcraft@ccd.edu)>  
**Sent:** Thursday, January 4, 2018 5:25 PM  
**To:** Lunsford, Laura  
**Subject:** Interview Questions - Dissertation

Dear Dr. Lunsford:

We met at the Mentoring Conference this past October at the University of New Mexico, and you very graciously consented to review my interview questions for my dissertation.

I have attached for your convenience, my Table of Specifications, my Informed Consent and my Protocols.

Should you need anything further, please don't hesitate to call on me.

Thank you so much for your time, your expertise and your comments.

Best,

Bill

William Ashcraft  
Professor of History

(The Protocols on the succeeding pages are part of Dr. Lunsford's response)

**Protocol – Faculty or Staff Interview**

**Researcher: William Ashcraft**

**Date:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Participant #1:**

- **Signed Informed Consent**

**Start Time: End Time:**

**Location:**

**Sensitizing Concept: Exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence**

**Description of Setting:**

**Opening Script:**

*Welcome*

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is William Ashcraft and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I look forward to our discussion and hearing what you have to say. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

*Purpose of Study*

Before proceeding, I would like to ask that you review the documents in front of you. First, you will see a brief description of my study. The purpose of my study is to learn about your perspectives as we explore faculty and staff mentoring on community college student's self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Through learning from you I hope to better understand the role faculty and staff mentoring plays in community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Your insights today will be instrumental in advancing my study and understanding of how community colleges can best assist student retention and success.

*Agenda*

Over the course of the next 60 minutes, I will be asking you a series of approximately 6 questions and I will be recording your responses.

#### *Role of Facilitators and Participants*

I am the sole researcher for this study and will therefore be facilitating this interview. My role is to ask you probing questions and learn from our dialogue. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate let me know at any time. Your role as a participant is voluntary. Please know that you are not bound in any way to continued participation. If at any time you would like to discontinue participation in the study, please let me know and you will be removed from the study.

#### *Participants Rights and Responsibilities*

In order for me to fully gather your thoughts and opinions, I would like to stress that there are no right and wrong responses to the answers. I am here to better understand your perspective about faculty and staff mentoring on community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. While remaining respectful of the opinion you share, your honest perspective will help me tremendously as I move forward. Lastly, please know that you have every right to not respond or pass on any question for which you are not comfortable responding. Your time and perspective are very much appreciated. Do you have any questions before I get started with the questions?

#### **Interview Questions:**

**Think about your work with students and answering the following questions.**

1. Please describe what you do to help community college students stay in school.
2. In student interviews, you were identified as being important to a students' desire to stay in college. What is it you do that makes students feel they can finish school?
3. Based on your experience and in your opinion, what are the most frequent reasons why community college students drop out of school?
4. Tell me about a time in the last year (or that really stands out to you) when you helped a student develop confidence in his or her academic abilities?
5. Tell me about a time in the last year (or that really stands out to you) when you provided support for a struggling community college student?
6. What resources or supports have most helped you to support students to complete college?

**Protocol – Student Interview ----**

**Researcher: William Ashcraft**

**Date:**

**Start Time:**

**End Time:**

**Participant #1:**

- **Signed Informed Consent**

**Start Time: End Time:**

**Location:**

**Sensitizing Concept: Exploration of faculty and staff mentoring on high-risk community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence**

**Description of Setting:**

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**Opening Script:**

*Welcome*

Good afternoon and welcome. My name is William Ashcraft and I am a doctoral student at Old Dominion University. I look forward to our discussion and hearing what you have to say. Thank you for taking the time to meet with me.

*Purpose of Study*

Before proceeding, I ask you to review these documents. First, there is a brief description of my study. The purpose of my study is to learn about your perspectives as we explore faculty and staff mentoring on community college student's self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Through learning from you I hope to better understand the role faculty and staff mentoring plays in community college student self-efficacy, support systems, and persistence. Your insights will advance understanding of how community colleges can best assist student retention and success.

*Agenda*

I will be asking you a series of approximately 8 questions over about 60 minutes. I will be recording your responses.

### *Role of Facilitators and Participants*

I am the sole researcher for this study. My role is to ask you questions and learn from our dialogue. If you have any questions about the study, please do not hesitate let me know at any time. Your role as a participant is voluntary. Please know that you are not bound in any way to continued participation. If at any time you would like to discontinue participation in the study, please let me know and you will be removed from the study.

### *Participants Rights and Responsibilities*

To fully gather your thoughts and opinions, I remind you that there are no right and wrong responses. Your honest perspective will help me tremendously as I move forward. Lastly, please know that you have every right to not respond or pass on any question for which you are not comfortable responding. Your time and perspective are very much appreciated. Do you have any questions before I get started with the questions?

### **Interview Questions:**

**Think about your time during college in answering these questions.**

- 1. How prepared did you feel to graduate from college when you started?**
2. Was there ever a time you were considering leaving college?
  - a. If so, tell me about why you felt that way.
  - b. Follow up if not mentioned: Was there anyone on campus (faculty or staff) who was helped you make a decision to not leave, to stay?
  - c. In what way(s) were they instrumental in your decision to stay?

{confusing here – is this still about leaving college? – if so, make it a d. or maybe this is a new question altogether.

3. Who built your confidence that you could be successful in college?
  - a. Follow up: what did they do specifically that made you feel confident?
4. What other supports were available that made you feel successful as a student?
5. What about their personality (not sure they could really answer about personality – suggest rewording). has influenced your decision to stay / or convinced you that you can be successful in college?

6. What resources or advice was most helpful to you in remaining in school (if they didn't quit)
  
7. What advice would you give other community college students who may be ready to quit, to leave college? (suggest using the wording above as I think that is really what you want to ask and they are most qualified to answer)
  
8. Is there anything else you would like to tell me about this topic?

Other questions to consider asking:

Thank you blah blah.

**APPENDIX F – INVITATION EMAIL TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY**

Subject Line: Help me with my PhD and get a free lunch!

Dear Student:

I am inviting you to be a part of my PhD dissertation / study.

You have been selected potentially for my study because you are a successful first generation college student.

I would like to interview you for approximately one hour so that I can learn why you have been successful in college, and about some of the people here that have helped you to be a successful college student.

In return for your time and insights, I can offer you a \$10 gift card to either Starbucks or Subway, or take your order, and bring you the meal you request prior to our interview.

If you are willing to help me, please reply to this email and indicate your willingness and a good phone number so that I can call you and make the interview arrangements.

Thank you in advance for your help, and for helping me understand the secrets of your college success.

Best,

Bill

**APPENDIX G INVITATION FOR FACULTY AND STAFF TO PARTICIPATE**

Dear \_\_\_\_\_:

In interviewing students relative to my PhD dissertation, you were named as being influential in a student's desire to remain in college --- to persist ---

I wonder if you would be willing to be interviewed by me for 60 minutes, to speak about persistence and your work with students?

I could do Monday, April 30 at 12:30pm, or virtually any time Tuesday the 1<sup>st</sup> of May, Thursday the 3<sup>rd</sup> of May, or Friday the 4<sup>th</sup> of May in your office if that works for you?

Please let me know what day / time works best for you.

In the meantime, thank you for what you do to help our students succeed!

Please advise. . . .

Bill



**APPENDIX H TRANSCRIPTION VALIDATION BY PARTICIPANT**

Student #8:

Attached please find the transcription of your recent interview with me.

Please review the transcript and do the **following by Monday, April 23, 2018** when you reply:

1. In the reply, add any further thoughts or clarifications you would like to have as part of the interview (if any);
2. Whether or not you have additions, please indicate that (if you are) satisfied with the transcription as being accurate of your thoughts.

Thank you again for the privilege of meeting with you, and learning from you.

I wish you nothing but the best as you continue your educational journey.

Best,

Bill

## APPENDIX I

### Reflective Journal

#### April 5

Today is the first day of data collection. In the instance, the data collection will consist of interviewing at least 20 “high-risk” community college students. High-risk is defined in at least one way by the literature as being first generation college student. Today, I have three such interviews scheduled. The protocols are readied, the informed consents are ready, the gift cards for Starbucks (their choice) have been purchased. The interview questions have been reviewed by my dissertation chair and committee, and a panel of experts. Yet, with all of this preparation, I can’t help but feel nervous as I begin these interviews.

The interesting thing about these feelings of nervousness is that I have been regularly speaking to students in my capacity as a history professor for nearly a decade. I feel confident in my ability to establish a rapport with them, and to get them to talk. My background as a banker for nearly a quarter of a century has well prepared me for that type of dialogue. Many of the absolute best memories I have at my institution have come from my establishing a personal relationship with my students.

As I reflect on the nature of my nerves, I imagine they stem from any of several possible sources. First, there is the fact that I do not know in any capacity the students I am speaking with. When I interview students normally they are mine. We have established some sort of entrée and comfort level with them, prior to our first meeting. In fact, many students that enroll in my courses have specifically taken the course because I am teaching it --- So, in many cases, there is some sort of comfort that has been established. In this case, they do not know me, and I do not

know them. Additionally, there is no reason for them to speak with me (unlike my students who may have the hope of receiving a better grade as a result or by-product of this relationship), or tell me anything.

Can I get them to talk? I have spoken to all the students that I will interview for a few minutes to get a sense of their level of talkativeness, whether or not I can understand them (if I am unable to understand them, transcription, already a tedious process, will be rendered impossible). I have been in the most general terms described the interview over the phone, and asked them if they thought that they would have something to contribute to this Can I get them to say something memorable?

This is especially worrisome to me because for over the past 18 months or so that I have pondered my dissertation topic, and read countless journal articles and books, I have “fallen in love” with it. It has spoken to me on many levels, and now, today, I am scared that somehow, I will be unworthy of my topic; unworthy to tell the stories of these students and their shared experiences. I am afraid because of my questions, or because they don’t know me, or because I am recording their answers, or because this will be used ultimately to achieve a doctoral degree, MY doctor degree, or I am afraid that the technology won’t work, or that I will erase one of the interviews --- these and many other reasons that I am unable to get in touch with, I am scared to death.

Finally, the time for the first interview has arrived. The first student I am speaking with today is a 23 year old Hispanic female who is interested in getting a Human Services degree. The second student I will interview today is a 58 year old Hispanic woman who has come to college, basically to follow the example of her three “awesome” daughters, one of whom is earning a

doctoral degree at the University of Texas. The third student I am speaking with today is a 30-year-old Caucasian male who is still trying to find his own way through college and a career.

The second student I interviewed is my age (the Hispanic female). I well understand her experiences of being a student at this age. While we know how to work, at least from my experience, our minds may not work as quickly; some of the plasticity of our brains has hardened. The Caucasian male's story resonates to me, because he, like me has spent time in the foster care system. I also identified with him in that even though I was a Vice President of a Southern California bank, and had three children by the time I was 30, I don't think I truly knew what I wanted to be (to think I have gone this far, is nothing short of mind-blowing). I think one of the take-aways from these first interviews that I can relate with is that they, like me are proud of their accomplishments; they like me have gone further than they thought they would or could. The reason I share these similarities is that I must remind myself that while I should identify with them, so that I can empathize with them, I shouldn't (and must not) empathize TOO much --- I must remain objective. If I identify too much, I must inject myself in the interview, or write their story in my voice, which ultimately is disrespectful to them, and will taint the data I obtain.

I feel as if all three interviews went well. Although I felt a bit stiff and not as relaxed; ironically, the students were very relaxed, but I felt as though I was too stiff and almost robotic in my questions (probably the pressure was getting to me). Maybe because of that, my initial feeling of the interviews was that they yielded some good information, but nothing "magical." As I processed the interviews in my own mind, I came away with a different feeling than the initial reaction. They were open, honest and full of great information, magic or not. My follow up questions were generally sound --- but I have to be careful to not "lead the witness" and put

words in their mouths; I must constantly guard against injecting myself and making the interview about me. Hopefully constantly being on guard against this will be a source of prevention.

### **April 6**

Eager to get started today --- I have three interviews scheduled, one just emailed me to advise that her “little guy” is sick, and so we have rescheduled for the following Friday (April 13). I have resolved to be more relaxed and enjoy speaking with the students even to the point of not depending on the script (other than to ask the predetermined questions), so that the conversation is more natural, and thus the material gleaned from the interviews will be more useful.

My first interview was with a young lady with a piercing in the middle of her tongue and a ring through her lip. In some ways, as she spoke she seemed defensive, maybe more defiant. When she spoke of her childhood and not having money, while many of her friends did have money, there was a subtle anger that was apparent. By the same token, her anger was softened by a justifiable pride in what she has accomplished in spite of a limited physical handicap (hard of hearing) and the lack of temporal advantages that any of her friends and acquaintances enjoyed. There was also a sense of loss at the death of her grandmother, who seemed to be a rock, the one who may have been the biggest advocate or cheerleader that this student had in her life. That sense of loneliness or loss seemed to engulf her at times. It was a reminder to me that this life can surely be a lonely place if we don't have advocates or cheerleaders, or confidantes to share our joys and help us through our sorrows. I reflected during that interview and afterwards of those I have loved and lost, those who saw the good in me (as did this student's grandmother) even when it seemed and felt as if no one else did. Her sense of accomplishment in spite of everything else she lacked (support system, financial means) shone through when she looked at

me at one point during the interview and said almost fiercely, "I am a scholar." I almost felt as if she is convincing herself and declaring it at the same time. It almost felt as if it was a declaration to those who had marginalized her because of her handicap, or because of her lack of financial means, all those who said in word and deed or manner that college is not for her --- hey, I am a scholar. At the same time, because of those and other factors, she was also convincing herself, and that convincing could be a lifetime pursuit due to the damage caused by those who said she wasn't good enough.

The second interview of the day was with a student, open and gregarious, employed at the institution in a work study position when she is not attending school. Her open and gregarious nature quickly turned to emotion when we spoke about her experiences in college --- her experiences were marked by family hardship and death, all of which derailed her initial attempt. Her issues with family included some type of mental illness on the part of her mother which thrust this student into the position of being the responsible adult for her younger siblings, while also being the role model for them. She quickly found that she was too far away from home from them, and for the support that they would need for her. She tried college her in Colorado with her family nearby --- then her grandfather was taken ill, and it was expected for her to support him and to take care of him, which further derailed her college experiences.

These stories and the emotion that surrounded it remind me that not everyone's story is a straight path, or moves in a straight, linear way. Each story is unique, and individual; each lesson we learn is unique and individually customized for us. No experience is wasted on us, nor is time lost provided we are moving forward (even if the movement is barely perceptible). It is also a reminder that these stories are sacred, and my responsibility is to be true. True to them, true to their story, true to the charge given to mentors and researchers alike: to do no harm.

**April 7**

Today was much more of a take stock day --- think about what I have learned, what I have experienced through the experiences of the students told in their own voices and take stock of what remains to be done. I went for a nice run on Saturday to think and process and feel. I see how proud these students are of their accomplishments, how grateful they are for those willing to help them, how happy and willing they are to share their remarkable stories, and I am struck by the fact that all of the students thus far interviewed have named multiple faculty / staff influential in their decision to be successful. While we may suspect, and while certainly administrators may mouth these words, truly our people are our best and greatest asset.

I spent much of the afternoon returning phone calls of those students willing to be interviewed and making appointments to interview them. As the semester is starting to wind down, I feel a sense of urgency to get my appointments as quickly as possible with students, so that I can get my appointments made with the student-named faculty and staff. My goal is to be able to make appointments with those faculty and staff named by the students on or before the 20<sup>th</sup> of April.

The other problem I have worked through is my number of students to speak with. At this point, I have near 70 students who have volunteered to be interviewed. I am totally stunned by this tremendous outpouring of help and support, but there is no way to possibly respond to all offers, and finish the data collection before the end of this semester --- if not, then my “subjects” (faculty, staff and students) may not be as glued to their emails, nor have the availability to be interviewed. So, I think, I will increase my number to 23 student interviews and a similar number of faculty and staff. Believe me when I say I would love to interview them all. The stories are

simply priceless, and I love hearing not only the joys and the accomplishments, but I love also hearing about their struggles.

I believe (and the student interviews seem to bear this out) that everyone has a story, and within that defining story, there is a pride in what they have accomplished, and a desire to share their story. I believe that the pride and desire to share, is that our stories are (in our eyes at least) a way or means of defining us and by defining us, describing us. The power of stories. I think and again the interviews seem to bear this out, that part of their pride is that intuitively, these “high-risk” community college students realize that they have a story (or stories) that are unique, and more than a little amazing. The things they have seen, the things they have experienced. Certainly, I think they enjoy sharing their stories and experiences, dare I say, with a white male, because they certainly must realize that so many of their stories and experiences are utterly foreign to me.

Interestingly, one of the reactions or experiences I have had through listening to their stories, and to the countless students that have visited with me through the years is a profound sense of gratitude for the simple things (to me) I enjoyed and took for granted, that I have come to find are so different or foreign to many of my students.

Having a two-parent family, having three meals daily, taking a lunch to school, having a place to lay my head nightly, a home, books --- nothing fancy, I didn't come from money, so I imagined that my life growing up was normal, nothing spectacular, just normal. I have come to find that my definition of normal (could this be defined as “privilege”?) is vastly different and would have been viewed by many of my students as luxurious. One way (of many) that these interviews and the many that have come before, is to be more grateful for what I had growing up, and understand what an amazing life I have been permitted to live.



I have also found that an indispensable quality for a qualitative researcher to possess is a genuine, active curiosity. I remember reading an apocryphal (I hope) story in an oral biography of Harry Truman called “Plain Speaking” where an interviewer was speaking with Alice Roosevelt (daughter of Theodore Roosevelt) where she allegedly said “oh no, my father would never have a meeting on Tuesdays, because Tuesdays was when he brought the prostitute to the White House.” The interviewer supposedly replied, “ok, now about the Panama Canal Treaty. . . .” An example (apocryphal) of what as an interviewer not to do.

As I interview, I constantly try to stay alert to comments, facial expressions, tones of voice, sighs, to try to understand their perspectives, their lived experiences. I think it is vital for me to, as much as possible to allow them to tell their story, to create a comfortable environment where they can feel safe to share the thoughts of their hearts.

## **April 9**

I have also made a more definite decision to almost treat the interview with students more relaxed and more casual. I think the first few interviews I was too stiff. Now, I am being more mindful to be relaxed, and enjoy with, laugh with the students who want to tell me their story.

The student tonight was a difficult interview as she mentioned to me that from the ages of 9-17 she was taken out of her home, and away from her mother, and lived in foster care, group homes, homeless shelters, etc. She said that those places and experiences don't prepare you for higher education, but they prepare you to work in fast food or some other minimum wage job. She also indicated that none of her foster parents, or those with whom she stayed had any college experience or any college aspirations for her. Therefore, at a critical time of her life (adolescence) when she could have, and some would argue should have been preparing for

college, or educational life beyond high school, she didn't have the academic encouragement, nor did she have the social or familial encouragement to prepare herself for college or to attend once she had completed high school (through GED or an actual graduation).

She sits before me as a middle-aged woman (approximately late 30s) and recounts how poorly prepared she was for college before she even began attending. She recounts that when an instructor wrote a positively comment on a paper she had submitted, she said that was the first time anyone had ever praised her for doing something well in a school setting. Then she said to me that when she had received an A in a college course, that was the first time she said, that she ever got an A in any school class. With both assertions, I was so taken aback, that I repeated both to her one at a time and asked if I had heard those comments correctly. She assured me I had heard them as she has spoken them. . .

I remember speaking one day to a student of mine from several years ago. This student was an older student (late 30s) when I met her. To this day, she remains one of the most capable students I had ever worked with. When she was inducted into Phi Theta Kappa (the Honors society for the two-year colleges) in November 2010, she told me the same thing: It was the first time she had ever been recognized for doing anything positive in school.

I am reminded forcefully how important praise (genuine and specific) is for all students, but particularly for those who don't have the strongest of backgrounds academically. I believe they enter in to college with some hope but also some dread. Hope that somehow this will be different, because they are different, but dread because of the all-too real fear that nothing meaningful has changed, they are still the same, and school is still the impossible hurdle they must but can't clear. It almost feels as if they view school as a trick, kind of like Lucy and Charlie Brown and the football, Lucy keeps assuring him he can kick. As Charlie eventually

believes her that she will hold the ball steady, she removes it at the last second and Charlie falls flat on his face. It often feels I believe to these students that college or school in general is that elusive football. Full of promise, full of hope, seductively beckoning them to come, and then, the ball is snatched away --- nothing it seems, has changed after all. It strikes me as I reflect on these stories and these experiences that for many of the students (those interviewed and those not interviewed) filling out the application and related paperwork may be the largest single act of faith they have ever made in their lives.

### **April 10**

One of the things that has consistently revealed itself is the self-confidence of these community college student, but I am struck by how fragile that self-confidence is. As an example, the student I was interviewing today said at some point during the interview, "I am a scholar." She said it somewhat defiantly, but I was unsure if she was trying to convince herself or me.

I have also been consistently shown how challenging their lives have been. How difficult high school has been either because of their social status, their economic status, or some type of disability or other issue that has made what should there a fun time of their lives a very difficult time of their lives. It certainly would be an interesting study to examine how high school was for community college students. I have a working theory that we would find their experiences in high school largely put them on track that led to challenges and all to our classrooms.

One of the other things that came up in the interviews today that surprised was that by a student that went she received a poor grade on the site or on a test for other graded material, she experienced a sense of shame or embarrassment and did not want to see the instructor. This reminded me of the study by Annette Lareau about low income persons, and middle income

persons and how they see education and institutions in general. That has also helped the to reflect on why students who needed the most help avoided me, those who would be the upper level of any class I taught were constantly in and out my office. This also serves might be it is to be intentional it might those students may be struggling. They are not avoiding me because of me, they are avoiding the because of this conditioning.

One other thing about this interview that really stands out is how important it is to be approachable and kind in how we interact with these student's who have particular needs in our classes. It strikes me almost as if these student's with this fragile self confidence are looking for ways out of our room and away from these possible feelings of inadequacy. So if we are not kind or approachable we have now given that permission almost give up or quit.

### **April 11**

This particular student is an ESL student and she talked about how, probably due to her language challenges, important it is for her to be dealt with in kindness. She said something that really struck me is that "kindness is the thing."

One of the other things that stood out to me this was how these high-risk students (or maybe it is "millennials") in particular look at small things like learning their names, using personal experiences by their influential mentors. It seems to have an effect of what humanizing the instructor or the staff member. It also helps these students who are struggling to see that we struggle to from time to time, and how we didn't let the struggle defeat us.

Along that same line a second interview today brought up how important it was for them not to feel overlooked; very simple interpersonal traits such as how important it is to be heard, to be listened to, once again how important it is for that individual in a relationship to be authentic.

I couldn't help but think how important these traits are in any relationship. Be authentic. Listen, and sincerely care about the person. Are those not important traits in any relationship not just that of a mentor?

This other student that I spoke with is a Dreamer. She is here illegally but covered by the executive order with the acronym of DACA. Speaking with her and hearing about her frustration with the current administration and the political maneuvering with it this order, and how this has affected her personally and as a student, has sincerely inspired me and it causes me to wish that those who are so eager to have these people be deported, I wish that they could spend a few minutes talking to some of the students that I speak with. I truly believe they would have or experience a change of heart.

One last thing these interviews taught me today is how important interpersonal skills are that are wonderful for any type of relationship are spoken in this mentoring relationship as well. One mentor was described as being influential because she does not just do her job she talks to you, she gets to know you as an individual. She's happy all the time you want to be around her she loves her job and loves what she does.

## **April 12**

The interview today was particularly impactful to me as this student revealed some heavily personal matters. This student who currently has a 4.0 grade point average dropped out of high school during their 10<sup>th</sup> grade year as they had a myriad of home problems, coupled with this particular student wrestling with his sexual identity and feeling no support at home or at school or in his larger community. Several of the takeaways that I walked away with. He said if

Satan had a face it would be the face of his stepfather. Can you imagine feeling that way!! Can you imagine having that said about you!!

He talked about how his stepfather sexually abused this student's sister. He talked about a mom that taught him many things but could not protect him from this stepfather. This whole story caused me to think again about how challenging high school is and its effect on students particularly those who end up in community colleges. Again I think this could be an interesting study for some future date.

Additionally I am reflecting once again what an interesting mix our classrooms are. They are veritable Petri dishes of emotions experiences interactions aspirations abilities, etc. It is a constant one for to me that our education system, lumping all of these different backgrounds and personalities together works as well as it does. This also reminds me how important training our faculty and staff is. Our faculty are content experts. They are not trained unlike those in public education in the intricacies of classroom management, nor in dealing with people from extremely diverse backgrounds, or with extremely diverse needs. Having such training is, I believe is indispensable to the success of that instructor as well as to the success of these students.

Another student today that I interviewed has come to us from a foster home / foster family background. This of course hits especially close to home for me, as I was a foster child. Unlike my situation, one home, one set of parents that ultimately adopted me, this student moved around from place to place. The challenges academically that this student faced has been staggering. I could not help but wonder how my life would have been different had I not been placed in the home that I was placed in.

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**April 13**

Another foreign language student was interviewed today. She spoke about how much like the other foreign language student, about how important it was to be reassured, to be told frequently that everything would be ok. She said that those who particularly impacted her were soft to her in their manner and approach. How they showed her by their actions that they cared about her, by their facial expressions and tone of voice. I think one of the best quotes I have heard was said by her it expresses some I think of fears faced by foreign language students, "I feel like I know things like other students."

One other interview today reminded out important it is for faculty / staff to demystify ourselves. The student recounted in high school her teachers told them essentially to fear professors. While this may or may not have been a tactic to get their high school students to get their work in on time, or a direct reflection of the high school teacher's own personal experience. The overall effect in my judgment is that it puts a barrier between us and our students. I do not believe that fear and education are compatible. You can't learn in an environment of fear --- only in an environment of love and comfortability. In my own experience, students won't come to you to confess some type of inadequacy or failing if they fear you. We must find ways to get more involved with our students on campus, and even I think during their senior year in high school --- maybe a "meet professors" event??

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**April 16**

A very interesting, unanticipated outcome (that I can't use!). One of the students being interviewed named my wife (who is an adjunct in the communications department) as one of several who have been influential in her desire to stay in college, to not quit. Needless to say, I

am proud of my wife, I can't tell her, I can't use it, and so I can only (for now at least) confide it to this exercise.

Another interesting comment from the same student, was that she dropped out of high school, largely because of an extremely negative interaction with a high school English instructor, I wrote down this comment, "he robbed from me my joy in learning" it was a petty misunderstanding and position that was taken, and I can see why she felt frustrated. It reminds me of how important interactions are, and the damage done especially due to the power imbalance, from a thoughtless act, or careless word. I read recently a study that described the parts of your brain that light up when socially rejected are the same parts that light up (in an FMRI) when you have been physically hurt. The experience with this student still resonates with her nearly thirty years after it occurred.

I have reflected on this time and time again and see a possible connection in my own educational experience. I had always had great interactions with my teachers throughout all grade levels. That is, until I entered Long Beach City College, where I felt as though my professors (even the history professors!!!) didn't care if I was there or not. My interactions with them felt as if I was bothering them, or that they didn't have time for me. Perhaps a connection to why I didn't complete any classes the entire first year and then left not to return until I was in my early thirties. The experience shared by the student reminded me of a similar painful experience that impacted me in similar ways that it impacted her.

### **April 17**

Three interviews today. The biggest takeaways for me, the role of a mentor as a role model. One student in particular spoke about her variety of influential mentors and how these



mentors inspired her, and have shown her how to live their lives, or handle their business and even in one case, a potential profession. This seems to support one of the functions of mentoring espoused by Kathy Kram in her groundbreaking book, *Mentoring at work*. I wonder of any of us realize the impact we have on one another? I wonder if we will ever know the way(s) in which we touch each other, or influence, without even knowing it? It is scary and quite humbling to consider how our lives interact or intersect and the powerful consequences of that meeting.

It is appropriate to think of this --- today is the 91<sup>st</sup> birthday of the former president of the bank for which I worked for 25 years. He was one of the finest men with whom I have worked. I loved how he modeled himself for us as an example of how to be a professional man. I found myself often consciously copying him. The truth? I doubt that he ever knew the impact he had on me, as I never told him.

The last interview of today was particularly impactful to me. A beautiful young lady from a Moslem (former) province of the Soviet Union told me a particularly heartbreaking story of her coming to America --- a story of fraud and deceit committed against this student and her family by a company promising things that they did not deliver to the tune of \$15,000. She told me she could never tell her parents about this and would put the phone on mute so that she could sob into it without her parents hearing her. She followed that story with another heartbreaking story of an experience she had in a chemistry class that she was forced to ultimately withdraw from.

This story according to her telling included favoritism, random and inconsistent enforcing of rules, and ended after her withdrawal with the faculty member in a chancer encounter telling her she was glad she had withdrawn because she wasn't smart enough to be in a chemistry class.

I can't imagine how that must have impacted that student. Perhaps the first experience made her strong enough to withstand such a hurtful comment. Once again, how important to be self-aware (an EI trait) so that we are aware when we are tired or less than our best (stresses of life, tired, etc) to protect from making these types of comments. We are in a very powerful position. To our students, we represent role models, and success, in a profound way for many of these people for whom they may not have many successes from which to draw. A cross word or something even more hurtful carries even more weight because of from whom it came.

### **April 18**

I am nearing the end of the student interviews and have been unfailingly impressed with the rich data, thick descriptions they have provided of their lived experiences. I worry that my inadequacies will limit being a worthy presenter of the marvelous stories and insights that it has been mine to receive. This student has had some most interesting health challenges which are not readily apparent either by sight or even in conversation. They are only apparent by his telling of the story, apparently some learning disabilities which have been more challenging as a result of a Traumatic Brain Injury. He spoke at some length of how kind both of his influential mentors have been to him by being flexible in the ways in which he completes assignments. This reminds me as this has been discussed (in different words, but similar meanings) of the importance of teaching generalized content to specific individuals, and being flexible in due dates, etc. to the specific individuals. No two students' conditions or needs are the same, some human kindness, some degree of flexibility (as appropriate) is needed and welcomed by first generation students. Particularly first-generation students who may have a variety of life issues or a variety of educational backgrounds and skills. It specifically reminded me of my first summer session in my PhD and the kindness extended to me by my Research Design professor who allowed several

late assignments for full credit. At the end of the semester, she mentioned that to me, and then kindly suggested that other instructors may not be as kind, understanding or tolerant. <Message heard --- but at that time, I needed the kindness and mercy she extended as I needed time to understand or figure out what I was supposed to do. Perhaps in similar ways, first-generation need some more time and understanding in understanding or figuring out, or even building up the confidence (efficacy) to complete specific assignments.

### **April 19**

I guess every now and then you have a clunker. Today was mine. After 19 superb interviews, today was one that was anything but superb. The student asked me if I was going to make her cry? I said, probably not, but to be honest there had been some students that felt some emotion in their responses. She said, “well, I’m a crier.” I prepared myself for a moving, powerful interview, and instead the answers were opposite of what she had suggested previously.

Perhaps she steeled herself against crying, I do not know, but the interview that normally takes about 50-60 minutes was over completely in about 15 minutes due to the shortness of answers, and the paucity of usable material. There wasn’t any kind of vine extended by her that I could grab for any profit. Perhaps having an interview such as this strengthens my previous interviews as it certainly shows I did not stack the deck to be sure I got the best interviews, discarding all others. This interview certainly proves that!

At this stage of my study, I have decided with just a few student interviews scheduled, I would begin interviewing faculty and staff who have been named by high-risk students thus far interviewed.

I begin these interviews with some concern, fearing that the faculty and staff that I know from previous interactions will say what they may think I want to hear, and the faculty and staff I

do not have previous interactions with, that they might be concerned about answering my questions honestly.

Today I have five interviews scheduled. The first interview is with a student advisor. One of the things that struck me throughout the interview with her is the number of times she used the word relationship. This word particularly struck a chord with me as “relationship” is at the heart of mentoring. I would estimate she used the word at least a dozen times in our hour or so together.

One of the other things that struck me in her was her passion for student success and her willingness to be available to students in a variety of ways including providing her home cell phone for student use. I particularly loved a phrase that she used to her students that may be struggling, “keep swimming.” I love the simplicity of this phrase, and the deep meaning behind it. This phrase illustrates what the students need to do and is very encouraging. But that phrase only works if there is any relationship, the point she continued to make.

This first interview reassured me that all will be well as I interview faculty staff. My heart was full as she continued to emphasize the value of relationships and the need to form them. She also mentioned something I had not considered, the importance of remembering little things about people. How those insignificant things are not so insignificant to others!

The second interview today was with a math professor with whom I had not previously interacted. I felt a bit of concern with scheduling the interview that his English speaking skills could be limited. Within moments of meeting him, my fears were completely allayed. He spoke with great feeling about seeing himself as a companion on the journey of learning. He spoke about being in partnership with the student’s walking a few steps ahead of them when necessary

and walking beside them most of the time. I could not help but be read by the of that marvelous piece of literature the Inferno, and the poet Virgil serving as a companion to Dante. The other thing that was particularly impressive to me in this interview was his experience as a student 40 years ago at the institution for which he currently teaches. 40 years ago he was what we called the time and he called himself in the interview a "boat person" coming from Vietnam after the fall of Saigon. He spoke about being willing to quit school due to struggles that he had in a class. He and several of his friends, did not understand anything that was going on went to the break room to get a cup of coffee and consider how to withdraw. When they looked up they saw their faculty member standing before them. The faculty member then took each student one by one to his office where he explained in careful detail what they did not understand. This influential person that I was viewing said to me he would not be where he is had it not been for the actions of that professor 40 years ago.

I think the remainder of the interviews fell into much of the same categories. The passion for student success that each staff and faculty member I spoke with exhibited. The ways in which they sought to build relationships with their students regardless of their employment roles or responsibilities.

One thing I think I have taken away today is how hard it is to interview. How hard it is to pay attention to every comment looking for meaning, looking for interpretations, thinking constantly of the proper follow-up question and how to ask the proper open-ended questions that lead the discussion. I have gone home tonight simply exhausted!

**April 20**

Well as bereft of any information or usable data gained from the last interview, these final two interviews were about as rich as could be. The first student confessed during the interview how she had been a Heroin addict for about 10 years, and that you would not have recognized me back then but has been clean and sober for about the past 4-5 years. She spoke with some feeling of a life lost, but a new life found. The biggest takeaways I left from her was how amazing humans are in their ability to recover, or rise above the various setbacks (many of which are self-inflicted) and the second major takeaway, is that as she spoke with some feeling about all of her other responsibilities, family, work, etc., she said something I will never forget, in the midst of telling me about the health problems she has experienced, and the frequency of her desire of wanting to quit college (even on the way up to do the interview!) she said this: you guys need to remember that for us this (college) is extra. For us, this is extra. I have reflected on this time and time throughout the day and into the evening. She's right: she can't give up her children, she can't give up her jobs, she can't (try as she might want) give up her responsibilities. The only "negotiable" item in her daily life is college. A very good reminder to me, and I hope to the rest of community college personnel: college for them, although we believe in it, to our students, this is extra. A reminder again of the need for kindness, compassion and flexibility in working with community college students who have added college life and college work on top of all of their other non-negotiable responsibilities.

The last student interview involved a very sweet Iraqi woman, who told me about her life as a student and the various people at the college that have been influential in her decision to stay. She spoke about a particularly challenging semester that found her, due to primarily family

responsibilities in tears almost every night. The interesting thing is about this interview is that it almost didn't happen, as she missed two appointments. But there was something in her voice that I couldn't explain but caused me to want to forge ahead and try to meet anyway. She mentioned casually but with pleasure that she had just the day before the interview that did happen, she had become a citizen. I am not sure why I asked the next (off-script) question, but I am glad I did. I asked her what it was like to be a citizen of one country for her whole life, and to have lived in an area.

Only two faculty and staff interviews today I think the two major takeaways from the interviews today have been one is a faculty member one is a staff for. Each of them have commonalities though. The first commonality is how important key people in their lives have been helping them go to college and complete college in their own right. The first talked about a high school science teacher who inspired him at that important time, and several inspirational literature instructors who helped him develop a love for learning and for literature. The second interview talked about the importance of a high school guidance counselor who refused to let go of her even after as a senior in high school she found out she was pregnant. This counselor refused to let go of the student, instead encouraging her to continue her dream of attending college. She spoke also of several other people in college who were influential in her subsequent career choice and it attempted graduate school. Both of them yet impressed you with the love they have for their students and they have for the success of their students.

These two interviews were particularly tiring however due to the emotional roller coaster individuals took me on. I felt the absolute lack of direction the first person's life until that key individual arrived. I ached for the one who talked about thinking her life was over when she found out she was pregnant as a senior in high school.

**April 24**

I am now on my eighth interview with faculty and staff one of the things that is continuing to stand out is how shocked and surprised and yet gratified each of the faculty and staff members have been when you have been notified they were influential in a student's decision to stay in college. I am surprised that these good people with such good hearts are unaware of the impact they are having. I do hope there are some tangible ways we can support them and thank them for what they do. It also reminds me how grateful I am for this study as it provides an opportunity to say thank you, and to interact with them all in ways that I don't normally have the privilege of interacting.

One of the takeaways and themes that I have heard in today's interview was how our students are human beings first, and they have complicated lives perhaps the high risk status of these community college students make their lives even more complicated, they come to us with levels of complication even before they become part of our classes. This wonderful faculty member talked about the importance of being flexible and empathetic in our dealings with them and in our expectations for timeliness of assignments. It is clear that she sees her job here as a calling. This also seems to be a theme that is emerging with the faculty and staff I have spoken to thus far.

Two other interviews today were with faculty members from human services. You can definitely see the intentionality behind each of their interactions with their student's. It is clear that they understand the importance of relationships and how to form, and nurture relationships. I can't help but wonder if such skills and attributes can be taught to others who are not in that discipline. It seems logical to be that such skills or traits can be taught and that behaviors can be improved upon.



The last interview of the day is with a science faculty member. He talked about how a negative interaction in college moved him away from a discipline he thought he loved but the instructor in his words kill his love for that subject. He then said to be I get excited in my classes so that others of my students can get excited for my subject. That was very impactful to me: “I get excited so that others can get excited.” It could not help but remind me of what the Greeks ascribed to the word “enthusiasm.” Their definition was “the God within you.” It seems that a passion for, or love for, or enthusiasm for both the student and the content is essential to be a successful mentor.

### **April 30**

Met today with another math professor named as influential. She is well-known to me through years of interactions. What I didn't know is how she sees her students. She said to me that when she had her son, she decided right then and there to be the kind of professor / teacher he would need, when he needed one. That desire seems to drive her in her interactions with her students. It was also interesting to learn from her the challenges she faced being a mathematician, and female in the old Soviet Union. While the Soviets didn't seem to mind back in the 1970s, her colleagues demonstrated an astonishing amount of sexism, but in time, came to depend on her and other female colleagues for help in their math.

She also shared several thank you notes she has received just this semester alone. She said that these positive affirmations keep her doing what she does in spite of the various administrative changes to her discipline that takes much of the joy from her. She derives her satisfaction from her job, her meaning from her students (as I think it should be).

It is interesting to me how often administrators intervene in the classroom, and how often those interventions come without seeming to have any feedback or involvement from faculty (those affected). I wish that these very well intended individuals could understand as I did when speaking with this faculty member, the harm done to these practitioners of education generally and their discipline specifically when changes are mandated without consulting those content experts. Again the theme came through that successful mentors care about the success of their students. How much that desire and caring permeates what they do and why they do what they do in the classroom.

### **May 1**

Three interviews today. Biggest takeaways from these interviews. One of the faculty mentioned is a psychologist by training. He repeated the idea or concept of the need to have a positive self-regard for every individual. Another theme I hope can be taught to faculty. It seems to me that some of us may have these attributes naturally, while I think that for even those for whom it does not come naturally, it can still be taught. I read something once many years ago in a history book “Thinking in Time” by two Harvard professors (Neustadt and May). They concluded with the general idea that they saw themselves as hitting coaches. They may not be able to make everyone a .300 hitter, but if they could at least raise the batting averages, that was their aim. So it is with what we could call “emotional intelligence” or soft skills. I am coming to be persuaded that these desirable skills can be taught if the student is willing to learn and apply the principles being taught.

Another of the interviews reminded me of the importance of creating an environment where students can feel comfortable. This faculty member spoke often about the need to regularly model failure for their students, But this faculty believed that is important to help

students feel comfortable to make mistakes as well. That these mistakes are important in the overall scheme of learning, and he said something else that particularly struck home for me. He said that often people in community colleges or higher education believe that community college students that fail do so because they don't care. His experience (and one that resonated with me) is that they fail because they care too much. It is because they care that they are trying to do too much, raise a family work full time and go to school on top of all of it.

Perhaps the biggest takeaway I am gaining is one that I can't use in this study, the ways in which these outstanding and influential faculty and staff members have taught me, and reoriented my thinking about my students. I am touched and inspired by how much they care, and I only wish (many times over in this study) that we had and could make time such as these to speak with our colleagues about what drives them, and what they have learned about the craft of education and our students.

### **May 3**

Very impressed with an interview from a 19 year long adjunct, who previously had served as a high school principal. Her confidence was inspiring. She didn't do anything unless it helped students succeed. She is hands-on and motherly, by her own admission. The biggest impact on me today was when she said that the main reason to her that community college students don't succeed is because they haven't found someone to help them manage all of life's challenges. That seems to specifically connect with the family issues and challenges that so many of the successful students I interviewed identified in their own lives.

The other particularly impactful thing for me, that I couldn't tell her, was she handed me a thank you card and a Starbucks gift card given to her by a student of hers, and she asked me to read the card. The card came from a student I had interviewed the student that had named her as

being most influential, and the Starbucks gift card was the one I had given to her for participating. Due to maintaining confidentiality, I couldn't and wouldn't identify the student, but it truly made me warm inside and reflected on the many kindnesses shown me through the hears by my students. Theodore Roosevelt was right, "people don't care how much you know until they know how much you care."

Meeting with another faculty member today who spoke at great length about the need to have small wins for our students, so they offer many opportunities to earn points and build confidence. Again I was reminded by this faculty member how important it is to create the proper learning environment, an environment that is welcoming and warm and safe. He spoke about how students who come to college as first generation students may be tense and on edge because they sense the imposter syndrome, and thus the need to create an environment where they feel safe and welcomed. A theme?

The next interview of the day was with another faculty member who sees in her own life the struggles of many of the students with whom they associate. High-school drop out, poverty background. This faculty member takes time to learn about the needs and struggles of their students down to helping them prepare for job interviews, bringing in clothes from their own closet to help students dress properly for those professional interviews. I was truly blown away by the care and compassion shown by this faculty member. I can certainly see why this member was chosen (and all the others that were chosen, too).

The last interview of the day was with a staff member who works with students through advising. They help them with scholarships and deadlines and again I am struck by the care and concern they demonstrate. Managing multiple due dates for various scholarships and programs. Something that was said earlier in my interviews by a staff member (I think it was #1) students

aren't here to get a degree in going to college. They are here to get a degree in the profession or discipline of their choice. Certainly this is one of the functions of mentors, to help students navigate through the maze of college. Perhaps another theme?

#### **May 4**

It is quite bittersweet: I am nearing the end of these wonderful transformative for me, interviews. As hard and energy consuming as these interviews have been, I will truly miss them, once they are done – the challenge for me is to be a good conduit of the amazing thoughts, insights, stories, etc. that it has been mine to collect, hear and live. I worry that somehow I won't be worthy of the gifts given me.

While it seems as if I am hearing many of the same things over and over again, I wouldn't miss any of it for the world. I do not think I do not think at this point, I do not think it is what they say but it is how they say it. The stories they share, the private thoughts they share, so different, so uniquely their own that keeps me asking questions, that keeps me wanting to hear everything they say. One story today touched me greatly as an influential mentor told me about how she worked with a student who had suffered a mis-carriage. Nineteen, and alone. The father was overseas in the military (he didn't even know she was pregnant), and the student couldn't tell her mother. This advisor was all the student had to face this great challenge with.

Amazing the things these students endure with little or no support systems – it seems often throughout these interviews, we are all they have, not just for content, but life skills, as they are often not lacking academic efficacy but life efficacy, adult efficacy, emotional efficacy - -- what a blessing it is to be here, but what a challenge it is at the same time.

**May 10**

The last two interviews --- wow, now what??!!

The first interview told me about how she needed to work a student through depression and threatening's of suicide (she is a trained psychologist). In fact the day of our interview was the day the student had previously confided to this faculty member she had planned on killing herself. Due to the quick thinking and expertise of the faculty member she was able to direct and help as appropriate this student, and the day came and went, uneventfully.

The last interview came after this faculty member received her annual performance rating. She revealed that she had been told by her supervisor that not superlatives would be given out this year, and so, regardless of what she had done throughout the year she would receive an average rating. This faculty member is anything but average, over the next hour, she regaled me with stories of intervening with students and sending this one or that one to law school or placing this one or that one with a law firm in town, or helping this one or that one gain entrée in professional circles. I couldn't help but think again and again, so this is average? I couldn't help but reflect on the damage being done to this member who gives so much, who is clearly so passionate about what does why she does it, and for whom she does it, do we run the risk of burning people like that out. Is the unintended consequence of such a belief that we will have faculty and staff members who fail to exert themselves or do as much as it won't matter anyway? Do we run the risk of depending on the good hearts of these people one too many times and then when we need it the most, there is nothing from which to draw? Needless to say the last interview, as so many of them were painful, emotional, and often wrenching when it is considered what is needed is support not negativity.

I will be most interested to see what the coding process reveals once I am able to receive the transcripts back and am able to compare them with the audio version, my notes and this journal. I am so grateful for what these students, faculty and staff have given to me. I am surrounded by good and great people. I hope I am worthy to be the voice that tells the thoughts, stories, insights and lived experiences of forty-eight people compiled over the previous five or so weeks.

**APPENDIX J: DEMOGRAPHIC ATTRIBUTES OF STUDENT PARTICIPANTS**

<b>Student #</b>	<b>Degree Program</b>	<b>GPA</b>	<b>Pell Eligible</b>	<b>Gender</b>	<b>Ethnicity</b>
#1	Gen'l Studies	3.25	No	Female	Unknown
#2	Associate of Arts	3.90	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino
#3	Associate of Arts	3.47	Yes	Male	White, non-Hispanic
#4	Human Services	4.00	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino
#5	Paralegal	3.91	No	Female	Non-residentAlien
#6	Human Services	4.00	Yes	Female	More than one Race / Ethnicity (non-Hispanic)
#7	Associate of Arts	3.03	No	Female	White, non-Hispanic
#8	Human Services	3.55	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino
#9	Associate of Arts	2.54	No	Female	NonResidentAlien
#10	Associate of Arts	3.49	Yes	Female	White, non-Hispanic
#11	Paralegal	3.59	No	Male	White, non-Hispanic
#12	Associate of Arts	4.00	No	Male	White, non-Hispanic
#13	Human Services	3.22	Yes	Female	Asian
#14	Associate of Arts	3.83	Yes	Female	More than one Race/ Ethnicity (non-hispanic)
#15	Paralegal	4.00	Yes	Female	More than one Race/ Ethnicity (non-hispanic)
#16	Associate of Arts	3.38	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino
#17	Associate of Science	3.52	No	Female	HispanicLatino
#18	Associate of Science	2.93	No	Female	Asian
#19	Associate of Arts	3.53	Yes	Male	HispanicLatino
#20	Business Tech	3.86	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino



#21	Associate of Arts	2.84	Yes	Female	HispanicLatino
#22	Associate of Science	3.75	Yes	Female	White, non-Hispanic

## APPENDIX K: CODEBOOK TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

### Code Book Terms and Meanings

<b>Term</b>	<b>Meaning</b>
<b>High school:</b>	Secondary aspect of education (grades 9-12)
<b>Unprepared:</b>	General statement of unpreparedness for participation in higher education
<b>Family Issues:</b>	Non-academic issues preventing educational achievement such as family instability
<b>Financial Aid:</b>	Scholarships, grants, loans, etc. to assist in the completion of a degree in higher education
<b>Finances:</b>	Daily personal obligations (rent or housing, food, etc.)
<b>Academic deficiencies:</b>	Deficits in academic functions such as, reading, writing, mathematics leading to poor grades or performance
<b>Parenting:</b>	Including single parenting; demands specifically relating to parenting that impacts time or performance in college
<b>First generation:</b>	Designation in higher education denoting a student, neither of whose parents graduated from a college or university
<b>Overwhelmed:</b>	To be overcome psychologically, educationally, physically, or emotionally caused by or impacting performance in higher education
<b>Relationship:</b>	Description the connection between two or more persons
<b>Kindness:</b>	Friendly, generous or considerate
<b>Compassion:</b>	Concern for the struggles or problems of another

- Happy:** Showing pleasure or content
- Sense of Humor:** In attitude and action the ability to perceive or appreciate humor
- Authentic:** Genuine in attitude and demeanor; not phony or pretending, but natural
- Accessible:** Approachable, friendly, open
- Loves job:** Finds meaning in work, enjoys job, sees it as a calling / purpose
- Helpful:** Desire to help
- Confidence:** Self-efficacy, assuredness in an ability to do a specific thing
- Encouragement:** To give support, confidence to another
- Transactional:** An exchange or interaction between people
- Initiative:** Determination from within to take action
- Uncertain degree path:** Drifting in college between majors, uncertainty of career path
- Family support:** Encouragement of support by family members
- Resources:** Assets of staff, learning centers, tutors, etc., available to students to convert into the help they need to be successful
- Guidance:** Counseling or advice specifically related to academic matters
- Engaging:** Environment in classroom contributing to feeling welcome or involved, engaged in the material being presented
- Dependable:** Trustworthy, reliable
- Negative experience:** Experiences with faculty or staff that were not received positively by the student
- Focused on student success:** An attribute of faculty / staff on student outcome in class, on a specific assignment, or throughout higher education

- Feedback:** Information or response to actions, materials, assignments designed to foster improvement
- Individualized:** Flexibility, meeting the needs or requirements of one
- Role Model:** Inspiration

**APPENDIX L: STATEMENT OF QUALITATIVE AUDITOR**

Shelby, Candice [Candice.Shelby@ucdenver.edu]

[Actions](#)

To:

M

[Ashcraft, William](#)

Sunday, September 16, 2018 1:56 PM

Retention Policy: 180 Day Inbox Policy (6 Months) Expires: 3/15/2019

You replied on 9/16/2018 2:21 PM.

To whom it may concern:

I have reviewed the qualitative files, both audio and transcripts of the forty-eight interviews conducted for this study, and find the following:

1. All files are in order with transcripts, and supporting documentation;
2. All Informed Consent documents are signed and dated and accurately completed;
3. There are field notes for each of the transcript interviews;
4. Both audio and transcripts are in password protected files, and stored in a fire proof, secure cabinet;
5. All reasonable steps have been taken to protect privacy / confidentiality of the participants.

Regards,

Candice L. Shelby, Ph.D.  
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## VITA

William E. Ashcraft

### Education

- Ph.D., Community College Leadership, Old Dominion University, 2018
- M.A., History, Norwich University, 2001
- B.S., Liberal Arts, Excelsior College, 1996

### Professional Experience

- Professor, College Community College of Denver, January 2006-present

### Professional Service

- Co-advisor, Phi Theta Kappa, 2010-present
- Chair, History, Geography and Political Science, Community College of Denver, 2013-2018
- Statewide History Discipline Chair, 2013-2018
- Faculty Council Chair, 2010-2013
- Member, Denver Performing Arts, Higher Educational Arts Council 2008-2017

### Professional Presentations and Publications

- Ashcraft, W. E. (2018). Exploration of Faculty and Staff Mentoring on High-Risk Community College Students. University of New Mexico Mentoring Conference Publication. Albuquerque, NM.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (October, 2018) Exploration of Faculty and Staff Mentoring on High-Risk Community College Students. Presented at the University of New Mexico Mentoring Conference. Albuquerque, NM.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (August 2018). Importance of Mentoring in Education. Presented at the Denver Public Schools Social Science teachers in-service training. Denver, CO.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (April 2018). Importance of Mentoring in Higher Education. Presented at Faculty and Staff training, Community College of Denver. Denver, CO.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (January 2016) Importance of Forming Connections Between Faculty and Students on Student Engagement and Success. Faculty and Staff training, Community College of Denver, Denver, CO.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (January 2014) The Impact of the Women's Movement. Town hall meeting co-sponsored by the Rocky Mountain PBS and the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Denver, CO.
- Ashcraft, W. E. (October 2013) The Civil Rights Movement Then and Today. Town hall meeting sponsored by the Denver Center for the Performing Arts, Denver, CO.