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The Disconnection Between High School and College: A Study of Retention of Students Who Are at Risk of Leaving College Before Completing a Degree

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A Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the Department of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements

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by

Peggy R. Sherwin

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Dr. Stephen Sherblom, Dissertation Chair	2-9-12 Date
Dr. Susan Isenberg, Committee Member	2-9-12 Date
Dr. Beth Kania-Gosche, Committee Member	2-9-12 Date

Declaration of Originality

I do hereby declare and attest to the fact that this is an original study based solely upon my own scholarly work here at Lindenwood University and that I have not submitted it for any other college or university course or degree here or elsewhere.

Full Legal Name: Peggy Ruthaleen Sherwin

Signature:_____ Date: _____

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Abstract

The number of students graduating high school and entering community colleges academically unprepared has increased. The problem is that they are at risk of leaving before degree completion. The community college in this study requires remedial no-credit courses for unprepared students transitioning from high school based on an academic assessment test. There is no follow up once they are placed into the remedial courses. In contrast, non-traditional "returning learners" who test into remedial courses additionally receive follow-up in the form of an orientation workshop, a study skills course, and mentoring. The purpose of the study was to (a) review the preparedness of community colleges for the unprepared student, (b) provide unprepared students with a voice about being unprepared, and (c) engage faculty in thinking about their role in meeting the needs of at-risk students.

The research methodology was qualitative. Data sources were student surveys of remedial students, conversational interviews with faculty and students, and case studies of three remedial students. The results of this study indicated that faculty and students reported similar concerns from their respective positions—there is a disconnection between high school and college. Faculty expressed concern over not knowing how to connect with the unprepared students transitioning from high school. Faculty appeared to be at a loss for (a) techniques to inspire and motivate students, and (b) strategies and tools to help students learn. Unprepared students transitioning from high school lacked self-esteem and social maturity to communicate their needs. They were often afraid of their professors, and therefore, did not seek help or even admit to needing help. The case studies revealed a difference between the two unprepared students who came directly

from high school (unsuccessful in college) and the non-traditional unprepared “returning learner” student (successful in college) who had access to the “returning learner” program, which included resources not available to students coming directly from high school, such as an orientation workshop and mentoring—a more individualized and holistic approach. In summary, unprepared students transitioning from high school and non-traditional “returning learner” students are the same in their need for a holistic approach with resources for academic success.

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Chapter I - Introduction

Background of the Study

As an adviser at a community college, I noticed that every semester begins the same way. Graduating high school students arrive eager to begin taking college classes, only to be told they must take remedial classes for no credit because they lack skills necessary to be successful in college-level courses; however, these unprepared students are not even successful in the remedial courses. This is evident from my observations of the empty spaces in the parking lots as the semester progresses and the tearful eyes of students when they are told to drop a class or the disappointment on their faces when they receive D's and F's after their first semester of remedial no-credit courses. In other words, remedial coursework does not seem to be enough to help unprepared students be successful in a community college learning environment.

This study investigated college procedures, programs, and activities related to the preparation of unprepared students at one Midwestern community college. The Assessment Center at the study community college is placing students in remedial courses in English, mathematics, and according to their scores on an admission assessment test. The process of placing students in remedial classes of English, mathematics, and reading results from assessment testing. The team of assessment educators are continuously seeking ways and testing instruments to make the process more student-friendly while collecting the information needed for placement.

As the primary investigator, I utilized surveys, interviews, and case studies of three students who tested into remedial classes, that is, the courses offered for those students deemed unprepared. Also included was the examination of attitudes,

perceptions, feelings, and descriptions of the unprepared students who have enrolled in college credit courses. I examined the collective issues and experiences of students who are enrolling at the community college. Many of these students think they are ready for college because they achieved a minimal grade point average at the secondary level and graduated from high school.

High school graduation usually validates the closure of one academic level of achievement and the beginning of another level of academic achievement. Students have some degree of confidence that they have fulfilled the academic requirements for high school graduation; and, many think they are ready to begin the challenges of college-level course work. This confidence is often shattered when they pretest for entrance into college-level English and mathematics courses. This pretest often indicates that they do not have the skills necessary to compete in college-level courses, eroding their confidence.

In this research study, I explored the importance of the relationship between college experiences and student persistence. When students feel accepted and engaged in the learning process, they tend to work harder toward achievement and report more satisfaction with their educational experience. Ender and Willkie (2000) suggested that unprepared students may “have a negative self-concept with respect to the academic environment; it is important that advisors provide the unprepared student with positive and encouraging feedback when appropriate” (p. 135). Encouragement and acceptance can change a student’s educational direction and improve his or her college experience. Theoretically, faculty and staff understand that remedial courses are skill builders that fill in the gaps of information and understanding missed or not mastered during elementary

and secondary education. When colleges and universities prepare for the unprepared student population with programs that instruct, guide, and encourage high expectations, at-risk students learn to achieve. The college believes its mission is to provide life-changing opportunities for its community members to be successful on their jobs, at home, and at college. For many people, remedial courses can offer a second chance at completing their basic education (*St. Charles Community College Catalog***,** 2006-2008). Colleges and universities are helping students cope with issues they may face on campus such as financial burdens, feelings of being lonely on campus, issues with family, working too many hours while taking a full-time schedule, falling grades, and taking non-credit courses. Colleges facing these new challenges must consider all the factors that may influence the success of students.

The financial cost to colleges of meeting the educational needs of unprepared students presents another concern. This includes tutorial assistance and training for faculty to equip them to assist unprepared students more effectively. Hiring appropriate faculty must be a financial consideration when instruction is a major concern to the academic success of these students. Typically, adjunct faculty teaches the remedial courses and the class size of these courses is generally the same size as regular courses.

Another concern is whether unprepared students will benefit from the current structure of higher education. For example, consider this new generation of so-called “Y” students, born in the mid to late 1970’s through the year 2000. Armour (2005) concluded that Generation Yers grew up pampered, nurtured, and programmed with activities since they were toddlers. Educators are now witnessing these students as unprepared young adult students needing help with many tasks. The first semester of college courses is a

great predictor of which students will be able to compete in college. Generation Y students are expected to benefit from a system that has been designed by a generation of educators who are self-starters, motivated by their desire to produce without the need for constant feedback. Therefore, educator expectations often do not match student expectations. The current educational system has not holistically supported many of the unprepared Generation Y students beyond providing remedial classes.

Community colleges appear to be of value to a community; however, the successful course completion rate for students at community colleges has not been well documented. It is not certain how many students took remedial classes and succeeded in transferring to a four-year institution or graduated with an Associate of Arts degree. The community college offers a solution to many college-bound students by offering quality education at an affordable cost to its residents. Students may attend the community college for half the cost of attending a four-year college or university. Students do not have to leave home to get a quality education, thus eliminating the cost for room and board. Moreover, most students attending the community college have jobs. These students may keep their part time and full time jobs while attending the community college.

Over the past several years, more and more unprepared students have enrolled in community colleges (Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2006). As a result, more remedial courses have been added, additional professors have been hired, and new course strategies have been developed to help the unprepared students. For example, some unprepared students' remedial courses are offered in an eight-week session, which means students can take a remedial course the first eight

weeks and take a credit course the second eight weeks. Two courses in a 16-week semester help students reach their college-level courses more quickly and decrease their sense of starting behind classmates. Another plan has been for the colleges to create more credit courses that are within the remedial academic pedagogy of what the study community college calls Success Semester courses. Such courses might include study skills, social development, and professional etiquette. This plan alleviates some of the concern of having to pay for remedial courses for which students do not receive credit.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (MDE) (2006) released a report on students' educational competency levels. The report indicated that 36.4% of Missouri public high school graduates planning to enroll in two-year and four-year colleges are finding that their assessment scores are placing them in remedial courses. The report also indicated that 29.6% of college students were taking remedial mathematics, 16.9% were taking remedial English, and 10.1% were taking remedial reading. These statistics indicate that a large number of students enter college without the required competencies.

Similarly, Ring (2001) investigated the lack of preparedness of students in a community college. Ring's qualitative research interviews identified unprepared students, assessed their skill base, and examined instructional approaches used by professors. She also interviewed faculty to investigate their perceptions of students' preparation for college. Ring's study included the national trends of students who are unprepared found that only 45% earned an associate's or bachelor's degree. Of the students who were enrolled in certificate programs, only 41% earned a degree.

These percentages mirror the population of students enrolling in community colleges throughout the country. Without immediate attention, the unprepared students will continue to leave college before completing their degrees. Many other states are reporting similar concerns with students taking remedial courses. The American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) has reported that 53% of students entering colleges and universities are unprepared, i.e., lacking basic skills in at least one of the three basic areas of reading, English, and mathematics (Tritelli, 2003). In addition to a growing number of students taking remedial classes, the cost to community colleges and other institutions of higher learning of providing the appropriate personnel to teach remedial courses has doubled (Tritelli, 2003). Remedial unprepared students courses help improve students' achievement but also add to the overall duration of semesters needed to complete a degree. When students leave college before completing a degree, their challenges extend beyond the classroom. Additional classes and new teaching strategies to move remedial students along more quickly address only some of the concerns of unprepared students. Many of these students have not had the support of parents, because their parents did not attend college; the only support they had was their teachers or counselors who advised and encouraged them to be achievers. These students were afraid, lacked self-confidence and motivation, and were socially unprepared to confront the day-to-day challenges common in the first semester of college.

At-risk students are unprepared for college courses, along with the absence of a transferable high school education, and life skills as well as familial risk factors (Dobson, 1999). Dobson (1999) examined the demographic, academic, and institutional factors that affect student retention in community colleges. Dobson, along with several of his

colleagues, concluded that academics as well as the student's social disposition after entry into college contribute to the student's decision to withdraw from college. Craig's (2005) research found that poor academic preparation and a lack of commitment to a goal had a negative impact on a student's success. Craig's (2005) mixed methods study recommended that early academic assessment and identification of students who change their enrollment status from full-time to part-time might indicate that students are at-risk of leaving school before completing their degree or being placed on warning or probation due to low grades. Craig's qualitative research utilized interviews with administrators from programs with high success rates and from programs having low student success rates. The indicators related to student success were grade point averages, time interval between high school graduation and entering a community college, and attempted but unearned credits.

The qualitative results indicated that poor academic preparation and lack of commitment to goal completion was negatively related to student success. Craig's (2005) research on student retention provided essential information for institutions of higher learning to adopt procedures and programs to respond to the unprepared students. Unprepared students faced internal and external stressors consisting of ethnic or cultural ideologies, stress from peers, and social interaction or the lack of social interaction (Tinto, 1993).

America's educational system has not aligned itself with the changes in today's society. The rising cost of post-secondary education is stressful on both incoming students and their parents. This stress is compounded when students realize they were not prepared to take the college-level courses.

Despite students passing their courses in high school and some having exemplary grades, students are still testing into remedial classes. Noted researchers, such as Craig (2005) and Levin (2005), have suggested numerous factors having an impact on the disconnection between high schools and colleges. Most importantly, the secondary school system has been on a mission to meet academic standards of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). Schools have increased their efforts to meet NCLB academic achievement goals, driving the alignment between secondary schools and colleges further apart. There are discussions among educators at the community college level creating momentum concerning higher test scores. One of the major concerns of many educators who are in a rush to produce higher test scores is that educators will be compelled to lower the teaching standards in order to achieve the required accountability provisions. Some educators argue that NCLB will actually ensure that children are left behind. If schools fail to meet the Annual Yearly Progress (AYP) rating two years in a row, they are sanctioned; and some students may be offered the opportunity to relocate to a different school district (Trujillo & Mintrop, 2005). Children are left behind, along with the communities who are supporting a failing educational institution. The House Education Committee's reauthorization of the NCLB Act issued a release regarding the disconnection between elementary schools not preparing students for secondary school and students leaving secondary schools not being prepared for postsecondary schools (Mintrop & Trujillo, 2005).

Students who are unprepared are costing colleges, universities, employers, and American taxpayers an enormous amount of money. Ismel (1988), author of *Trends and Issues in Adult Education*, wrote that changing demographics in combination with

technology have placed education and training of the workforce on the national agenda. Although it has been 21 years since Ismel wrote her article, her view of the educational and labor landscape is in motion; and, her guidelines for working with adult learners continue to be timely (Ismel, 1988). This report validates the deficits in the unprepared students' lack of competency in basic skills education. The cost to high schools, colleges, and businesses is, according to Revenue and Expenditures for Public and Secondary Education: School Year 2001-2002, approximately $16 billion per year **(**Johnson, 2001-2002).

My study describes the academic experiences of three students who have entered the community college and were placed in remedial courses based on the results of their assessment scores. These students are from different backgrounds, they belong to various age groups, and they attended different elementary and high school districts. The case studies provide a personal account of their experiences during their first semester of college-level courses. Conversational interviews with these students reflect their feelings and attitudes regarding their unpreparedness for college and insight into the disconnection between high school and the community college. Too often, in the community colleges' efforts to be open institutions, and to bridge the gaps are not fully realized. It might appear that colleges are more focused on increasing their enrollment numbers, losing sight of one important issue, making sure students who are already enrolled are credentialed for higher level employment and have the ability to further their education (Levine, 2005).

Community colleges' open-door policies have made it possible for any person wanting to take classes to earn college credit or to gain knowledge for the purpose of

obtaining an entry-level employment opportunity to enroll in the community college. For some of these students, coming to the community college and connecting to a person who might provide support and guidance can be the deciding factor for students staying in college or leaving. For others, it has been a matter of course selection or the developmental classes that separated them from their friends. Regardless of the situation, the academic counselors are the first line of educational planning and the sounding board for students when courses are failed, dropped, or when family matters are complicated. The academic counselor's role has changed as the needs of students have changed. This change involves a more personal, instructional style of advising, directed toward student success. A more holistic, differentiated style of teaching helps students become involved in making their own choices regarding their educational planning.

Researchers have devoted years studying students who are at risk, with few results to improve the academic status of students or the disconnection between high school and college. Researchers Tinto (1987) and Tinto, Goodsell-Love, and Russo (1996) have described and recommended three areas of analysis: (a) the design and implementation of a comprehensive program designed to address the issues and improve retention, (b) the organizational dynamics of change to bring about the retention, and (c) the role of institutional research that establishes cause and effect. Failure to understand unprepared students prevents academic professionals from providing these students with the assistance they need to achieve academic success. Oakes (1985) reminded the stakeholders in academic services and developmental education that substandard courses and programs hold low expectations for learning. Students in remedial courses often experience (a) low motivation, (b) poor self-concept, and (c) have a lower academic

expectation for learning (Oaks, 1985). As troubling as it is, many students do not expect, nor do they desire to achieve, higher academic standards. Many of these students are satisfied with their current placements in lower academic classes, and students often refuse the opportunity to appeal when it is offered.

Tinto's (1987) study recommended an area of analysis to improve retention and academic achievement where institutional research establishes the cause and effect of students who leave school early. Collected data alert administration, faculty, and staff to the areas of deficits within the system. Repairing these deficits is a collaborative venture for all members of the academic development team: administration, faculty, counselors, advisors, and staff. Strategic planning, designing, and developing programs supply the vehicle to combat the gaps and losses of unprepared students. Slowing the drop rate and increasing retention is the change necessary for growth and stability in an educational institution (Tinto, 1987).

High school teachers and counselors are the first line of defense, recognizing and identifying students who are at risk of not completing their classes, dropping out of school, and being unprepared for higher education. High school teachers have the time and opportunities to learn many details about students to aid in their academic and social areas of unpreparedness. When schools begin to collect the data that provides information about students' unpreparedness, they may be able to incorporate the necessary tools to stimulate reading, incorporate mathematical techniques with technology, and introduce a variety of ways to teach writing styles and English skills.

The study community college identifies students as unprepared during the enrollment process, at risk of low academic achievement, and less likely to be able to

compete with the academic challenges of college. As an academic counselor, I have noted that students will ask me to be their counselor. My perception has always been that students need a familiar face, someone with whom the student has established a relationship, and can refer to by name. Literature on students' retention and attrition suggested by several researchers on unprepared students made these observations that are quite accurate in today's educational experiences with the unprepared students. Researchers have found that contact with significant persons within an institution of higher education is a crucial factor in a student's decision to remain in college (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen, Farren, & Vowell, 1996). Researchers Chickering and Gamson (1987) found that students who were engaged in the course with their professors had higher retention levels. Glennen et al. (1996) found in their studies of students that students who had a relationship with their professors were more academically successful than students who did not have a relationship with their professors. Professionals in higher education such as academic, transfer and career counselors, and advisors who come in direct contact with students and understand the challenges that students face, especially these unprepared students, are primary candidates to assume the role of professional guide or mentor. While faculty, administrators, and other personnel all contribute to students' decisions to return, academic advisors and/or counselors have the most one-on-one interaction with students (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen et al., 1996). Counselors are used as the major education analysts in helping students develop their educational plan, and the counselor is a master-degreed professional skilled in course development, educational planning, and course analysis. The counselors are usually the front line of contact with the students who

are enrolling in college. Advisors who are at a bachelor degree level advise students on class selection, and these individuals do not work with students on probation. Advisors help students plan their transfer to college courses, serve as an advocate for students who need courses accepted or waived, listen when students have academic and personal issues, ask questions to encourage critical thinking skills, and refer students to college services as needed.

The college mission statement suggests that assisting students at risk is the first priority of faculty, staff, and students to communicate concerns when the well-being of students is threatened. The safety of the campus community is a major concern. Providing information and educating the campus community of these issues of risk helps in making the college campus a safe environment for learning and professional development (*St. Charles Community College Catalog*, 2006-2008, p. 14). As an educator and member of the helping profession, my responsibility is to carry out the mission of the college to better serve the students who have elected to attend our college.

My Role

My role has been to counsel students in nursing associate degree programs and students preparing to transfer to a four-year college or university. During the past 13 years, students, programs, and requirements have changed. The changing economy has also encouraged many changes in classroom instruction regarding new programs, especially in technology. Colleges have added new programs to meet the demands of America's global economy. For example, 13 years ago developmental classes consisted of a few English and mathematics classes; today reading has been added for domestic students as well as international students. Parents became more engaged in the last seven

or eight years, attending to their children's educational needs. These parents are in control and their children are comfortable having someone assume the responsibility of scheduling classes, completing financial aid forms, and communicating with faculty. In years past, there was a great deal of discussion and concern about the urban population of students. My role as an academic counselor offers many opportunities to wear multiple hats. One job is as a referral agent to outside resources, which is becoming more common, and another is to develop multicultural and diverse programming. This possibly occurs because our student population is more diverse and presents issues related to blending cultures and increasing their learning potential. Today, educators' attention has turned to the rural students who are testing into developmental classes in alarming numbers after graduating from high school. My experience with these students has shown that they are less likely to plan for college or use critical thinking skills to work through a problem.

My experience with these students involved presenting workshops to first-time freshmen, which was one of my job responsibilities. The information in the workshop focused on understanding the procedures for registration in addition to learning how to select classes that satisfied the outline for general education classes. After the presentation, a question-and-answer portion of the workshop assisted students with building their schedule. A counselor registered the student in semester classes. Some students were unable to grasp the information presented in the workshop, and some students seemed incapable of making a decision without the guidance or presence of their parents. Some students appeared unhappy that they were required to attend the workshop.

In addition to presenting workshops, I advised "warning" and probation students.

The warning and probation students were some of my favorite students. Many of these students are ready to settle down to their studies after realizing they will have to pay for their classes out of their own pocket. Encouraging these students to participate in their educational planning engages the student, and usually students become vested in the direction of their educational career. I have noticed this population of students will self-identify their academic deficits one-on-one more readily than students in past semesters but will often refuse assistance or disregard help if offered. They rely on their parents to help them with registering for classes and discussing their academic status with their professors when they have differences about their grades. Students are not distressed when they fail a class; and when they find fault with a faculty member, many students simply leave the class without the formality of dropping the class. In my experience, it appears the students believe that such behavior is appropriate and justified. Some of my colleagues have commented that these students send or receive text messages during their advising appointments and while registering for classes, failing to see the inappropriateness of this behavior. They are technology savvy and many of these students have the latest item of technology seemingly regardless of their economic status. I have found that encouragement, frequent contact, praise, and sometimes a stern conversation will keep them returning for advice to make sure they are progressing toward their degree.

I have worked with youth in various career paths from youth employment training programs, substance abuse treatment centers for adolescents, mental health centers, and educational institutions. My experiences with these students have taught me to be honest, to mean what I say and say what I mean. This behavior creates a trusting relationship.

Statement of the Problem

For some time, researchers have documented the disparity in academic preparedness of students entering community colleges across the country. Enrollment numbers for colleges are increasing, and this increased enrollment has prompted educational leaders and politicians to take a closer look at the problem and develop a remedy to address the unprepared students leaving high school. As the United States economy turns away from a plentiful job market, it is harder to find a job without a degree or some type of post-high school training **(**Shane et al., 2009). The problem is that as unprepared students enroll in college, they leave college without completion in staggering numbers. If these unprepared students are not educated to take their place in this new global society, the United States economy will experience another major depletion in American preparedness to meet the challenges of our changing society.

Educational and community leaders are alarmed that the percentage of high school students who drop out of school is on the increase. Reports place the dropout rate above 25%; and, in other locations, the high school dropout percentage is much higher. Many educators attribute the increasing number of dropouts to the higher academic standards that schools are now forced to administer (Donnelly, 1987). Donnelly (1987) also found that higher public school standards have affected minorities and disadvantaged, at-risk students. These students later end up at a community college where the open admission policy is available to all students. Benard (1995) described the value of high expectations in the schools. Raising standards is not enough; educators must support students in attaining their objectives (Edmonds, 1986; Howard 1990; Levin, 1988; Rutter, Maughman, Mortimore, Ouston, & Smith, 1979; Slavin & Madden, 1989).

Research Questions

The research presented in this study investigated students who entered the community colleges unprepared, many of whom commonly leave the community college before degree completion. The research questions were as follows:

1. Why is the study community college failing to retain at-risk students?
2. How effective is the assessment process for entering community college students?
3. How does faculty perceive the attitudes, abilities, and overall motivation of students who are unprepared for college?

Purpose of the Study

Each year, high school students are admitted to colleges without the skills to successfully transition. Traditionally, many community colleges require these students to complete remedial courses. Students are required to take these courses and achieve a certain level of competency before moving on to the college credit courses. Some authors believe that the following approaches may actually reduce students' engagement and learning opportunities while stigmatizing students' success (Slaven & Madden, 1989; Oakes, 1985). The purpose of my study was (a) to review the preparedness of community colleges for the unprepared first-time freshman and the challenges of accommodating these students, (b) to provide the unprepared students with a voice regarding their own knowledge about being unprepared for college course work, and (c) to engage faculty in a conversation regarding their perception of the unprepared student, and determine if faculty needs are met in educating the unprepared students. Examining faculty perceptions of the unprepared students may be a worthwhile practice to facilitate academic achievement.

Rationale for the Study

The research questions represent a series of concerns discussed when community colleges explored institutional attributes that pertained to two-year college students. The exploration of attributes looked at various subpopulations of students with the purpose of understanding institutional attributes and supports that contribute to the success of unprepared students.

Earlier research indicated that Black and Hispanic students typically enroll in lower-level courses, attain lower class ranks, and receive special education services (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2000 - 2004). While working in the role of Academic Counselor, students typically would ask if a course was difficult, or if I knew the professor. Many would state without wavering or mixing words, they would rather take courses they know and felt they could pass with few challenges. Students of any color who are faced with multiple at-risk factors need additional support in high school and beyond to overcome these barriers to achieve academic success.

Definition of Terms

Assessment. An examination that students who are planning to attend the community college must take to determine their academic levels in mathematics, English, and reading. If students provide the college with an ACT score and their subtest scores indicate competency in the foundation areas, students may take college-level courses in English and mathematics. Reading may not be required if their ACT score is 19 and above (*St. Charles Community College Catalog*, 2006-2008, p. 35).

At-risk. Students whose academic skills fall below those skills determined to be necessary for college success and/or whose college readiness skills have not adequately prepared them for the rigors of college study and learning.

Community colleges. Accredited higher educational institutions that offer the Associate of Arts degree, Associate of Science degree, Associate of Applied Science degree, academic preparation, workforce training, and continuous lifelong learning opportunities to people who live in the community (American Association of Community Colleges, [AACC], 2004).

Grade Point Average (GPA). A number quantity representing a student's performance during a semester, quarter, trimester, or school year (Pickett, 2000).

Millennial generation. Sometimes called Generation Y, this learner cohort is described as pampered, coddled, and technology savvy (Armour, 2005). Millennials were born between the 1980's to mid-1990's.

Open-door policy. An administrative phrase used to acknowledge everyone. This is a policy of accepting everyone who completes an admission application. The community college accepts those students without a high school diploma or the equivalent (AACC, 2004).

Remedial. A term used to concern itself with correction of faulty study habits or raising a student's general competences (Cayne, 1988).

Success Semester. A program in the study community college designed for students who test into all three areas of academic foundations (English, mathematics, and reading). This compilation of courses is designed to provide students with less rigorous

courses over the semester to encourage achievement and academic success (*St. Charles Community College Catalog*, 2006-2008).

Unprepared. Refers to students who are transitioning to two-year and four-year colleges missing basic math, reading, and English skills.

Chapter II - Literature Review

High school students who were achieving the minimal core competencies in basic skill classes, such as reading, are planning to enroll in post-secondary classes after graduation. Many of these students will most likely enroll in a community college. One community college in Arizona witnessed thousands of unprepared students attempting to enroll at the community college. In 2009, 89% of their students who were new students and recent graduates from high school were not prepared for higher education. Flores (2009) reported that 35% did not read at the college level, and 51% did not meet the college writing standards. In addition to the assessment testing, the college intended to spend $20 million a year on developmental education (Flores, 2009).

This chapter presents literature from past and present years of research on students who are unprepared for entering postsecondary education programs and includes the most current research on at-risk students and retention. This research clearly documents the problems that community colleges nationwide are experiencing with unprepared students. Throughout the 1990's and continuing today, secondary schools' program reforms have focused on revising state and national learning standards. However, these standards are not always in alignment with college curricula or professor expectations (Linn, 2002). This chapter not only documents the problems, but it also explores and examines the issue of college readiness to address the needs of unprepared students who are struggling academically. In the interest of student achievement, educational institutions must focus their efforts on a more holistic approach with students who are at risk of being unsuccessful in their course work. The difficulty of demonstrating the need for more rigors within the K-12 system is the lack of longitudinal

data tracking students from high school to college. This makes it difficult to propose changes in course content that would better prepare students for transition into college. Conley suggested that college readiness is simply, “the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in entry-level college course work without remediation” (Conley, 2007, p. 12).

Colleges have instituted specific programs to assist these unprepared students in basic skills; meanwhile, the number of basic skill courses has increased to accommodate the ever-growing number of students who are entering colleges unprepared for the rigors of college course work. Today students are exhibiting behaviors associated with special learning deficits that require educators to work with them in new ways. High school educators are concerned with trying to meet standards and accommodate the learning style of each student.

According to data from the research site, the number of students graduating from high school and enrolling in the community colleges has increased. These students are leaving high school unprepared to compete in college-level courses. This increase in unprepared students has brought about the need to have more sections offered in remedial mathematics, English, and reading. In my experience, students who are unprepared exhibit academic problems and fear of being shut down when expressing their concerns or needs during much of their academic experience. Research data that identifies the unprepared students makes their transition to higher education less stressful and more successful along with contact with the appropriate persons, programs, and support systems. Many unprepared students enroll in college and leave before their first semester ends. Research from a survey conducted by the Pearson Foundation found that one in six

students were at immediate risk of leaving college within the first few weeks of enrollment. The survey reported that 15% reported that they had dropped out or were considering dropping out within the first few weeks of the semester. Students reported having difficulty managing their studies, work, and family obligations. Also in the survey, 20% of the students reported that they did not seek help to succeed in their studies even though they were struggling. The majority of students interviewed reported that they did not discuss their situations with their advisors or counselors. Determining a pro-active strategy that directly addresses the individual needs of students who are at risk of failure and leaving school before completing a degree may possibly increase retention and student degree completion.

History of the Community College

Early in the 19th century, some of the oldest American institutions such as Harvard, Yale, and The University of Pennsylvania became so expensive that only the wealthiest and most privileged families could afford to send their sons to college. Later, new denominational colleges such as Williams and Amherst began and catered to the poorer students. Also during this century, as the enrollment steadily increased and college curricula and entrance requirements also increased, more students arrived at college with insufficient academic preparation.

In 1852, the president of the University of Michigan was outraged because too many courses belonging in secondary and elementary schools were being offered in colleges. He felt that admitting students with low skills into college lowered the standards of the universities. This argument has continued to be repeated even today in *Toward an Educational Transformation* (Tappan, 1996).

Despite the urging of Tappan (1996) and the high entrance standards of colleges and universities, students have found another avenue to enter the educational system, the community college. During the past century, community colleges have grown tremendously in numbers and have changed with the times. No other segment of postsecondary education has been more responsive to its community's workforce needs. At community colleges, students can learn at any point in their lives while taking advantage of low tuition, convenient campus locations, open admissions, and comprehensive course offerings.

Community colleges have endorsed programs that offer students education and training for careers to place students in entry-level positions; these degrees are called Associate of Applied Science degrees and are designed to help students enter the workforce. The traditional college-level courses that lead to an Associate of Arts degree and prepare students for further study toward a bachelor's degree are generally pursued at community colleges (Cohen & Brawer, 1982; Gardiner, 1994). Associate of Arts degrees typically take about two years of full-time study to complete. Today's comprehensive community college is both a principle provider of academic instruction and a major provider of vocational preparation and workforce development through stand-alone adult training programs. The college population has grown dramatically and has become a microcosm of society with an increasingly diverse population of American society just as four-year colleges and university populations (Cohen & Brawer, 1982; Gardiner, 1994).

Traditionally, academically prepared freshmen are said to be on the decline, stated by a fellow professional observing the flow of students seeking academic counseling during registration. It is true that four-year colleges and universities are enrolling a more

diverse and academically challenging population. This is explained by the economic state the country is currently experiencing. Although academically prepared students are not on the decline, one consideration might be that the number of unprepared students has increased, and counselors may be seeing more of this population in their advising offices. Until recent years, unprepared college students' academic performance received little public attention. Students leaving school before completing their degree have been characterized as adult learners, first-generation attendees, and low income. Tinto (1993) found that one-quarter of all students withdraw because of academic failures, while the rest drop out due to factors such as low interest or "the organization of educational institutions, their formal structures, resources, and patterns of associations" (p. 89).

The early 1960's brought about a different thinking, attitude, and a desire to change the lives of minority citizens, especially black Americans. This turbulence stimulated an acute change in minority-student patterns of college attendance and degree attainment in the United States. These changes have encouraged an increasing number of minority students accounting for the considerable number of students enrolled on college campuses today. In 1997, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES, 2000-2004) reported that African-American students, Hispanic students, Asian or Pacific Island students, and Native American students make up 27% of the total college enrollment. The makeup of student enrollment today is much like that in 1997 (NCES, 2000-2004).

Unprepared College Students

Prior to the 1970's, junior college schools were established to provide low-cost education, including providing individuals with lower-level education, certificates in specific areas, diplomas, and associate's degrees. From my years of experience working

with the unprepared students and referring them to the tutorial center, unprepared students rarely take the initiative to use the services. There is a growing demand for colleges to reform and improve the retention and educational achievement of their students. In the United States, community colleges are publicly funded. Community colleges were established to be an open-enrollment institution for any person who desires the opportunity to pursue a higher educational degree (Craig, 2005). These institutions have been called technical colleges, city colleges, and most recently, community colleges. Many community colleges practice open enrollment. With the practice of open enrollment and the state of the economy, larger numbers of unprepared students are enrolling in these colleges. During the 1960's, many post-secondary schools were taking on greater responsibilities and offering remedial courses to students who were not prepared for the rigors of college. In an effort to support unprepared students, researchers Fidler and Hunter (1987) and Derry and Murphy (1986) studied traditional methods and learning styles to support the efforts of the underachieving students who are at risk of failing in college.

Colleges incorporated a wide variety of programs to support achievement of unprepared students by offering tutoring programs, study skills classes, academic warning, and probation for additional support. Colleges generally have these support programs included in their remedial programs, which are the courses that are grade-level appropriate and are usually determined by the student's reading level. Decades later, Dotzler (2003) noticed that although higher education institutions were assuming a greater role in remedial education courses and pedagogy, classroom practices did not change. One of the major problems with this open drop-in service refers to having tutors

available to assist students with their understanding of problems related to their current academic programs. Students drop in for tutorial help and sign in on the wait sheet. When it is his or her turn, the tutor works with the student for 30 minutes to one hour. Some students feel a sense of embarrassment at needing these services. If the student is not provided with a tutor at that time, the student may not return for a follow-up appointment time. These students are sensitive about their particular issues, and many feel that they are being judged regardless of other students in the same room receiving help. Some student complaints are more social in nature. In my position as Academic Advisor, African American students have commented to me that they feel they are seen as the representative for all people of their culture. Some students have said they feel that their teachers are unapproachable, and other students have reported feeling lonely as if they were outcasts. They have an overwhelming flight response to flee the area and not be noticed.

Maxwell (1997) pointed out the deficiencies in unprepared students: “Skills, knowledge, motivation, and academic ability are significantly below those of the typical student in the colleges where unprepared students are enrolled” (p. 2). Ender and Wilkie (2000) stated that unprepared students are likely to display any number of characteristics such as low academic self-concept, unrealistic grade and career expectations, unfocused career objectives, extrinsic motivation, external locus of control, low self-efficacy, inadequate study skills for college success, and a belief that learning is memorizing and a result of passive learning (Ender & Wilkie, 2000). It is evident by the comments of unprepared students and the works of Maxwell, Enders, and Wilkie that a more holistic

approach must be taken to reach the layers of issues that impede their academic achievement.

Maxwell (1997) and Ender and Wilkie (2000) are only three years apart and both more than a decade old in their assessment of unprepared students at risk of academic failure. However, their descriptions of the unprepared students are still accurate. Unprepared students are considered low achievers, students who have poor school attendance, students who attend unaccredited school districts, students from disadvantaged homes, and adult returning learners. This varied student population has grown substantially over the past several years in part due to the influx of families leaving the city, families moving to the area due to job transfers, and companies leaving certain parts of the country because of the economy. With this increase in the student population, the number of unprepared students enrolling in college remedial education courses is creating a need for more remedial courses, employing additional remedial education faculty, and locating additional classrooms to accommodate these courses (Higbee & Dwinnell, 1998).

Preparing colleges for the unprepared students has become another challenge. In the past, unprepared students would often just drop out or never consider coming to college. The pendulum has swung in the opposite direction; students are enrolling in college despite their lack of preparedness. The majority of the credit for this pendulum swing is the shift of the economy. Americans have lost the jobs that sustained their families, and students are less likely to find those lower-wage jobs now taken by their adult parents who once held the higher-salaried positions. About 20% of all workers do not have health care coverage from any source (Kalleberg, Reskin, & Hudson, 2000).

During my doctoral class, “Instructional Program Improvement Strategies,” our professor posed this question for discussion: “Should all students be expected to attend college?” The discussion was lively, and there were many opinions and thoughts that contributed to this specific question. One statement that stuck with me came from a fellow student who stated that he did not believe every student should go to college. He was not without support in his statement. I was astounded to hear this perspective from an educator. Is it not every citizen’s right to be educated if he or she so choose? He expounded on his position making the point that every student has the right to an education through 12 years; beyond this point it should be understood that not every person has the ability to succeed in college. In an article authored by Newby-Hines (2007), the author suggested that high school counselors will no longer advise students in two categories: (a) those who are on track for post-secondary education and (b) those who are bound for the factories. The author is suggesting that counselors should be concerned with advising all students to continue their education beyond high school if only for one year. Their belief is founded on individual ability to use technology in all areas of a person vocation. The debate over access to college was discussed in a panel at the Urban Institute where a unanimous “yes” was echoed that all students should have at least one year of higher education or career training beyond high school. Educators and administrators will realize that as the economy continues to shift, more high school graduates and returning learners are headed to the classroom to be reclassified for this changing job market.

The Disconnection Between High School and College

In the 21st century, the majority of students will need some postsecondary education courses to earn a respectable wage. “An estimated 85% of current jobs and

almost 90% of the fastest-growing and best-paying jobs by 20% require some postsecondary education classes" (McCabe, 2003, p. 8). "Sixty-three percent of students pursuing two-year degrees, and 40% of students in four-year colleges take at least one remedial course in their first semester of college" (Kirst & Bracco, 2004, pp. 14-15). A recent report published by American College Testing Exam stated that a large majority of high school students who took math and science courses did not gain college-ready skills (60% and 74%) implying that the course titles may be correct, but the content and instructions are not aligning with the rigors of college instruction.

High schools and colleges must form alliances to discuss expectations and review materials and instruction to lead students in the direction of higher education. In addition to academic preparation, students need to know that being aligned characteristically with the college environment can lead to successful completion of their college degree. College readiness is enhanced by students assuming responsibility for their academic achievement, exhibiting respect for themselves, their peers and professors; and developing character and perseverance. Too often, academically unprepared students leave high school misled about their own abilities. They believe that they are ready to assume the rigors of college-level courses. Some of these students achieved a 3.0 GPA on their high school course work and managed to get through the curriculum required for their acceptance to an institution of higher learning. Spann and McCrimmon (1998) said, "A detailed plan is needed if we are to address students' academic needs" (p. 37). Academic planning in college helps students prepare for the upcoming semesters in several ways: by selecting the appropriate courses to promote academic success, discussing with the transfer college which courses will work best to fulfill the

requirements for the degree, and consulting with other students to determine which professor would be most likely to teach according to their preferred learning style. In my experience, students' ability to plan and keep track of their academic courses is a fairly good predictor of how long it will take to complete their academic program.

Remedial courses add cost and time to degree completion for students, but colleges have also devoted time and money to remediation. The cost has been difficult to measure, and the results of course remediation have not been evaluated fully. Other programs are the A+ programs created in the Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education as an incentive for improving Missouri high school students' college enrollment in Missouri community colleges implemented the A+ program. Students are finding their way into the A+ programs, and many are entering community colleges testing into developmental classes. Participation in A+ programs does not mean that students are academically prepared for the rigors of college. These programs verify that students have been engaged in a strict set of activities along with adhering to the attendance policy and meeting the minimal qualifications to receive the A+ scholarship.

More schools are becoming proactive by joining resources to address the problem of unprepared students. Two colleges, Ozarks Technical Community College and Missouri State University, that have initiated a task force to find ways to combat the rising need for remedial classes as growing numbers of students fail to pass college-level English and mathematics (*The Free Library*, 2008). The institutions are examining best practices and best programs used across the country to determine if they can find a program or programs best suited to their institution.

The director of an academic achievement center at a community college in Missouri that tutors students who need help in order to pass basic algebra and English classes said of unpreparedness, “It’s an epidemic” (Crise & Newby-Hines, 2009, p. 2). Another executive, Jim Kellerman, director of the Missouri Community College Association, noted that students who are unprepared are a prevalent problem across the state and the country (Crise & Newby-Hines, 2009). A Missouri community college’s task force is expected to have a report in the near future that discloses their findings on unprepared students in Missouri schools. This school hopes to save some of the $2 million it spent last year on remedial services for 7,300 students.

Colleges are spending billions of dollars to prepare incoming freshmen to compete in college-level courses. There is a substantial amount of money spent by colleges and taxpayers on unprepared students. These funds have been provided to elevate students’ academic standing in college-level courses. Remediation has grown to enormous proportions in this country. Studies indicate that 1.4 billion dollars a year is spent on remedial education. In 2006, a study conducted by the alliance calculated that more than 2.3 billion dollars is lost on students who leave college before being prepared to compete in college level courses (Wiehe, 2010).

Transition of Unprepared Students

In years past, students who completed high school were content to find a job to earn enough money for themselves and their family. This was typical of the majority of students who graduated. Men were looking for career jobs, and women were looking for a husband with whom to start housekeeping. The economy has made significant changes in the way Americans live and how Americans think of school, education, and acquiring

a skill. The momentum of the United States' economy has directly propelled women from being in the home to being in the corporate boardroom.

In the 21st century, a college degree has become what a high school diploma was 100 years ago. Acknowledging academically deficient students and helping them learn the skills needed for college has been a feature of American education (Ramaley, Leskes, & Associates, 2002). Today, the older adult is returning to community colleges in record numbers to be retrained for the 21st century workforce changes (Ramaley et al., 2002).

With the state of the economy, learning has become a lifelong endeavor. Students as well as their parents are looking to community colleges to provide education and training to meet the demands of this continuously changing job market. Colleges are admitting students in record numbers. It is fair to say that of the students who are leaving high school would prefer to find a job earning enough money to provide for their needs and possibly a family later. Their parents are fearful that if their children are not in school they will lose their insurance, thus the sequence begins. As enrollment numbers increase, so do the number of students entering college who are academically at risk of failure, with poor preparation skills and low probability of completing their academic goals. Keeling (2003) suggested that the millennial generation students who graduate from high school in the 21st century are often entering community colleges lacking educational planning skills. For some students this may be the first time they have had the obligation of getting to class on time and interacting with other students they do not know or confronting choices about social challenges of drinking and dating. Few students are prepared for these challenges during the first year of college.

These students may want to continue their education but lack the appropriate skills of planning for their educational success. The lack of skills or preparation may be partially due to parents taking the leadership role and not allowing students to make plans independently. Among these challenges are low-income students who drop out of school at a rate six times that of their peers (Wirt & Livingston, 2004). Unprepared students have an inadequate background of knowledge and skills necessary for college. These include inadequate study skills, inability to read and write, lack of time management, and lack of the ability to organize and categorize important information.

Critical-thinking skills and common-sense skills are equally important tools in completing college courses. These students often have unrealistic expectations and ideas of what is required to complete college. The non-academic factors typically begin to unfold once students are enrolled, and this also affects retention **(**Braxton & McClendon, 2001-2002; Kennedy, Sheckley, & Kehrhahn, 2000; Mangold, Bean, Adams, Schwab, & Lynch, 2003; O'Brien & Shedd, 2001; Wyckoff, 1998).

Students at Risk and Unprepared

Training educators regarding at-risk students is critical. Training educators to respond positively to at-risk students requires a holistic approach to educational training in instructional methods and class management. In my research some of the educators were willing to participate in educational training workshops, planning strategies to learn as much as possible to address the needs of the unprepared student. Other members of the helping team have joined forces in training programs seminars and planning strategies to quality academic advising programs and successful recruitment and retention of at-risk students (Heisserer & Parette, 2002).

Requiring a personal level of training for educators helps to improve professional staff relationships with students who are considered at-risk. Research literature on student retention and attrition suggests that contact with a significant person within an institution education is a crucial factor in a student's decision to remain in college (Chickering & Gamson, 1987; Glennen et al., 1996). Researchers Chickering and Gamson (1987) found that students who were engaged in the courses with their professors had higher retention levels; and Glennen et al. (1996) studied students who were more academically successful than students who did not have a relationship with their professors. Higher education professionals who come in direct contact with students and understand the challenges their students face are primary candidates for advisor and mentor roles. While faculty, administrators, and student affairs professionals all serve as advocates and play an integral part in student retention and attrition, advisors are typically in the best position to assist students in making quality academic decisions. The terms counselor and advisor are used to determine the extent of services given to the students. The counselor at this institution has responsibilities to work with every aspect of the student’s academic program. The advisor can provide academic advisement but is restricted to work with students on probation. Counselors are usually the front line of contact with the students who are enrolling in college. Counselors are advisors; and as such they help students plan their transfer college courses; they are advocates for students who need courses accepted or waived; they listen when students have academic and personal issues; they ask questions to encourage critical thinking skills; and they refer students to college services as needed.

Community colleges are generally open-enrollment institutions of higher educational learning. This means that all students are received and admitted, regardless of their academic background. Some students attending college believe that doing so allows them the opportunity to succeed in a professional career after graduation (Ismel, 1988).

Students who are considered unprepared and at risk of leaving college before completing a degree are in need of an array of services. Applying remedial courses as a remedy to the problem increases the threat of students leaving college due to course failure (McCabe, 2003). To increase the success of students who are at risk of not attaining their academic goals, specific objectives must be in place. Students who are entering the study community college must take an assessment test to begin their academic studies. An assessment series in basic academic skills that includes exams in English, reading, and mathematics is used to place students in the appropriate course levels. Students who test into remedial courses in all three foundational courses (mathematics, reading, and English) must enroll in courses from the Success Semester course list. The Success Semester program is designed for students who test into remedial courses in all three foundational courses. Students test into three remedial courses are required to complete all three areas before enrolling in academic college credit courses. Students who are placed in three remedial courses are generally students who are at risk of leaving college early before completing their degree.

Minority Students Meet the Demands of College

During the early l960's, there was an acute change in minority student college-attendance patterns and degree attainment in the United States. These changes encouraged an increasing number of minority students, accounting for the considerable

number of these students on college campuses. As the demographics of this country change, so do the demographics of our cities and counties. Community colleges are no exception to the ongoing changes that are rapidly occurring in many cities, schools, and communities. The U.S. Census Bureau (2010) indicated that the country is changing rapidly. The Hispanic population is now the largest minority population. African Americans represent 13% of the population. Projections indicate that within 30 years, African Americans and Hispanics will constitute over one-third of the American population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010).

In 1996, the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that African American, Hispanic, Asian or Pacific Islander students, and Native American students made up approximately 27% of the total college enrollment at degree-granting institutions in the United States. According to the U.S. Department of Education, the number of racial and ethnic minority students who were awarded degrees increased in the years between 1976 and 1998. Table 1 illustrates the breakdown of minority students awarded degrees.

Table 1

Minority Students Who Were Awarded Degrees

Minority Group	High School	Some College	Bachelor Degree
Two or More Races	73.2	48.1	19.6
Black or African American	71.3	40.3	15
Hispanic or Latino	45.5	25.0	8.0

Note. From the National Center for Education Statistics (2008).

Colleges and universities are confronted with the challenges of helping minority students cope with issues they may face while on campus. To help racial and ethnic minority students make successful transitions from high school to college, programs and individuals must be willing and accepting of others' differences in order to provide instruction and direction to succeed in higher education. The demographics of minority faculty are underrepresented in the community college in all instructional disciplines as well as professional, technical, and administrative positions (Black Issues, 2000). The shortage of minority faculty and staff may in part be a contributor to the failure in retention of minority students. Minority students who are entering colleges and universities unprepared for the rigors of college and facing issues such as alienation, marginalization, and loneliness are met with multiple challenges. Because of the growth of ethnic minorities' participation in secondary education, institutions are investigating unbiased admission, and a welcoming environment that speaks to a variety of multicultural and ethnic backgrounds. Far too many of these students never have the opportunity to seek help from programs established to meet the challenges of minority students before leaving college. The first few weeks of a student's educational experience are sometimes more traumatic than enduring additional weeks of academic struggling. During the incoming freshman transition to college, students preparing to register for classes expressed their fears, self-doubts, and apprehension regarding post-secondary education.

"Responsibility for creating a supportive climate lies within the college community. Minorities should not be made to feel that they are the spokespersons for every person of their race or national origin" (Ender & Wilkie, 2000, pp. 134-135). There

must be a genuine attempt to understand and provide the necessary mechanisms to create an environment that cultivates learning.

When students feel accepted by their teachers and peers and are engaged in the learning process, they tend to work harder to achieve and report more satisfaction with their educational experience. I further suggest that unprepared students may have a negative self-concept with respect to the academic environment; it is important that advisors provide the unprepared student with positive and encouraging feedback when appropriate. This encouragement and acceptance could change students' educational direction and provide them with a successful college experience.

Remedial Education

The continued addition of remedial courses alone has not resolved the retention issue or stopped students from leaving college early. Understanding the unprepared students and the definition of the term "unprepared" over the past 50 years might shed some light on the next proactive move toward building academic success toward degree completion. Higher educational institutions must provide students with the necessary courses to assist them in their academic growth by using specific strategies at all levels of the educational frames to bridge the connectedness to the conceptual focus on unprepared students. Although the cost to implement additional courses may vary, many of the delivery services already exist within the institution; however, preparing faculty and staff to work with unprepared students is missing in higher education. There is a growing demand for college reform to improve the retention and educational achievement of students. The strategic planning committee on college campuses recognizes the challenges ahead, creating new pathways for students who are educationally and

economically disadvantaged. Researchers recognize that at-risk students have multiple social problems as well as academic deficiencies in basic skills. Pascarella et al. (1996) researched extensively at-risk student orientation to college during the freshman year. The evidence from this research indicates that first generation students tend to be at a disadvantage with regards to basic knowledge about postsecondary education (Pascarella et al., 1996). This research further acknowledges that first generation students are challenged with anxieties, dislocations, and difficulties of college courses. Their experiences often involve cultural and social as well as academic transitions (Pascarella et al., 1996). There seems to be a relationship between unpreparedness students and academically unsuccessful students.

Researchers have taken a critical look at educational institutions that provide a conscious, driven approach to addressing the problems of students who are at risk of leaving school before degree completion. Educational institution such as Northern Virginia Community College, commonly known as NOVA, has launched the Pathways program to Baccalaureate degrees. The Pathways program provides unprepared students with support and structure from high school to community college to university until degree completion (Whitmire & Esch, 2010). The University of Alabama-Birmingham took an already existing program supported by faculty and professional advisors and incorporated critical thinking and remedial advising to retain at-risk students. There are others colleges who are innovative and moved to the challenge of retaining at-risk students. However, many colleges are still missing additional components of student success. The purpose of remedial education is somewhat like providing the missing links

of a chain. It connects the missing pieces by developing in each learner the skills and attitudes necessary for attaining academic, career, and life goals.

Effective practices related to the overall effectiveness of remedial educational programs should be centralized and intentionally coordinated. Educational programs should institute policies to facilitate the student's completion of remedial course work. According to Cohen and Brawer (1982), "students who are unprepared for traditional college-level studies represent the thorniest single problem for community colleges" (p. 236). These challenges extend throughout all levels of post-secondary education with remedial education serving as a gateway to post-secondary education for many students in this country.

According to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) in a report from 1996, 32% of incoming freshmen were required to take remedial courses, which made up about 30% of all freshmen in four-year colleges and universities. Students who took and completed two remedial courses had a 45% chance of achieving an associate degree (NCES, 2003). College readiness programs in colleges have assisted learners to develop the skills and attitude to reach their academic career, and maintain their academic standards. Community colleges have strategic planning committees discussing the effectiveness of remedial courses and the unprepared students in relation to course completion. Students who are planning on enrolling in courses at the community college must take an assessment test, but the ACT is generally not required for admission to the community college. The assessment test consists of English, reading, and mathematics components. Students who test into one or two remedial courses may take any college-

level course that does not require prerequisites. For any remedial course into which the students test, they must either take the course or appeal the score and retest.

The curriculum of remedial courses often covers material that was taught in high school. Some of the college remedial courses are independent study such as reading, and students are responsible for the subject matter covered. These remedial courses are an opportunity for students to gain the skills of general knowledge in basic courses that were missed in high school. Remedial courses help some at-risk students bridge the information gap that exists and builds an academic foundation that is the goal of the primary educational experience. In other words, community college remedial courses provide the missing pieces from both elementary and secondary educations.

Remedial courses offer students the opportunity to improve their skills in mathematics, English, and reading. Course numbers for these courses usually begin with a zero designating that the course is without credit. Although not for credit, class hours are completed, and students receive a Pass or Fail grade. Students may determine if they need to take a remedial course by the results of the assessment test. Students must take the remedial course into which they tested or appeal the assessment test score to be placed in a non-remedial course.

Lundell and Higbee (2000-2001) stated the following:

> We need to see each student's education as a continuum, not as a series of discrete experiences. This is especially true of the single most profound 'disconnect' not between developmental instruction and the so-called mainstream but between high school and college. (p. 8)

Counselors and advisors can help these students understand the benefit of remedial courses by reframing basic criteria needed to be successful in college.

Poor academic performance is a clear indication of "at riskiness" (Denti & Guerin, 1999; Guerin & Denti, 1999; Karlsson, 1996; Murdock, 1999; Sagor, 1999). Students who test into remedial courses are more likely not to take advantage of the resources available to raise their student success ratio. This is due in part to their lack of basic knowledge of postsecondary education and other challenges these students experience during their transition from secondary education.

Theories and Research on Learning Communities

Creating standards of best practice methods for at-risk students can help in maximizing their chances for success. Understanding how students internalize knowledge, acquire skills, and develop critical-thinking skills share in the overall concept of the teacher-student relationship. Teachers are more than information givers; they cultivate an engaging environment where students can reflect on their discoveries of new information contributing to their world of knowledge.

Social integration pertains to the degree of congruency between the individual students and the social system of a college or university. "Mechanisms of social integration include formal peer group associations, extracurricular activities, and interactions with faculty and administrators" (Tinto, 1975, p. 107). The learning environment has a great influence on the student's ability to learn. Teachers must understand effective classroom management and use strategies to promote a positive, cooperative, and purposeful learning environment. Students need the experience of assuming responsibility for themselves and others, participating in the decision-making

process, and working collaboratively on projects in an environment that provides constructive feedback. Constructive feedback is one of the tools that encourage participation and personal satisfaction as well as academic growth. When educators discuss the learning environment, they are systematically designing learning communities for all students to flourish and grow. “Learning communities foster resiliency by building on students’ strengths rather than focusing on deficits” (Schutz & Lanehart, 1994, p. 401). Learning communities typically place groups of students in two or more linked courses with mutually reinforcing themes and assignments. They seek to build peer relationships, intensify connections to faculty, and deepen understanding of coursework, which increases the likelihood of student retention until degree completion.

Student attrition continues to be a major concern in higher education, especially in the areas of students who are considered at-risk. Learning communities inspire discovery of two disciplines in the context of our contemporary times. The student’s learning is active and engaged. The student will make connections between courses, see how ideas intersect, and take ownership of the first year in college.

As educators, we should ensure that the goals of the institution parallel the goals and characteristics of its students. Wiggins and McTighe (1998) suggested that students may take courses for different reasons: to develop a philosophy of life, to learn to interpret numerical data, to understand scientific principles or concepts, to learn to be a better communicator, to learn to organize ideas, or to understand how researchers gain knowledge. Irrespective of any of the reasons listed above, educators must be trained and supported if they are to instruct this fragile population of students. Learning communities inspire students to make connections between subjects, disciplines, students, and to make

connections between students and faculty in supportive learning environment. Educating the educators will establish these basic principles for student learning.

Colleges are developing support centers for faculty and staff for the purpose of support for teaching and learning. This community college has incorporated resources to improve teaching and learning, creating a variety of opportunities for faculty and staff. This center serves as an incubator for generating and nourishing new ideas for the improvement of teaching and learning. Learning communities were established to engage students in common work, and to share similar values and norms. Faculty members are orientated towards teaching, students and schooling, and working in a cooperative collaborative manner. In education cultures, the term learning community is most often used to describe a group of people from multiple areas and multiple levels who work together collaboratively and continually (Johnson, 2001-2002). Researchers such as Clark and Burns say that such an arrangement, identified by clear and shared purpose, collaboration, and collective responsibility for student learning, is critical to effective teaching, and has a direct effect on the improvement of student learning.

College Students and Retention

Many students are leaving college before completing a degree. Retention of students in school is primarily the responsibility of the college institution, and institutions that provide the necessary service programs to accommodate students who have multiple issues while attending institutions of higher education. Pascarella and Terenzini (1991) offered a summary of literature on student retention and other associated college student outcomes. Tinto's (1993) research on student departure has influenced researchers' understanding of student retention. Tinto's theory helped guide a large number of

empirical studies of student retention. Students enter an academic system that is measured by grade performance and intellectual development. Together, these two dynamics lead to academic integration into a social system where peer group interactions and faculty interaction lead to social integration. Academic and social integration provide a perfect marriage (Tinto, 1993). Students who are engaged in social activities on a college campus seem to be more vested in their educational career and achieve greater academic success.

In an effort to improve retention, colleges across the country are creating programs, developing strategies, and collecting data on students who are at-risk. This approach was influenced by the works of Tinto (1987) and Tinto et al. (1996), and the learning community movement in instruction. Learning communities supports both individual and collaborative construction of knowledge, sharing skills and emphasizing how to learn rather than what to learn.

A common element found in much of the literature on at-risk students is a supporting environment, for it promotes positive experiences that could improve retention regardless of internal characteristics (University of Georgia, 1999). However, the literature was in conflict with the belief in a supportive educational environment where many developmental courses must be taken and successfully completed before college-level courses are taken. Remedial courses alone do not provide students with the appropriate tools to react to situations and events with proper decision-making skills, nor do these courses make an uncomfortable situation in a class endurable without the support of other services that are available to these students. When students are placed in remedial courses without the support of the college environment, students often fail or

leave school before completing their degree. Many colleges do not participate in an organized program or programs for at-risk students that promote positive relationships, cooperation, and purposeful learning. Some colleges do not participate in learning communities in which students and faculty engage in purposeful learning activities, allowing students to make choices, creating expectations, and learning critical-thinking skills and methods for successful and positive communication and behavior. Many institutions add remedial courses as a means to raise students' academic basic skills level to an appropriate academic level in order to successfully compete in college courses, which improves retention.

The purpose of remedial education is to develop in each learner the skills and attitudes necessary for the attainment of academics, career, and life goals. Although remedial courses are readily available to students who test into them, another important piece of the at-risk student's circumstances appears to be in conflict with the general theoretical advice that promotes a holistic approach to the success of at-risk students (Bean, 1980; Spady, 1970; Tinto, 1975). The holistic approach is designed to provide at-risk students with a sense of purpose by providing course work that has a special interest to them. The holistic approach identifies students with issues other than academics that have a direct bearing on their retention and thus their ability to complete college and achieve a degree.

Academic Counselors and Advisors

Academic counselors and advisors encourage students to become self-disciplined when it comes to preparing for their classes in a manner consistent with the professor's timeline. This academic support team educates new and returning students on the

differences between high school and college and shows students how to select courses while considering their other obligations such as job, family, and friends. The individuals who make up the advisement team must track and document the changing educational plans of the various colleges to whom the community college supplies students through the transfer process. Students are encouraged to begin the interview process of selecting a transfer college or university during their first semester of community college. Counselors listen to students' personal trials and academic challenges. These counselors and advisors are also responsible for registering students in classes, helping students deal with life's many challenges, and learning new strategies that encourage student retention.

Over 30 years of study, research, and practice have placed students who are academically unprepared in remedial courses and special education programs (e.g., Slavin & Madden, 1989; Oakes, 1985) that may actually reduce the student's engagement and learning opportunities while stigmatizing him or her. A mainstream view (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Karlsson, 1996) proposes that academic deficiencies are primarily literacy-related. This theory holds sufficient credibility when students are entering the community college from high school testing into remedial reading, English, and mathematics (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Karlsson, 1996). A large number of students struggle to learn in their content area courses because they cannot understand the required texts and express their understanding in discussion and writing. These students are at risk of not completing their courses and achieving a degree. Leone and Drakeford (1999) said that remediation does not work; rather, they believe that "a challenging curriculum" and a "variety of courses" are among the hallmarks of successful programs (p. 88). Parts of their research may have validity; nevertheless, regardless of the grade level, if students are not able to

comprehend what they are reading, a more challenging curriculum would not equate to students completing their degree program successfully.

Community colleges and universities are incorporating retention programs that address at-risk students and their lack of preparation for the college curriculum. The National Center for Developmental Education at Appalachian State University (2009) began to develop programs and courses to assist developmental students and to develop the specialized field and conduct research in the area of developmental education. Derry and Murphy (1986) conducted research in cognitive and educational psychology and developed a program called, Putting Learning Strategies to Work. This was completed in conjunction with a consortium of four-year colleges to find ways to serve unprepared students. This initiative supported conferences held throughout the Midwest to provide faculty and staff with key information to help the unprepared students successfully participate in the rigors of college coursework. The shift was toward creating a cooperative relationship between the students' developmental department and instruction. These two areas could have an enormous impact on retention of at-risk students (Derry & Murphy, 1986).

Student development offices house the academic counselors and advisors. The academic counselors and advisors have the potential to offer a curriculum of opportunities for student success, where students, who need support in academics, as well as emotional, social, and cultural development, can take full advantage of the college experience. Instruction of this type is not a new element in student education. In fact, student education could not exist without the interaction between counselor and advisors helping to prepare a pathway with the students' participation to their academic future.

Counselors' instruction sets the standards for students' learning processes and academic interaction. However, over the past several years, counselor-student relationships have encouraged more interaction and decreased the distance between the teacher-student relationship and academic interaction. A positive relationship between the counselor and student can give students autonomy and opportunities to practice and develop critical decision-making skills and courage to express their opinions in the safety of their learning environment.

The counselor-student relationship can assist the teacher in understanding the student's learning style and his or her capacity for learning. Using a more holistic approach with students will encompass promoting a safe and supportive learning environment for students to learn and grow. Offering comfort when students are distressed will show acceptance of the students and a sense of inclusion and belonging.

Roueche and Roueche (1993) provided a complete guideline for developing and evaluating a set of standards for students. These guidelines include creating a clear description of outcomes and developing mechanisms for evaluation. Counselors and advisors have used many of these guidelines and suggestions by these researchers to work more effectively with students in response to their needs. Counselors and advisors are the best line of contact to students for answering questions and resolving most problems within and outside of the academic institution.

The Returning Learner

It is becoming more common for counselors and advisors to provide academic services for adults who may have entered higher educational institutions many years after graduating from high school. The returning learner is entering college in record numbers,

both males and females. Many of these students are unprepared for college basic skills; therefore, they are often testing into at least one or more remedial courses during their first semester of college (Higbee & Dwinell, 1998).

Many of these returning students are uncertain about taking that first step back into college. During the registration process, these students express their fears and apprehensions about returning to college after so many years away from a classroom. They feel that the younger students will laugh at them for being the older person in class; some have low self-esteem possibly stemming from the circumstances that brought them back to college. Many are facing a career and lifestyle changes, and others are afraid of not being able to meet the academic demands of the courses they are required to take in order to complete their degree (Benshoff & Lewis, 1992).

Whatever their circumstances, these students have a substantial position on college campuses today. The returning learner returns to college with the attitude of being responsible for their own learning. Returning learners are bringing years of work and life experiences, they come to college ready to jump in and learn from their professors, and they understand the time element and adjust their behavior accordingly. Colleges are aware of their presence and they are making accommodations, such as providing additional tutorial services and the returning learner's workshop especially for them. The older returning student may be able to take certain classes at a discount to encourage their learning. Returning students are a valuable part of the college campus especially in the classroom. The college offers returning learners group sessions to meet other returning learners and to assist them with goal setting, decision-making, self-confidence building, career exploration, assertiveness training, time management, and organizational skills

(Adelman, 1999). The returning learners often have multiple non-school-related commitments and responsibilities that they must attend to while pursuing their educational goals. Many of these students may also be returning to college to pursue new interests, or they may wish to resume their education after having dropped out of school for reasons such as financial problems; competing responsibilities; or a lack of focus, maturity, or motivation. Implementing the measurements that would address the various difficulties adult learners face is secondary to the initial need to advance the understanding of, and the appreciation for, adult education and adult learners.

Alternative Interventions

Researchers have examined and documented a number of interventions that were designed to improve retention and raise the academic level of at-risk college students. High academic expectations are characteristic of successful alternative programs. Secada (1999) noted that the ineffective programs focused on basic skill remediation and vocational training. Remedial education may be necessary for some returning learners who are planning to continue their education. Industry has made employment more available to graduates of vocational programs. Vocational training programs offer specialized knowledge in a trade or manual skill; students may choose from a variety of trades and typically specialize in one specialty area.

Constructivists suggest that remediation does not work. They say what does work are high academic standards and high expectations. Leone and Drakeford (1999) cited that “a challenging curriculum and a ‘variety of courses’ are among the characteristics of successful programs” (p. 88). Karlsson (1996) also suggested that a variety of constructivist strategies are effective; for example, peer tutoring, cooperative grouping,

service learning, answering questions with questions, and a strong focus on student interest are among the most distinctive hallmarks of successful programs. These interventions include locating students early in the admission process (Guerin & Denti, 1999; Leone & Drakeford, 1999; Secada, 1999; Slavin & Madden, 1989). Assessment testing has been the procedure used to screen for students who need remedial courses. Capoor and Overstreet (1993) discussed compulsory placement into basic skills courses. Alfred and Lum (as cited in Duckwall & Vallandingham, 1995) discussed mandatory counseling.

McCabe (2000b) recommended that high school assessment and college-placement assessment should be integrated into a seamless assessment system. Fewer than 25% of high school students will succeed in entry-level college courses (Whelan, 2007). This might help students who complete high school graduation requirements transition appropriately into college level courses. Many of these students are not aware that they do not meet the basic skills for the general education requirements. For example, students who leave high school a semester before graduation take the assessment test and may test into all remedial courses. This is a common occurrence with many students leaving high school. High schools and high school students need to know how their students are progressing and developing college entry-level skills that promote academic success. Providing students with knowledge of the processes of the college assessment system helps to address early the academic problems regarding basic skills requirements for high school graduation and the general equivalent skills needed for college success.

Goodlad (1997) found that college students were more inclined to find value and pleasure in the arts, physical education, and vocational courses than in the traditional educational core curriculum courses. Cross (2000a, 2000b) found that the students who are most likely to drop out of college are not connected with the people and events on the college's campus. Cross noted that the connections need not always be face-to-face; communications can also be electronic via email or chat rooms, telephone calls, or letters. Humans need some way to feel that they belong. Tinto (1993) reported that being connected to the classroom and college has a significant effect on retention. The transition from high school to college presents challenges as well as opportunities. Students must simultaneously adapt to the rigors of college courses and meet the social responsibilities of the college environment as well (Holmstrom, Karp, & Gray, 2002).

One of the most important strategies currently being promoted and implemented is the strategy of learning communities based on Meiklejohn's Experimental College founded at the University of Wisconsin in 1972. Meiklejohn (1981) believed that undergraduate college students must be taught how to think. Thus, his aim was to make students into "thinking, caring, active citizens with intellectual skills to participate in a democratic society" (p. 1). The current literature on learning communities indicates that this process has a significant impact on the academic success of disadvantaged students, students of a different racial or cultural background, academically unprepared students, students needing remedial support, and non-traditional students.

Strategies for Students' Success

There are five conditions that are paramount in the support and retention of the unprepared students: (a) expectations of success, (b) advice, (c) support, (d) involvement,

and (e) learning (Gardiner, 1994). Researchers have indicated that high expectations of students are factors in students' academic success. Students, especially those who are low achievers, do not have high expectations of their ability (Gardiner, 1994). Students are more likely to persist and graduate in an environment where they are expected to succeed—one that provides clear and consistent information regarding institutional requirements, advising, and choices regarding programs, courses, and resources. It is especially important for students to have a personal point of contact—one campus person, faculty, counselor, or staff person who the student feels they know and feels comfortable sharing their thoughts. A remedial program designed for student achievement monitors the academic success of its students, supports the faculty who teach the unprepared students, and engages the students in campus life. Developing and maintaining a positive self-esteem is important for the development of students. Many of these students have issues with low self-esteem, especially regarding their remedial academic course work. Most students during their first semester of college require some form of academic or personal support. Support may be provided in a structured manner where students get together collectively to discuss their issues and receive support from each other. Mentor programs, drop-in student centers, and student club organizations may provide student support. Goodman (2001) found that calling a student's name aloud when checking attendance had a positive effect on attendance. He also concluded that professors could enhance retention and attendance by orally calling the class roll and making individual comments when returning papers to students. This concept adds a personal connection between professor and student. In my research, the students interviewed and the students in the case studies reported difficulty in talking to their

professors. Several students could not recall their professors' names. Researchers Barr and Parrett (2001), Benard (2001), are just a few of the supporters of students at risk and unprepared for college course work, providing supporting data that students are more likely to persist in an environment where they are considered and valued as members of the institution. All students have the desire to belong to a group, organization, or institution. Professors could make more of an effort by learning their students' names and brief information about their students. Studies have indicated that other programs have had success with students' attendance and academic achievement when the professors develop a personal relationship with their students.

The unprepared student often feels lonely and not a part of the intercultural environment within the college campus. Student involvement engages students in the campus experience and cultivates a positive exchange by fostering accountability for daily actions and awareness of their role as a contributing part of the college's movement, and this involvement matters more during the first semester of college when attachments are crucial to retention of students who are unprepared. Students are more likely to persist and graduate in an environment that supports involvement and encourages learning. The purpose of college learning is not just to transfer knowledge, but also to create and integrate experiences in the learning process. Students are then able to construct knowledge for themselves to become members of the community of learners. Educators must be educated in how to facilitate the learning process. If colleges place learning first and provide educational experiences for their educators, all participants succeed. O'Banion (1997) for more than 40 years has moved education forward by creating optimal learning communities. The principle is based on creating a practical

importance for change. The learner is a full partner in the learning process, assuming primary responsibility for his choices. Students become the pilots of their educational destination deciding in which direction they wish to travel. The learning college in a learning community offers as many options for learning as possible. Differentiated instruction has been a process used with students in K-12 classes to facilitate the student-learning process to address varied learning styles. Learners are encouraged to form and participate in collaborative learning activities. One of the most important principles involved in the learning process of students is feedback. Providing students with feedback assists both professors and students in knowing how the information has been processed and what information is needed to complete the knowledge base and assist students in understanding how this knowledge can be used (Irons, 2009), has shown that developmental students perform better when their curriculum relates to real-world situations and students' specific interests.

Summary

This chapter presented a review of literature related to the issues of students entering college unprepared for the rigors of higher education, the disconnection between high school and college, and the population of students who are at risk of leaving college before degree completion. Most students who attend college believe that a better life is in store for them and their families if they get a college education or vocational training. Minorities are increasing the academic rolls in higher education. Many are at risk and facing multiple barriers to succeeding in post-secondary education. The U. S. Census Bureau (2010) indicated that the change in global society is making a great impact on

many cities and schools. This projection indicated that within the next 30 years Black Americans and Hispanics would constitute over one-third of the American population.

Colleges and universities are faced with numerous challenges helping minority students who are facing academic challenges. Remedial education has increased in number of courses and level of participation. This increase is in part due to the shift in the economy. There are fewer jobs and an increase in lay-offs, which drives people to return to colleges and universities. This sudden increase in the college enrollment means more students are entering college unprepared. One of the major concerns is finances and specific characteristics of this population. Many of these students have issues that are compounded by their unpreparedness for school. Their issues consist of family problems, unemployment, and lack of critical thinking skills. In the educational institution, the student remedial department is designed to provide the support to address those issues that are non-academic. Counselors and advisors offer professors the freedom to work specifically with students' academic problems. Counselors and advisors are usually the first line of defense for students entering the educational system. The transition of students at risk and unprepared, procedures and processes with at-risk students, minority students meeting the demands of college, and developmental education are all within the educational scope of counselors and advisors. Learning communities have been developed to address the at-risk students' academic difficulties. Theories and research on learning communities, college students and retention, and group activities are all consistent with the academic learner and alternative interventions.

Traditionally, schools have responded to student diversity and poor academic

performance with approaches such as ability grouping and grade retention. Implementing a more holistic approach where students' needs are identified upon admission and an educational plan is developed to accommodate their academic deficits is promising. This approach includes learning communities, educational courses, group work, tutorial and counseling services, and weekly or bi-weekly monitoring to increase academic achievement and retention. This may be a more appropriate approach than remedial courses to address the retention of at-risk students in a community college. When colleges assist students in gaining academic competencies and support in their coursework, more students complete their college courses and are able to graduate.

Chapter 3 presents the methodology used to gather data for this study and describes the research design, the survey, teacher-student perceptions data, and case studies.

Chapter III - Methodology

Three approaches were used to collect information at the study community college to answer the following research questions:

- Why is the study community college failing to retain at-risk students?
- How effective is the assessment process for entering community college students?
- How does faculty perceive the attitudes, abilities, and overall motivation of students who are unprepared for college?

First, I interviewed faculty who taught remedial courses and students who took the remedial courses. Second, I surveyed students registering for the Spring 2009 semester courses, and third, I conducted three case studies with students who each tested into three remedial courses. These students were placed in a program called Success Semester, which provided one semester of courses without many of the rigors of regular courses. I also looked at learners who were returning to college to start a degree and those who planned to complete a degree. They were unprepared for the rigors of college-level course work. This study could provide counselors, faculty, and administrators with valuable information to help in addressing the issues of unprepared students entering college. Students' lack of preparation is sometimes viewed as the fault of high schools but students may have been remiss and inattentive, leading to poor academic performance and low grades. To understand the unprepared students, we must learn from them what is important and what services they require to be successful. Students who are unprepared can better explain why they are unprepared for college work.

The purpose of my study was (a) to review the preparedness of community colleges for the unprepared first-time freshman and the challenges of accommodating

these students, (b) to provide the unprepared students with a voice regarding their own knowledge about being unprepared for college course work, and (c) to engage faculty in a conversation regarding their perception of the unprepared student, and determine if faculty needs are met in educating the unprepared students. A case study approach was chosen to personalize the students at risk of leaving college by including their voices to tell their stories in their own words. My research study offers supporting interviews that illustrate factors that contribute to the unprepared students leaving college before completing a degree. Case studies allow the study subjects who are actively involved in the process of learning explain their attitudes and beliefs about their specific situation. I required the assistance of students who were actively taking remedial courses and were willing to discuss details of their particular education difficulties including any related to their registration process and how they were introduced to the educational process. This study was conducted to track the outcome of these three students during a semester term to determine the process and progress they made during the semester.

Research Design

Identifying the areas of need in this qualitative research study resulted in a design to collect three sets of data: (a) a survey of students; (b) interviews with faculty providing perceptions about the unprepared students and with students providing perceptions about faculty's instruction in the classroom; and (c) multiple extended interviews with three students who tested into three remedial courses. This study employs qualitative research methods in its attempt to understand why students leave college. The study used the natural human behaviors to report what happens to the students during one semester of remedial courses and adjusting to new teachers in a new environment. The interviews

provided not only student and faculty answers to my questions but also an opportunity for me to observe their behaviors, critical thinking skills, socialization skills, and attitudes.

The first set of data was collected from the surveys, which involved structuring the survey questions. Questions emerged from concerns related to students' ability to be successful in college. After the list of questions was created, I had a conversation with co-workers and specifically with my dissertation committee chair to refine the questions to make sure that the survey questions were easy to read, clear, and unambiguous. Students needed only to mark "Yes" (indicating agreement) or "No" (indicating disagreement) to respond to the 15 short statements. One hundred surveys were passed out to first-time enrollees at registration during the spring semester of 2009 and 68 surveys were returned. The survey results provided descriptive data of the characteristics of students who were enrolled in college during the fall semester of 2009. The entire survey can be found in Appendix C.

The second set of data was collected from faculty and student interviews regarding their perceptions of unprepared students. Faculty perception provided a unique dimension, which demonstrated how perception affects student learning. The researcher conducted nine interviews with faculty regarding their perceptions of and experiences with unprepared students. Participants were pulled together from various disciplines within the college. The participants were engaged in unstructured conversational interviews regarding their student population, class size, student participation, and level of engagement. The interviews took place over three semesters, were 10 to 15 minutes in length, and occurred during a brief stroll to the faculty member's office from the classroom, in the faculty member's office, walking across campus, in a telephone

conversation, or over lunch. These conversations were not audio recorded, and I took notes to preserve the accuracy as much as possible. Each of the faculty's particular positions resulted in differing viewpoints and perspectives.

The third set of data was collected from case studies. An invitational letter was mailed to 270 students who tested into three Success Semester remedial courses. The invitation offered students who tested into three remedial courses the opportunity to meet with an academic counselor at regularly scheduled times to discuss their course work, receive tutorial services, and perhaps receive a referral to counseling services. There were no responses from the first mailing.

A second and different invitational letter was sent to another set of students who tested into three Success Semester courses. The letter explained the interview and the information that would be gained from the student's participation. There were 174 invitations mailed to students. The mailing process occurred over a period of six to eight weeks. Of the 174 mailed invitations, three students responded by stopping by my office for a face-to-face conversation. I received four additional telephone calls and two arranged appointments, but students failed to keep their appointment times. The three participants who agreed to participate agreed to discuss their experiences from the time of visiting the campus to the enrollment process and through their first semester. The third set of data was collected from case studies of three students who each tested into three remedial courses. The three case studies reflect multiple interviews with three students over the course of a semester.

Students who agreed to participate in the case studies provided a brief biography discussing their educational experiences from elementary to secondary education. Three

students agreed to meet for six interviews to share their experiences during the enrollment process and their first semester on a college campus, providing information aimed specifically to investigate the value of a holistic approach in working with at-risk students.

Limitations of the Study

There were seven study limitations. The small sample size and single institution implementation were the first two limitations to generalizing the results of this study to other institutions. Increasing the sample size and incorporating a representative sample derived from all first-year students would strengthen future studies that might replicate this one with a more diverse group of students. The third and fourth limitations were the following: (a) the participants who agreed to be interviewed were all White, which does not represent the diversity of the community college student body; and (b) eligibility for inclusion was based on data collected from the assessment test scores. Students who tested into three remedial courses experienced the Success Semester. Students who test into three developmental courses are often reluctant to discuss their unpreparedness for college course work. Students who tested into remedial courses well called and mailed letters to come in and discuss their educational preparedness most neglected to make the assigned time given to them.

A fifth limitation was students conflicting feelings regarding the discrepancy between their high school course work and the course levels they tested into in college. Study students were those who have taken the assessment and tested into three remedial courses and placed on a list for the Success Semester from April 2009 to August 2009. This list was composed of more than 685 students who were taking English, reading, and

mathematics in Fall 2010 classes. These conflicting academic feelings presented a dilemma for research with students participating in activities that revealed their academic standings because most student feel ashamed and embarrassed to take remedial courses. Students who are taking remedial courses do not want their peers to know they are functioning below college level. There has been a change with the reading component of Success Semester classes. During the course of this study, the reading requirements were changed for students who read on a fifth grade level. They were no longer required to take a remedial reading course. Currently, if a student tests into two other remedial courses in addition to reading course, they may not be required to take Success Semester classes**.**

The sixth limitation of the study was the limited conversations with faculty members regarding their students' participation. Faculty members were asked to describe their students who were experiencing difficulty with the subject materials and to share their interpretation of the class level of engagement. These conversations were brief and often occurred between classes, or lunch breaks. The seventh and final limitation was the timing of the study—during faculty and professional staff's busiest time of the semester, registration. Faculty and staff are moving along rather swiftly because the increased demands in their time during registration. Their main concern is helping students find courses that are appropriate for their schedule. In my relationship with the students who participated in the study, I discovered that many of the students who seek help from a counselor during this time are looking to find someone with whom they can connect for the duration of their time at the college. During registration, students are often given the name of a counselor with the hope that it will be a good match. Many of the referrals and

surveys occurred when I was not present. Therefore, I was not able to monitor the surveying process or the information shared with registering students at all times

Location

The Midwestern community college in my study was considered a medium-to-large campus in terms of the student population. Academic programs offered at the college are the following: Associate of Arts degree, Associate of Arts in Teaching degree, Associate of Science degree (pre-engineering), Associate of Science (nursing and Health information technology), and Associate of Applied Science degree designed to provide students with the necessary skills for entry-level employment. The college was voted into existence on April 1, 1986, with the mission to enrich the community by providing lifelong educational and cultural opportunities focused on personal growth and student success in a global society. There are approximately 96 full-time faculty members who provide the instruction and educational leadership with approximately 200 part-time faculty members who also provide instruction.

Subjects

Participants who took part in this survey were primarily white college students between 18 and 21 years of age. The majority of these students completing the survey are first-time freshmen. Students who completed the survey are representative of a population of medium-to-low-income families comprising the surrounding communities that support the community college. Although minority students are a significant group on this campus and are sometimes found to be unprepared and part of a lower socioeconomic group, they were under represented in this survey. The under representation of this group was in part due to the fact that some members of the

unprepared group, especially minority students, were not as forthcoming about their academic challenges as others. Researchers such as Tinto (1993), Ring (2001), and Conley (2007) had participants representing a more diverse group of students in similar research studies. Students geographically participating in this research study lived within a five to 35-mile radius of the college.

The Survey

The survey was conducted during the registration period to capture a large number of students at one time. Students were seated in a comfortable room awaiting their number to be called to see a counselor to assist them in arranging their courses for the Spring 2009 semester. The instrument was created to reach students who might not be available to participate in a sit-down interview. The survey offered students the opportunity to meet with an academic counselor to discuss further any concerns or problems they were experiencing with their education. Each student had the option of checking the statement that gave the counselor permission to contact these students for further discussion or answer any questions they might have to assist in making their academic experience more productive (see Appendix C).

As an enticement, students who agreed to complete the survey were offered cookies, candy, chips, or a protein bar. The survey instrument was administered during the morning sessions just before classes. The survey was distributed to the students, and students who completed the survey returned it to a container without writing their names on it to protect their confidentiality. The surveys were collected for one month to capture the majority of students who were enrolling in their Spring 2009 classes**.**

Conversational Interviews with Faculty and Students

Faculty perceptions were derived through conversational interviews with various faculty members. The faculty members who agreed to speak with me regarding the classroom experiences with students were candid. They appeared to be at a loss as to what they needed to do to affect students' desire and motivation to learn. Many of the conversations took place in brief meetings as we exchanged information about the students enrolling in their classes. Other conversational interviews took place during the faculty members' office hours as they waited for students to stop by for additional help with class assignments or questions related to previous lectures. Faculty perceptions and attitudes about students, if positive, were likely linked to positive relationships between faculty and students with favorable student outcomes. Faculty perceptions and attitudes about students, if negative, were likely linked to negative relationships between faculty and student with an unfavorable student outcome. Faculty members' comments were stated as close as possible to the meaning and understanding without expanding the comments or diluting the original meaning.

Student perceptions were based on conversational interviews—specifically 80 comments that were collected over six months of advising students who suddenly realized that they were in a course they did not understand, or they had a confrontation with a faculty member and were dropping the course. Students expressed concern that some faculty members suggested that students should drop their course because they were having difficulty keeping up with the information being presented in the classroom.

Faculty members expressed concern that students are not academically prepared for their courses. Students expressed concern that faculty members talk over their heads,

saying things the students do not understand. The use of a student's perceptual data involved the student's learning process as it related to the overall environment. Students can generally predict the social environment between themselves, their faculty members, and their classmates. They are usually able to determine if there will be a productive match between teacher and student.

Case Studies

In depth student stories were collected through case studies of three students participating in the Success Semester. Case study students were interviewed repeatedly over time. Discussions with students were not only about academics, but also home life and relationships.

Chapter 3 presented a discussion of the research methodology. My study used a qualitative approach to collect data from three sources: student surveys, faculty and student conversational interviews, and three student case studies. Chapter 4 presents a discussion of the findings. In addition, I discuss some of my own experiences as an academic counselor at the study community college.

Chapter IV: Results

Information has no meaning without structure. This chapter presents the data using an organizing structure that gives the information meaning. It includes student survey results, conversational interview results from faculty and students (faculty's perceptions of students' and student perceptions of faculty), and the student case studies of three first-time enrollees at the study community college. The findings are accompanied by narrative discussion. Some of these students believed that they were academically prepared for the rigors of college-level course work until the assessment test revealed the painful reality of their academic inabilities. As students received this information, they reacted in various ways: some were angry, others disappointed, and still others appeared to be numb to the fact that they were not at the required level of knowledge and skill in English, mathematics, and reading to be successful in college course work. In this chapter, I examine qualitative data collected on unprepared students at a medium-sized community college. The purpose of my study was (a) to review the preparedness of community colleges for the unprepared first-time freshman and the challenges of accommodating these students, (b) to provide the unprepared students with a voice regarding their own knowledge about being unprepared for college course work, and (c) to engage faculty in a conversation regarding their perception of the unprepared student, and determine if faculty needs are met in educating the unprepared students.

Survey Results

The surveys were distributed at the community college to 100 students during student registration of which 72 were returned completed or partially completed. The responses presented in Table 1 represent the students' responses to the 15 survey

statements. Students responded “yes” if they agreed and “no” if they did not agree with the statement.

Table 2

Survey Responses

Statement	Responses	Number
1. I am concerned about a college education.	Yes	26
	No	46
2. I attended High school regularly.	Yes	61
	No	5
3. I have difficulty understanding what I have learned.	Yes	9
	No	52
4. I know how to study for class.	Yes	9
	No	52
	Wrote sometimes	1
5. I have difficulty taking tests.	Yes	54
	No	1
	Wrote sometimes	1
6. I have difficulty asking for help.	Yes	25
	No	37
7. I am the first generation in my family to go to college.	Yes	19
	No	52
8. I am a single parent.	Yes	4
	No	57
9. Childcare is an issue for me.	Yes	4
	No	57
10. Transportation is an issue for me.	Yes	3
	No	59
11. I graduated from high school.	Yes	4
	No	57
12. I have a general equivalency.	Yes	9

diploma (GED).	No	53
13. I receive financial aid and/or loans for college tuition.	Yes	42
	No	24
14. School was always a challenge for me.	Yes	12
	No	50
15. I have reliable support system to assist me through college.	Yes	63
	No	9

Note. Total number of responses possible = 72

Survey questions were developed based on questions students typically ask during the registration process. Students new to the college process would enter my office; and without prompting, their first statement would be, "I don't know why I'm here." The student was asking for help, but was not prepared to appropriately communicate his or her needs.

Statement 1. **I have some concerns about my college education.** Students often had financial or academic concerns or issues meeting and or difficulties interacting with others. The goal of this statement was to stimulate a dialogue for student support. There were 26 students who responded yes to this statement and 46 students who responded no. Many of the students did not see themselves having academic problems until they were on warning or probation status. Even then they would not attribute this to lack of knowledge or skills; rather, it was due to some other minor error, such as missing an assignment, turning in an assignment late, working too many hours, or the professor did not present the materials in a manner in which they could understand.

Statement 2. I attended high school regularly. Research has indicated that absenteeism is an indicator that students are in trouble (Thompson & Geren, 2002). When the appropriate retention safeguards are in place, students are identified, and assistance can be made available to possibly avoid students dropping out of school before degree completion. Results on Statement 2: 61 responded yes; 5 responded no.

Statement 3. I have difficulty understanding what I have heard. This statement required students to indicate if they had difficulty understanding what they had read. Reading appeared to be one of the major areas of academic deficiency for which students were placed into remedial courses on the assessment test. Students were given written information about their course program, and they had problems reading and understanding what they read. Students also refused to take a course if there was considerable reading involved. Many commented that they did not want to study that hard. Results on Statement 3: 9 responded yes; 52 responded no.

Statement 4. I know how to study for my classes. The professor who teaches the study skills course noted that most students did not know the proper way to study or the appropriate manner of studying that best fit their learning style. Students who are having problems studying can and should take a study skills class. Understanding the best practice for studying according to the student's learning style can mean the difference between the student receiving a passing or failing grade. Results on Statement 4: 9 responded yes; 52 responded no; 1 responded sometimes.

Statement 5. I have difficulty taking tests. Students who failed a class or who took the assessment test and placed into remedial courses say they have difficulty taking tests. A number of students experience test anxiety. Students will often complain that

they are not good test takers. Students who are in academic trouble may have advanced to a warning notice from the college. The notice informs them that their academic performance is below the acceptable standards of the college. These students claim that they study the materials for the exam, but during the test, they cannot remember any information. Many of these students have failed the same course repeatedly. The apprehension and fear can be the catalysts responsible for students leaving school or for their repeated failures. Results on Statement 5: 54 responded yes; 1 responded no; 1 responded sometimes.

Statement 6. I have difficulty asking for help. The majority of students who are unprepared have low self-esteem, poor social skills, and generally find discussing their issues embarrassing. Research has found that those students who are unprepared are more likely not to ask for help for fear of being judged (Guerin & Denti, 1999). Results on Statement 6: 25 responded yes; 37 responded no.

Statement 7. I am the first generation in my family to go to college. This group of students' lack of information may have put them at a disadvantage because they did not know where to begin the college-planning process. Low-income, minority, and first-generation students are often lacking specific types of "college knowledge." Results on Statement 7: 19 responded yes; 52 responded no.

Statement 8. I am a single parent. The purpose of this statement was to determine if these students had responsibilities that extended beyond the average college student. Single parents are among the students who are defined as at risk of leaving college before completing a degree. Results on Statement 8: 4 responded yes; 57 responded no.

Statement 9. Childcare is an issue for me. Students who have childcare issues may often be absent from school. Childcare tends to be a major issue for parents, especially single parents. Although childcare services are available on the college campus, the fee may be more than students can afford to spend without assistance. Results on Statement 9: 4 responded yes; 57 responded no.

Statement 10. Transportation is an issue for me. Students who attend the community college are often faced with not having transportation to get to and from classes. Students indicated that public transportation was non-existent where their community college was located. Students who have limited transportation resources must rely on family or friends' assistance in order to attend classes. For other students who can afford taxi service, they must rely on this mode of transportation as their only means of attending classes. Results on Statement 10: 3 responded yes; 59 responded no.

Statement 11. I graduated from high school. The response to this question provides information regarding the number of students enrolling in college with high school diplomas. Results on Statement 11: 4 responded yes; 57 responded no.

Statement 12. I have a general equivalency diploma (GED*).* Some researchers have indicated that students who leave high school before earning a diploma have difficulty completing the curriculum (Tinto, 1997). These students were at risk of leaving college due to the difficulty of the courses, the materials, and the lack of self-guided ability to complete college-level coursework. Results on Statement 12: 9 responded yes; 53 responded no. These students are often returning learners who have been out of the formal education program for a number of years. Entering a more structured program might present additional barriers making them at risk of leaving college due to the

difficulty of the courses, the materials, and the lack of self-guided ability to complete college-level coursework.

Statement 13. I receive financial aid and/or loans for college tuition. Most students needed assistance to continue their educational degree. Students who had financial concerns may have also had additional financial concerns that might have interfered with their educational programs. Results on Statement 13: 42 students responded yes; 24 responded no.

Statement 14. School was always a challenge. Students who have had challenges in school usually continue to have them. Students who did not receive appropriate assistance usually had less academic success than did the students who did not experience difficulties with their academic program. Results on Statement 14: 12 responded yes; 50 responded no.

Statement 15. I have a reliable support system to assist me through college. Research has shown that students who have support and guidance tend to do better in school than those students who do not (*Center for Instructional Development and Research Bulletin*, 20011). Results on Statement 15: 50 responded yes; 9 responded no.

Faculty's Perceptions of Students

Some of my colleagues have commented that these students send or receive text messages during their advising appointments and while registering for classes, failing to see the inappropriateness of this behavior. They are technology savvy and many of these students have the latest item of technology regardless of their economic status. Their communication skills and social skills are lacking and so are their manners, self-care, and self-esteem. I have found that encouragement, frequent contact, praise, and sometimes a

stern conversation will keep them returning for advice to make sure they are progressing toward their degree.

Faculty members tend to be worn-out regarding the continuous lack of concern displayed by the students regarding their academic success. Faculty often make comments such as, “students act as though they are unconcerned about the course content,” “the other day a student slept the entire class period and there was a test on the material covered in that class period during the next class period”, and “the student complained that he was never given the information. He said he was being tested over materials he never studied”. Another professor who teaches mathematics said, “I present a problem and work several of them in class. Everyone sits there with blank stares on their faces; and when I ask if there are questions, no one says a word. I don’t know what to say.” A professor said: “I sit in my office, and my students never show up to ask questions or discuss what was said in class. On test day, they moan and groan about the content. They complain because I did not tell them what was on the test.” A professor called to let me know that he was referring a student to me. He said the student appeared to be in over his head with new information. The student was behind in his assignments and claimed he understood the material, but his grades and outside work contradicted his claims. Another professor talked about an incident in her class where a student made a rude remark to a guest speaker who came to speak in her class. She said when she confronted the student, he was not aware that he had been offensive to the guest. It seems likely that the problem rests with both the student and the professor.

The student-professor relationship in colleges and universities can be both extraordinarily valuable and quite frustrating. A professor can be a mentor, a confidant

and advisor, or friend, and can oftentimes change the course of a student's life. Unfortunately, in the case of human relationships, when a relationship with a professor goes awry, it can be emotionally, mentally, and professionally damaging to both student and professor. Colleges and universities must become more sensitive and present a strong presence that creates effective, systemic changes aimed at improving the quality of student life and learning.

High schools, colleges, and universities must take a collaborative approach to improving students' interactive ability, encouraging social inaction and college connectedness. With these initiatives in place, both recruitment and retention would be promoted. The interviews with faculty reveal their perceptions of the students in their classes as being uninterested, lacking motivation, and academically unprepared. This is consistent with the perception of students who believed that professors are knowledgeable, but move too fast and do not make the information understandable. While this may be true, the majority of students reported that they do not ask questions in class, and they do not visit the professors during office hours.

Students' Perceptions of Faculty

Students seldom meet with faculty during the faculty member's office hours. When students were asked why they had not talked with their professors, they gave the following answers:

> The professor speaks in a low, monotone voice. He puts me to sleep.
>
> My professor is [pause], she really does not know what she is doing.
>
> I think he has a lot of information; he just can't teach.
>
> I can't understand my teacher. She does not speak English well.

I'm only going to college so I can stay on my parents' insurance.

I have missed too many classes. I have to work at night.

I just need to get a full-time job and make enough money to pay my bills.

I'm going to take a semester off to work and save some money.

I'm not passing any of my courses.

I've been told different things by every person I've talked to and it has messed with my plans to graduate.

I'm going to have a baby so I have to quit after this semester.

I have to quit school and find a place to live. I cannot live at my parents' home any longer.

It is taking too long to graduate from here. I can go to another college and not take all of these developmental courses.

College is not for me, right now. I've been in school all my life. I need a break.

I'm not interested in this class.

I'm frustrated that I have to take these developmental courses.

These are just a few of the comments from students who are showing signs of difficulty in the classroom and possibly leaving school before they graduate or complete their course of study or at the end of the semester. The role that community colleges play in providing assistance for at-risk students is tied to the historical development of community colleges. Community colleges' early direction developed from a goal to serve the educational and vocational needs of the local communities. A more contemporary goal of the institution is to bridge the gap between public education, secondary schools,

and institutions of higher learning. These student comments may indicate that the study community college is not bridging the gap for some students.

Case Studies

Pseudonyms were used to maintain student anonymity. Results of three student case studies are as follows:

Case one: Melody misses opportunities in high school

The individual in this case study is referred to as Melody. Melody is the first member in her family to attend college. Melody is tall and a rather full-figured young lady. Her voice is soft, remarkably resembling that of a child of five or six and so are her mannerisms. She appeared shy and noticeably reserved. Melody is 18 years old, white, and recently graduated from high school. According to the criteria described by Roueche and Roueche (1993), additional problems face students at community colleges. Students may be at risk because many are first-generation attendees and economically weak (Roueche & Roueche, 1993). These characteristics are true of Melody's situation. Melody lives at home with her mother. She said she has a brother, but he does not live with them and seldom visits. She also talked about her mother being on disability. She added that she would like to get a job to help support her mom and herself.

In a candid conversation with me, she spoke of her desire to attend college because she believed that it is a means of opening opportunities toward a good career with a decent wage. She enrolled late at the community college on August 10, 2009, two weeks before classes were to start, which meant that most of the classes for fall were already filled. In my experience, students often enroll late and have difficulty finding classes that are open in the time frame of their availability. In addition, students are often

unable to enroll for classes in the morning and afternoon hours that are consecutive to meet their work or other scheduling needs. The courses that are available may only meet in the evening. In Melody's case, a three-hour class in the evening was dramatically different from what she experienced in high school. She would have much better success in classes that are short in duration with more meeting opportunities such as meeting three times per week. Unfortunately, when I met with her for the first time, evening classes was her only option.

Melody, like many other students who enroll at the community college, failed to plan for college while in high school. She failed to discuss her educational goals with her high school counselor, which created a number of barriers before she ever started the college admission process. Melody neglected to keep admission deadlines in mind when completing the enrollment process. She started by not filing her financial assistance application in a timely manner, never discussing planning to attend college with her high school counselor, and not participating in the freshman Smart Start Session. Melody's failure to plan and ask questions triggered a number of missed opportunities**.**

The conversation might have assisted her in making a timely, focused plan for college; but instead, she missed the financial aid deadline to secure her funds to attend classes. Financial aid is necessary for Melody to pursue an educational degree. Melody does not work. Her mother is disabled, and they are dependent on her mother's disability check to live on. Melody's lack of planning set a series of missed opportunities in motion with regards to starting classes. Her lack of planning caused Melody to pay for her classes until her funds were awarded, and she missed the prime selection of classes available to her. She could have applied for a work-study position to help her become

engaged with the campus community, and could have participated in Smart Start to help her use the necessary tools for success on the college campus.

Students often neglect the opportunity to discuss their concerns about their education and their desires to further their education with teachers, counselors, and other educators. Melody stated that she never asked questions in high school; she said she stayed to herself. Often because students do not know what questions to ask unless there is a situation that has reached paramount proportions, they may not approach a person of authority for help or assistance with an issue or problem.

Melody tested into three remedial courses: English, reading, and mathematics. She appeared comfortable with the results of her test scores and declined to appeal her scores to possibly retest into a higher level of English or mathematics. I asked if she had ever been assigned to a smaller classroom in high school to address special academic concerns such as reading and mathematics. She denied participating in any special-needs courses or additional academically supportive programs. Students request their transcripts to be mailed to the community college, but these transcripts do not state if the students received special services. If Melody had attended the Smart Start session, she would have been informed about her responsibility to self-identify. Counselors or advisors do not seek out students or ask them questions regarding their high school educational programs. If the students ask or tell the counselor or advisor they received special services in high school, counselors and advisors are forthcoming with information about the Office of Accessibility Services (OAS) where students talk with the coordinator of OAS and provide the necessary documentation to receive services.

During the initial visit, Melody answered only the questions she was asked. How was the assessment test? Were the directions explained in a clear manner? Melody responded that she understood the information. She was asked if she felt she was placed in the appropriate classes. She responded, “I guess so,” with a childish grin. She was asked if she wanted to appeal her scores from the assessment. Her response was like many other students who struggle academically. Students rarely take advantage of the appeal process to test higher in mathematics and English. The testing appeal process for mathematics is taking a final exam in the class in which the student placed. If a student tested into a beginning algebra, the student could take an exam in that subject to pass to the next level. If the student tested into a remedial English class, the student could discuss his or her options with the counselor or advisor; and the counselor or advisor could provide the student with the information. The students are expected to write two essays, the first a “take-home” essay consisting of 500 words following the established criteria and returned by a specific deadline. The second essay is 300 words written in a controlled on-site setting.

Melody said she was never good in math; she realized she needed help and repeating the class could help her in her career choice. Melody wants to be a teacher, and she said she enjoys working with younger children. She elected to not appeal her three remedial courses. Her classes were in the evening, one night a week for three hours each night. As a counselor, I assess the student’s overall attitude, zest for learning, and their ability to connect with the enrollment process. I frequently advise students to take classes three days a week, which allows students to spend more frequent but shorter periods of classroom time in study of the subject. This greater frequency also seems to assist in

building relationships with faculty, which helps to accommodate and strengthen the learning process. During our first conversation, Melody provided information regarding her early academic education. She stated that she did not have a difficult time in school, and she believed she did fine in both grade school and high school.

As the semester progressed, I asked Melody about her professors. She said they were nice, but she could not recall any of their names, nor could she remember any vivid features of her professors with which to describe them. We talked endlessly about her plans and what she aspired to become once she graduated from college. She was definite about wanting a college degree but added she did not know what was to come next. She was fortunate to have me as her advisor, because I was familiar with the remedial courses; but due to the large number of advisees and the time element of Melody's registration, I was unable to research her high school course work. The lack of educational history referred me to the most familiar document at hand to provide appropriate placement in remedial courses according to Melody's assessment scores. Her verbal account of her high school educational experience was less than accurate which made it difficult for me to provide the support Melody needed to be successful. In my experience, most students who are unprepared are unwilling to divulge their educational shortcomings for fear they may be judged.

On our second visit in September, Melody began to feel more comfortable and her conversation was easily forthcoming. Classes were under way, and students were adjusting to their courses and their professors. Professors were quickly identifying those students who were experiencing difficulty in their classes and making the appropriate referrals. It is important to make sure that students get to the right referral source the first

time. It has been my experience that if students do not see or make contact with the person to whom they have been referred, they will leave and not return. Melody did not express any concerns from the professors regarding any deficiencies in any of her classes. Melody also said she does not have a problem coming to the community college to attend her classes. She reported having a history of attending high school on a regular basis.

Melody's visits became more frequent, unscheduled, and usually on Wednesday evening before attending her class at 6:30 p.m. The relationship we were building appeared to open other avenues to Melody's life and family. Melody talked more openly about her boyfriend and his job. It appeared to be her favorite topic. She spoke little about her parents and siblings. I encouraged her to take an active role at the community college by joining an organization and volunteering to help with different events.

During our visits, Melody reported making progress in her classes. She consistently denied needing help in her classes. Instead, she stated that she was doing well in her classes and that she did not need any additional assistance with her courses. Since there were several weeks left in the fall semester, it was too early to determine if Melody was truly doing as well as she believed.

While Melody may not have established a relationship with any of the faculty she saw for classes once a week, she had established a positive connection and a significant contact with me on campus. Thus, I could provide her with resources and referrals to assist her academic success. Although comfortable with the conversations over the past two months, Melody maintained a secure distance in discussing her family consisting of her disabled mother who did not attend college and an older brother living outside their

home. She was at ease in telling me her boyfriend lived with her and her mother. Melody also shared that her boyfriend helped out with the finances.

I found an event in which Melody could actively participate in the multicultural October events on campus. Melody participated in the evening's activities. When I observed her at the event, she was interactive and appeared to be at ease around students she had never met. She smiled warmly and greeted visitors who came to participate in the evening's activities, followed directions, and made sure she was where she was supposed to be at the specific time to keep the program running on time. At the end of the evening's events, she introduced me to her boyfriend who was friendly, well spoken, and appeared to be supportive of Melody. Melody does not drive and she does not own an automobile; therefore, she depends on her boyfriend and her mother to get to and from school.

The next week following the multicultural program, Melody stopped by my office. She appeared to be more engaged in our conversation. Dressed in a blue plaid, pleated mini-skirt with a white blouse, black leggings and mid-calf black boots, she looked like a college student with a slight air of confidence as she walked into my office and sat down with a wide smile across her face. In the previous weeks, she would always ask directions to the building where her classes were being held; but, today she said she remembered how to get to her classes.

Students at the mid-term point can gauge where they are academically. They have also had test papers and class participation activities to gauge their course progression. In my experience students who have come to my office for help are anxious about their mid-term grades. I usually advise students not to drop the course until the drop date, and

before they drop the course, I suggest that they ask the professor's permission to continue to sit in the classes to get the information they will need when they take the course the following semester. In Melody's situation, she continued to say she thought that she was doing well, but again she had not taken the initiative to meet with her professors to get an accurate report on her progress in her classes. Student mid-term grades are not posted on their transcript. If students are not doing well, they will get a letter to visit with a counselor and discuss their options. Melody was not doing well in her classes; in fact, she had failed her classes for the fall semester. Failing her classes put Melody in jeopardy of having her financial aid interrupted until she achieved a 2.0 GPA and had a pass rate of 70% or above. This criterion puts Melody in a situation where she would not be able to continue her education at the college level until the above criteria was met. Melody was taking three classes and she failed two classes; thus, she did not complete enough classes at the 70% pass rate to continue on financial aid.

Case two: Brian—a student with ADHD

Students attend the community college for various reasons, and many do not have a reason for coming to the community college other than it is a place where their friends and relatives have attended or are currently attending college. Brian took the assessment test in early July 2009, which is late, because most of the fall classes are filled by this time according to the daily statistics of closed classes during the enrollment process. The list of students who tested into three developmental courses was sent to me in my effort to keep track of unprepared students enrolling in college. Brian was on the list.

I sent all of the students who tested into three remedial courses a letter inviting them to participate in my study. Brian was mailed a letter that briefly discussed the

results of his assessment test. The letter invited him to participate in several interviews to get a better understanding of his educational background and academic career plans. Approximately one week later, a young man poked his head in the door with a slightly worn paper in his hand. Brian's face was kind, relaxed, and sincere. His body language was open and uninhibited. His clean-cut appearance was evidence that he took time to take care of himself. It was also clear that our meetings would be few because it was difficult for Brian to sit for any length of time. He appeared focused on his job and was scheduled to start work at 5:00 p.m. that day. Brian explained that he is paying for his college education himself because he was not eligible for financial aid. Brian's parents want him to prove his commitment to his academic career before they contribute to his educational fund.

Brian is 18 years old, a white male, and he was responding to the invitation he had received in the mail. He is a medium-sized young man with blond hair. He stated that he was the second member of his family to attend college. Brian said his parents were paying for his sister to attend college. He said that he must prove that he is serious about getting an education before his parents would assist him financially with his college expenses. Brian indicated that he was from a medium-income family, in which both parents worked as well as his sister. Brian appeared polite and willing to share information about his high school experience and the first several weeks of his college experience. His movements appeared unplanned and somewhat rushed. He explained that he had just finished his last class for the day and was leaving campus to go to his job. He explained that he had to be at work by 5:00 p.m., and it was after 2:00 in the afternoon when Brian arrived at my office. Since registration starts early in the fall semester,

encouraging students to plan early has been a goal of the department. This meeting would present the opportunity to discuss Brian's educational plan toward his career goals. I asked if he had a few minutes for a conversation about scheduling his courses that he planned to register for in the spring semester. "Oh! I plan to do it soon," he said. He said he realized that he would test low because he never put forth any effort in high school. Brian explained that he never really tried to get good grades in high school, and sometimes he attended classes and sometimes he did not.

I asked Brian to give his impression of the assessment testing. I asked him if the questions' directions were explained in a manner that was clear and understandable. He stated that he felt the information was clear, and he should have taken more time completing the test.

During the first meeting I had with Brian, he was asked if he felt he was in the appropriate courses, and he said yes. He moved around the room touching various items and examining books on the bookshelf. Brian sat down and the question was posed to him again. He stood up and said he was planning on working his way up to the appropriate college-level classes. He appeared comfortable with his decision and did not plan on appealing any of his test scores. As Brian talked, he moved from side to side in the chair rubbing the arm of the chair and leaning forward and backward again and again. Brian was asked again if he had planned his academic schedule for the upcoming spring semester. Students are advised to meet with an advisor or counselor to plan their classes early. The process of discussing and planning a schedule and reinforcing the idea to register early will stimulate students to enroll in the courses that are best suited to their learning needs. In Brian's case, I thought more class meetings of shorter duration would

best serve his short attention span. He said he was not sure. He asked if he could earn a degree from this college. He was not sure what degree plan he would pursue since his main concern was to be educated to obtain a better job. Brian was asked if he was planning to transfer to a four-year college. He said no; he was going to earn his degree at the community college and find a job. After a few questions, it was apparent that Brian needed information about the college and the programs we offered in order to make a wise decision regarding his academic career path. It was also apparent that his fidgetiness was more than a first-time visit to an unfamiliar place. Brian is like 5% of students who enter college (Nadeau, 1995); he suffers from Attention-Deficit/Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD)—a chronic condition that affects millions of children and often persists into adulthood (*Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, IV*, 2006). Adults with ADHD are faced with educational challenges: they have extreme difficulties learning due to problems involving listening skills, reading and mathematics comprehension, organizational skills, and memory and language deficits.

We managed to talk for 45 minutes about some of the interests in his life and the many open opportunities for information regarding his educational planning. Meetings with Brian were difficult due to his inability to sit for more than a few minutes at one time. He is a likable young man, but Brian is one of many students who have issues that need attention but fail to get the assistance they need because they feel embarrassed. Once these students leave high school, they believe their problems are left behind. Brian commented that he had assistance with his studies during grade school; but as he progressed from high school to college, he wanted to work independently without the help of professional individuals who have been trained to work with people like Brian

with specific problems related to his ADHD. Some students who live with a restrictive condition, have made adjustments in their daily lives, and the adjustments and compensations become a normal way of life.

By all indications and self-reporting, Brian had difficulties with his courses in high school. He was made aware of academic resources at the college after reporting he had a diagnosis of ADHD. Problems associated with ADHD include inattention and hyperactive, impulsive behavior. Children with ADHD may struggle with low self-esteem, troubled relationships, and poor performance in school. More and more high school students with disabilities are planning to continue in postsecondary schools, including vocational and career schools, two and four-year colleges and universities (Brinckerhoff, Shaw, & McGuire, 1992). The majority of schools and training institutions are not equipped to handle the increased numbers of ADHD students entering their facilities.

Students like Brian generally need a transition team to help them plan to move into higher education. These students benefit from time management, tutorial services, and monitoring by counselors and teachers. Brian believed that he could work through his school difficulties by starting in the lowest developmental courses and working his way up to college-level courses.

Brian, like Melody, would probably not seek the help of faculty members during their office hours if additional help were needed to be successful in his courses. Brian placed himself at a disadvantage by denying his need to have available resources that would offer him additional test time and possibly a quiet testing room without distractions. School districts and postsecondary schools must comply with the law. It is

the responsibility of the student who has a disability to self-identify. If students fail to identify their particular issue and they are unsuccessful in their classes, the responsibility lies with the holder of the information.

Students who are willing to disclose their disability and seek assistance will improve their opportunity to succeed in postsecondary education. Brian was only able to meet three times to provide information about his educational plans. He always reported that things were going well with his classes, his assignments were being turned into the professor in a timely manner, he had not missed any exams or major tests, and he was attending all of his classes.

Brian was encouraged to talk about his courses, and he responded, “They are okay.” When he was asked who his professors were, he could not remember their names. However, he could give a generic description related to the gender of his professors. Brian said one of his professors was an older man, with grey hair, and taught mathematics. On the few occasions when Brian visited my office, he never had his books. I mentioned my concern about the absence of books for his classes, and he responded that he had taken them to his car.

Brian was fortunate to select his courses during the period when classes had not filled for the fall semester. He placed into three remedial courses. His mathematics placement was Math 096, which is Developmental Math II; English 096, which is Developmental Writing II; and Reading 092, which is Reading Improvement. His classes met during the day on Tuesday and Thursday. There was a slight problem with these courses considering Brian’s difficulty in staying focused for long periods, especially since he decided he would try to attend the community college without the assistance of

the OAS. Tuesday and Thursday classes meet for one hour and 20 minutes. Brian would be better served taking his courses in short sessions meeting more frequently. Of course, Brian chose these days and times due to the possibility of getting more work hours on his job.

I have never seen Brian on campus, although I always left our meetings open for him to have the flexibility to drop by, check in, and say hello. This arrangement appeared to work well with his schedule. Unfortunately, our visits were few. Brian made four visits to my office, and he was always alone and on his way to another activity, usually work. Brian was not involved in any activities on campus because he was too busy with his job. I invited him to attend one of the events on campus, and he said he would come, but he never arrived. The next time Brian stopped by my office I shared the highlights of the event he missed, and he seemed surprised and somewhat regretful for not attending the event. Brian said, “I didn’t know all of that was going on.” I said, “Yeah! You see, I only share good, fun stuff for students to be involved in. See you next time.” He said, “Yes, I’d like to come next time.” He went on to add that he was busy with his friends. I asked if they attended the community college. He said that one goes to college, but the others do not; they work full-time jobs. I did not realize that day that this would be the last visit Brian would make to my office. He managed to complete the semester; and although his grades were not terrific, he managed to get through the Success Semester of classes with a 2.0 GPA for passing math and reading. He will need to retake the English course. When I last checked the spring schedule to check on Brian’s selection of courses, he had not registered for the spring semester.

Case three: Edith—a returning learner

Edith is a 47-year-old returning learner who is entering school to earn a degree in social work. She was laid off from work due to the declining economy and, like many other students, decided to return to school. Edith was diagnosed with rheumatoid arthritis several years earlier and just recently applied for Social Security disability.

Edith is married and has two nephews who she has raised since they were toddlers. One of her "sons" is autistic and requires a great deal of care that she and her husband provide. Returning to the educational environment as an adult brings a new set of challenges, expectations, and experiences. Adults entering the community college for the first time or returning after being away for a period of time may face a daunting experience. These students encounter a different generation of college students, programs, and, most significantly, a new age of technology. Adult students bring a great deal to the classroom. They possess real-world experiences that recent high school graduates simply do not. They have been in the workforce, raised families, and juggled the many demands on their time that come with life in today's hectic world. They have an important perspective that enriches the classroom experience for faculty and students alike. Edith was very forthcoming with comments and answers to the questions presented to her. Edith talked about the assessment test and stated that she had not realized how much she had forgotten in her 29-year absence from school. She said she was extremely nervous and still felt shaky after attending classes for several weeks.

Edith appeared eager to share information about her professors. She knew all of her professors' names, she had conversations with each of them, and had found her way to the Academic Career Enhancement Center (ACE). I believe that students like Edith

who are adult students and returning to earn their degrees are more passionate about the opportunity to learn. My experience has taught me that these students are focused and goal oriented.

Like Edith, other students who are returning to college often have numerous responsibilities, such as marriage, children, work, community obligations, or care for an older parent. The time commitment needed to complete a degree program and balance these responsibilities can be a challenge. Edith is a non-traditional student, she has experienced a major life change after working for years and found herself suddenly unemployed due to economic stressors and the onset of a chronic illness.

The returning adult is concerned about fitting in with *traditional* students. Often these returning learners ask me if they are too old to return to school. Most often the returning learner's first question is will the younger students see me as being out of place? The returning adult learners that I have advised have never questioned their ability to succeed in their academic programs, but their concern has been with how other fellow students will relate to them as returning adult students. The U.S. Department of Education has documented that adult students are the fastest-growing educational demographics with the numbers steadily increasing (McCabe, 2000a).

As the semester went on, Edith talked about her courses with excitement. She attended classes on Tuesdays and Thursdays from 8:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Edith tested into three remedial courses: ENG 095, Developmental Writing I; Math 095, Developmental Math II; and RDG 092, Reading Improvement along with Study Skills, and CPT 103, Microcomputer Applications. She had already studied and passed two exams in her mathematics course. As she talked about the information she was collecting in her

courses, her voice lost its hesitancy and indecision about returning to school. She was self-assured, and her face was happy.

Edith talked about the campus and commented positively on how well the buildings are kept, the cleanliness, and the ease of moving from one building to the next. She said some days were difficult to get up and be in class due to the pain she experienced from arthritis. She said she spends much of her available time in the ACE Center.

Edith smiled and said sometimes she looks at the younger students in her class and asks, “What am I doing here?” She talked about getting to know some of the younger students on campus. Edith said she discovered much more than she realized about the campus and how the younger population handles difficult situations. Edith said the younger students are afraid to meet with faculty. These students feel the professors will not take them seriously. She states that she has witnessed the harshness in the voices of advisors and office assistants to students who come to the Department of Student Services for assistance. She believes the younger students have some of the same concerns as the adult students. Edith explained that when she walked into the advising office, it was overwhelming. She said she did not know what to say or how to explain what she wanted. She said the fear of talking to educators made her feel like leaving before she said or did something wrong. Edith believes younger students feel the same; and instead of approaching counselors or the professors, they do nothing.

The difference is that adult students will ask for assistance because they have the experiences, skills, and knowledge to attain their goals. Students attend college as an investment in their future. They want a quality education. They often need help and

direction. They need someone in the campus community to reach out to them at a critical point in their college career. This connection assists in the transition to the next level. According to Edith, it is harder being an adult student than being an 18 year-old student. The older learner must juggle their responsibilities at home and make the grades to be successful in school.

Edith's second appointment was canceled when she called a few minutes before her appointment to say she was in a study session with her mathematics tutor. She said she was concerned about an exam the next day. Edith said she barely passed her last exam, and she was worried about not making enough points to pass her course. Edith was first to acknowledge the fact that she tested into three remedial courses. She felt confident that she would not have any problems in her reading course. Edith's reading course was Introduction to College Reading. Typically, students who place at this level of reading complete the reading component in one semester. Reading 093 provides direct practice in development of college reading skills. This course emphasizes vocabulary skills, comprehension skills, advanced reading skills, and reading for study.

At our next session, Edith talked about getting to know some of her younger classmates and involving them in study groups while assisting them with their course work. She appeared to be happy about the new role she had created for herself. There was a definite confidence that was not there before. She asked if there was a volunteer program for students to help other students during registration and other critical points during their first semester.

Edith's comments were valid and had merit. She said she often remembered how lonely she felt the first day of classes. An advisor gave her a map of the campus, but there

was not a connection. The campus did not have an office or person who could intercede on behalf of students who are in need of assistance to stay in their courses. Students who needed direction and answers to their questions regarding what to do the first day of their courses were often left alone and wandered from building to building, unsure of where they were or if they were in the right place. Students who were taking remedial courses sometimes worked out problems alone. Admitting to someone that there was a problem often brought about fear of being judged. Students were pretty much on their own without the guidance and support of advisors, counselors, and faculty. I could only nod my head in agreement with her assessment of our efforts or lack of efforts to support these students. Too often these students got into trouble and only their professors knew that the student was not working at the level of a college student. Without a support network on campus, these students will continue to fall through the cracks.

Edith's assessment was passionate and sincere. She had only been a student at the community college for one semester, and she had assembled enough information to make an accurate and well-composed assessment of the situation of students on this campus who are at risk of leaving before degree completion. At-risk students generally exhibit low self-esteem and are low achievers (Stringfield, 1994). These students tend not to participate in school activities, and they have a minimal identification with the school with which they are affiliated. Edith said she understands the feelings and attitudes of the students who are in her classes. Many of the students come to class and leave when the class has been dismissed. Students have said they leave campus because they have jobs, and there is nothing going on to keep them interested in staying on campus. Most students have not connected with a specific person or department on campus that

provides enough interest to keep students on campus. If they do not ask a question in class the right way, she said, they usually get a funny look before the question is answered. Instead of asking a question in class, they usually wait until class is over and ask her to fill in any blanks they missed in the class. I asked Edith if she felt overwhelmed by such a request. She stated that she liked helping people. She said she liked helping students with their homework; it helped her to understand the materials much better. If she did not understand something, she asked the professor. She said, “I don’t have a problem asking the professor for help.”

The information Edith shared so freely was helpful yet shameful to hear. As she talked about students needing help but afraid to ask for help, I felt deeply ashamed. I realized that in my haste, there were probably students who needed my help who, for whatever reason, did not get it. But because of the unintentionally unwelcoming environment due to hasty attempts to make sure everyone was assisted with their specific issue, students possibly felt turned away. What a horrible thought. It is extremely important to establish significant lines of communication at the beginning of the school semester and remind students to use these avenues of communication whenever questions and concerns arise. There is typically little contact between a student and their academic advisor, but the professor and academic advisor can be a line of defense against academic failure. Edith has been helpful in sharing information to assist our department to make changes, increase retention, and support the at-risk student through a difficult semester.

Summary

Data was presented from surveys, conversational interviews with faculty and students, and case studies. Unprepared students described their experiences during their

first semester at college. These findings identify deficiencies in various areas of the unprepared students' success. Each department of a college must recognize its particular roles and responsibilities in making sure that students succeed academically.

The results of the conversational interviews for students who are unprepared indicate what their experiences were on a daily basis. These students, unlike other students who are prepared for the rigors of college, are met with multiple issues and problems as they find their way toward academic success. Their ages are also different, but all have similar needs.

Despite good intentions, high schools and colleges are failing to make an academic connection for a smooth transition for students moving from one to the other. The experiences of these students speak volumes to those who seek to improve student learning in an environment created for students who are preparing for the rigors of higher education. The unprepared students who are persistent and determined will achieve academic success despite the lack of programs and student interventions targeting the unprepared student.

With a mandate in place to curb the dropout rate and to improve the academic standards of students, ultimately it is in the classroom where students will receive the instruction and assistance that will help them achieve. Knowing how this process is supposed to work, students like Melody, Brian, and many others have not met these standards. Not only have they failed to meet the standards of preparedness, they do not have socialization skills to discuss concerns with their professors, counselors, or advisors regarding their academic needs. The at-risk students such as the two cases discussed in this chapter are not rare in their presenting issues or their inability to make their problems

known or to ask for assistance if they should need academic services in order to be successful. They speak about their academic deficits one-on-one more readily than students in the past but seem to refuse assistance or disregard help if offered. At-risk students rely on their parents to do their thinking, registering for classes, and discussing their academic status with their professors when they have differences about their grades. Students are troubled when they fail a class and when they find fault with a faculty member. Edith, who is a returning learner, approached her educational experience as an opportunity for personal growth and development. She realized there were gaps in her educational preparedness and she took appropriate steps to fill in the gaps to become prepared for the next levels of higher education. Edith first visited my office during the summer after taking her assessment test. She was concerned about her low placement scores and wanted to get a head start and take math as her summer class. Despite my advisement regarding taking an eight-week course, she believed she would be able to take the course. Two weeks into her math course Edith realized the class moved faster than her skill level permitted her to follow. She failed the math course but registered for it again the following fall. Edith admitted that she needed more help and a slower pace to be successful. Many students simply stop attending their course without the formality of dropping it. It appears to the student that such behavior is appropriate and justified.

Despite the efforts of the community college, one of the three case study students, Melody, had to leave the college because of poor grade performance and the lack of financial support. Brian may still be at risk of dropping out of school before achieving his college degree because he has not made his learning problem known to those who are available to assist him in locating the appropriate resources to address his learning

problems. Edith elected to use a different approach to her learning gaps by using the resources available to her and has been successful in meeting her academic challenges. Chapter 5 presents the discussion and interpretation of my findings, conclusions, and recommendations for the future.

Chapter V – Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Issues and concerns presented by the unprepared students have had a significant impact on community colleges. The community college's major concern has been the education of students and providing students with qualified faculty to develop their academic potential. The mission statement of the community college stresses lifelong learning, preparing students for the next phase of their academic career, graduation, and transferring to a four-year institution of their choice.

This study was a qualitative study of surveys, conversational interviews with faculty and students, and case studies of three students who tested into three remedial courses and were placed in Success Semester. These students were unprepared and at risk, facing a plethora of challenges. According to the student responses, the support activities and programs that have been put in place for their achievement and success have been only minimally successful. Some of these students are not comfortable asking for help or seeking help for their academic deficits on their own. Many students believe others make a joke of them due to their inability to learn like other students. The majority of students who participated in the data collection were unprepared for college coursework.

Surveys

The survey results seem to indicate three things: (a) students who took the survey think of themselves as being academically and socially prepared for the challenges of college coursework, (b) students who took the survey would prefer not to be identified as having learning difficulties, and (c) students who took the survey agreed to take the survey because other students in the room were taking the survey.

A review of the survey data revealed both expected and unexpected responses. Many of the students who took the survey denied needing help with their studies, and many stated that they understood what they read. This response was surprising because the majority of students who were surveyed and who visited a counselor had a reading deficit. Some students will not seek help until it is too late. Although the surveys were anonymous, students denied having any issues that might hinder their ability to be successful in college.

Faculty Perceptions

Throughout the year, I visited in a conversational style with faculty who shared with me their views about what was happening in their remedial classes, their frustrations with unprepared students, and their disappointment regarding their own efforts to assist these students. Students enrolled in remedial classes also expressed their frustration about needing information from the professor but not knowing how to ask the questions, fear of meeting with faculty during the faculty member's office hours, and their own failure to discuss their problems with a counselor or advisor for academic referral. Some faculty and staff believe that this rise in unprepared students is due to their lack of motivation to achieve. Some faculty's perception is that the college administration has not prepared appropriately for the increasing number of unprepared students. Faculty as well as students expressed their fears and frustrations. Faculty is concerned about students' lack of attention and disregard for work in the classroom, and students feel that the faculty is unable to teach on a level that is understandable to them. Their frustration has carried over into their negative views of each other (faculty views and student views).

On the topic of unprepared students, Roueche and Roueche (1993) promote teacher education and training. Teachers who teach the remedial courses should be required to prepare themselves by participating in specialized training in preparation for meeting the needs of unprepared students. It has also been noted that those who teach these classes should have a sincere desire to work with populations of unprepared students because of the amount of work required in the teaching and learning process of unprepared students (Goodlad, 1997). A large number of faculty members in the community college are adjunct faculty, which means that many of the professional development dollars are unavailable to them. Faculty members are clearly puzzled about the unpreparedness of students and how to present the information they need for students' academic success. However, the reality is that freshmen and transfer students who are not prepared, but who are enrolled in remedial and college level courses want to learn. Professors do make a difference in their students' intellectual development.

Student Perceptions

Student conversational interviews provided the most significant results. Students shared their concerns over attending college and issues that they were experiencing in their beginning semester. As reported earlier, unprepared students are given an assessment test to determine what levels of mathematics, English, and reading they will be placed into during their first semester. Identification of at-risk students after the assessment testing alone does not increase students' academic achievement or improve their retention rate. The process of determining a student's academic level offers the educator the opportunity to assess and assist the students using a holistic approach. Using a more holistic approach means assessing and identifying specific needs of the students

such as creating a semester-by-semester academic educational plan to address their educational needs as well as their social and financial needs. However, after the counselor secures a section in a particular course for students, the students are left on their own. The students are not given a plan of action or academic plan to follow. This appears to be a weak point in the college's support process. The unprepared students do not have an educational plan or regular staffing consisting of a counselor, the students professors, and a member from career services. These individuals could discuss and develop the most appropriate educational plan for the student's progress during the first semester for their particular issues to help them successfully obtain academic success.

One of the participants commented about the uneasiness she experienced in her interactions with other students who were younger and her feelings of awkwardness when asking a question or knowing with whom to speak regarding any of her issues and concerns. Sometimes faculty and staff forget the anxiety that students can experience, that rolling emptiness that is felt in the pit of the stomach whenever they are introduced to a different or new environment or activity. Students sometimes feel that all eyes are on them or that someone will know their little secret. These feelings and responses especially are common for the unprepared students enrolling in college with academic and social deficits. Understanding these issues and teaching students to think through the process of decision making assists in the retention and academic achievement of students.

Case Studies

The case studies illustrated and articulated many of the concerns of students. The interviews encapsulated in the case studies gave the unprepared students a voice to speak about their specific needs, fears, frustrations, and disappointment. The students who were

repeatedly interviewed in my study were representative of the problems unprepared students are facing in the educational system each day. The case studies validate the assessment statistics of many more students who have not seen a counselor to develop an educational plan to address their academic and social deficits. Additionally, they demonstrate that the college's current measures to remediate the unpreparedness of students are inadequate and ineffective. Students who have academic and social issues are leaving college often without the interaction of a college official.

The case study interviews communicated students' uncertainty in their ability to stay in school on a day-to-day basis, and each day that they enter a classroom may be their last. Students, like Brian, presented as a case study, would have benefited from a team of professionals who assisted in his educational planning during registration. These students benefit from time management, tutorial services, and continual monitoring by counselors and teachers. During my collection of information from these students who were found to be at-risk, I found that they possessed the characteristics indicated by the literature of Craig (2005), Ender and Willkie (2000), and Tinto (1993)—low socioeconomic status; older or more mature student, notably the returning learner.

However, students are often limited in the extent to which they can participate in available retention resources. The students in my case studies are a small representation of the students who continue in higher education with a great deal of stress, struggling to meet the demands of higher education. Other students like Melody are not as fortunate. Her lack of socialization skills, questioning, interpretation and problem solving are connected to her failure and leaving college after the first semester. Social skills include both verbal and non-verbal forms of communication. Students must be able to

communicate their needs and ask questions to evaluate situations. Melody's communication with her professors was limited and her understanding of the materials presented in class appeared to have been understood in the classroom, but once the class was over her understanding and memory to recall information was nearly non-existent or missing. If her communication skills were well developed, Melody would have been able to articulate her needs and evaluate the information told to her by her professor. If Melody had developed personal confidence in her ability to ask for help, she might have had a different experience in her first semester of college. Based on my experience, students who develop a support system on campuses are more likely to have better success overall than students who do not. Edith who was the returning learner experienced the greatest success because she decided that she was going to be successful. Edith developed a support system among members of the student development team. She made an effort to learn her professors' names and she got involved in school activities. Edith was so comfortable in her classes that she tutored some of the students who were having problems in the courses she was taking. Like many of the learners who have returned to school, they are ready to begin the challenges of higher education courses.

The students represented in my research are a small sampling of the type of students on the study community college campus. Their experience with the challenges of a new environment is likely the same as any other new community college student. Students take different approaches to learning. In this study, three students started their educational experience by taking the Assessment test. The string that connects these three students is the results of their assessment tests. All three tested into three remedial classes. What separates them is how they process information they need to be successful

completing their remedial courses. Brian's approach to his unpreparedness was centered around his determination to show his parents he could succeed in college. His attention issues were challenged by his efforts to stay on track in his courses, work his part-time job, and limit distractions. Melody's case is typical of the many students on the community college campus. She made feeble to no attempts to contact her professors regarding her class standing.

The case studies presented in this study demonstrate the need for a more holistic approach to learning with at-risk students. Educating at-risk students does not just happen in the classroom. Students often need to adjust to new surroundings. They need skill builders to assist them with the communications process between their peers and faculty. Problem solving strategies also allow them the benefit of working through problems and make sound decisions that impact their lives positively. At-risk freshmen students are likely to lack self-esteem and because of past high school experiences that focused on their weaknesses instead of their strengths. Recall from Chapter 2 that learning communities foster resiliency by building on students' strengths instead of their weaknesses (Schutz & Lanehart, 1994). Returning learners are more likely to enter college with at least some life experiences that have provided them with resilience, organizational skills, and self-esteem (e.g., marriage, parenting, career success). Furthermore, returning learners have received special attention because of their sheer numbers (e.g., orientation workshop, relationship building opportunities, mentoring, tutoring, etc.).

The information collected has been consistent with the literature reviewed related

to unprepared students. This study revealed students' real feelings and attitudes about attending college unprepared and being lost in an environment established for the intellectually well-prepared students equipped with the skills, support, and abilities to handles the rigors of college curriculum.

The case studies presented are significant because they created the ability to focus on the big picture—too many students entering college unprepared and too few leaving with a college degree or certification. The case study results revealed that student habits and organization skills contributed to student success. These case studies explored three students, two of the students showed the need for organization skills while the third student demonstrated how organization played a key role in her success. The two unorganized students are only two of many first semester community college students who lack organizational skills. Often students do not have good study habits. Many of my advisees are encouraged to take a study skills course. The study skills course prepares students to stay on track, avoid wasting time, and meet deadlines, all necessary skills to be a successful student.

Two of the three students in the case studies are examples of poor organizational skills and study habits. Edith, our returning learner, stated from the onset that it had been many years since she was in a classroom participating in school work for herself. She talked about needing help focusing and managing her time. These areas are addressed in the study skills course offered on campus. Edith enrolled in the study skills course and helped not only herself, but also other students in her class.

Discussion

Students sometimes leave high school due to social promotions by earning the minimum grade point averages that give them the credits sufficient to complete high school graduation requirements. Social promotion does not mean these students have the academic skills to compete in higher-level courses. In one of my doctoral classes, I was introduced to a provocative, futuristic thinker, Daniel Pink (2007), who described our future outlook as having fewer individuals ready to fill the roles of teachers, doctors, and lawmakers. He described our youth as being carefree and falling behind India and China in education and ranking 13th in academic performance. Pink suggested that we are experiencing the effect of what might be the future of America's youth. He predicted from the behavior of our youth such things as (a) more students will enter post-secondary education programs unprepared for the rigors of college level work, (b) they will claim more rights of entitlement, and (c) more federal legislation programs like No Child Left Behind to alert us to meet the challenges of the unprepared community college students.

The study interviewees' problems are a small sample of the problems that unprepared students face in the higher education setting every day. The information collected has been consistent with the literature reviewed related to the issues of unprepared students. The study revealed students' real feelings and attitudes about attending college unprepared and being lost in an environment established for intellectually well-prepared students equipped with the skills, support, and abilities to handle the rigors of the college curriculum. The students who are returning to complete their education are sometimes academically unprepared, but as Edith proved, older mature students with rich life experiences have a mission. These students enjoy the

participation in classroom discussions. The returning learner is open and thirsty for a deeper understanding of the possibilities of achievement. They are inquisitive and use reasoning to exercise their problem solving skills. Most importantly, they are socially adept, interacting with faculty and staff to form meaningful relationships to assist them in their approach to learning.

The literature encourages community colleges to select teachers who are interested in helping unprepared students learn. Roueche and Roueche (1993) have suggested that teachers' attitudes might be related to students' achievement. Professors cannot create a classroom climate that is conducive to learning, one that is physically and psychologically respectful, (Knowles, 1980) if they are not interested in helping or do not know how to help unprepared students learn.

A holistic approach, where all components of the unprepared student's life are considered instead of just academic achievement, would take into consideration the following:

1. A centralized location or department for this specific population of students to promote the student's educational development.
2. Effective interaction between the teacher and the students to create an environment that respects the students, and encourages and stimulates learning by providing students with what they need to be successful.
3. Counselors specifically assigned to students while the students are working through the remedial courses.

No faculty member should be arbitrarily assigned to teach remedial courses if he or she would rather not teach the course or does not have the education to prepare them to

help adults learn; nor should any faculty member be assigned to teach who is only mildly interested in doing so. Uninterested professors cannot be expected to motivate students who are typically characterized by a lack of motivation. Conversations with faculty in my study indicated that most faculty members are concerned and troubled about the process of helping students who are not prepared. Other faculty members commented on the low motivation level of students. There is, however, a key component missing in the college's ability to address their concerns and reach their unprepared students. My findings suggest educators in the study's community college setting should be professionally developed to adopt a holistic approach to the education of unprepared students by (a) mastering their subject and materials, (b) seeking new ways of engaging and challenging students to help them learn, (c) collaborating with members of their education planning team, and (d) assessing student learning needs and preferences to deliver the best educational opportunities possible.

Additional findings in this study align accurately with the research collected. Students who tested into remedial courses at the study college are academically unprepared for the rigors of college level courses. The research also indicate that unprepared students have other issues that distract from the learning process such as family problems, learning disabilities, financial problems, and a lack of the social and communication skills needed to interact with faculty and peers. Faculty at the study college is seeking answers to unprepared students' lack of participation in the classroom and strategies to reach and connect to this population of students. Returning learners are among the unprepared, however these seasoned students are more successful in the classroom because of their desire to learn. Their younger peers respect returning learners;

and, faculty appreciates the interaction they foster in the classroom and the knowledge that their life experiences bring to the learning environment.

The literature in Chapter 2 discussed unprepared students from both ends of the educational spectrum—students who are entering college as first time college attendees to students who are returning after a lengthy separation period from college. Regardless of their personal reasons or problems, the research bears witness that students are still experiencing similar conditions and results. This study supports the research findings that students' academic problems are factually a part of their reason for leaving college before degree completion. Society has also contributed to the concern of students not being prepared to compete in today's job market. Many educational institutions have acknowledged the concern by adding remedial courses to support their academics. But, remedial courses are not enough. The returning learner, Edith, received special resources and support and she was successful. Perhaps all new community college students should be treated like returning learners.

Answering the Research Questions

The research questions were as follows:

1. Why is the study community college failing to retain at-risk students?
2. How effective is the assessment process for entering community college students?
3. How does faculty perceive the attitudes, abilities, and overall motivation of students who are unprepared for college?

Answering research question #1: Why is the study community college failing to retain at-risk students?

The staff at the study community college was concerned with the number of students enrolling for college courses testing into remedial courses. The results indicate that the study college struggles to retain students because they primarily support students' academic needs and not their other needs. The case studies provided a complete picture of the student needs as they relate to their ability to be successful having multiple barriers to their academic achievement. Students who are unprepared academically often bring extra baggage with them that distracts from their ability to study and learn. The study college does not have a specific place that or person who addresses students' other, sometimes delicate, needs such as students who are homeless, students who are living in an abusive environment, or students who may not have enough food to eat. A student resource center specifically designed to work with students and faculty to promote the success of students may help meet students' other needs. Such a center would provide individual staffing for students with various needs, individual academic planning guides, and a referral agent with follow-up to promote academic success.

Answering research question #2: How effective is the assessment process for entering community college students?

The study results indicate that the assessment process alone is not effective, because academics are only one part of unprepared student issues. To fully reach the unprepared students, a holistic needs assessment may provide the appropriate staff with vital information and support to meet all the needs of these students before the situation becomes uncorrectable.

Answering research question #3: How does faculty perceive the attitudes, abilities, and overall motivation of students who are unprepared for college?

Faculty who teach at the study college appeared to be extremely concerned about unprepared student attitudes. The faculty perceived their students as unmotivated to learn the materials they were given during the semester. They reported that students did not contribute to the discussions and questions were rarely asked. Faculty stated that some students would appear to be asleep in their classes and some faculty reported that their students did not seem to have the academic ability to compete in their classes. Gardiner (1994) supported the belief that educators should be educated to provide an equitable education for the unprepared student. The professional development process is absolutely necessary for educators in all categories to engage students at all levels (including at-risk students) in the learning process. Unprepared students who are not returning learners are not provided a seminar or workshop to introduce them to the various departments of the college. These students often feel that they are the only person in their particular situation. Providing all new students with a workshop that introduces students to other students with like issues could develop interactions and connections to resources to help many students' issues. Faculty perceptions reflect the disconnection between high school and college. Faculty who take the time to build a relationship with unprepared students (e.g., ask questions, spend time talking with them, help them solve problems, calling them by name) may understand how to connect with them.

Recommendations for Community Colleges

The study's community college is unprepared for the students leaving high school who are unable to compete in college-level courses. Community colleges are providing

some resources to students who are deficient in specific courses. Problems were found to exist with this community college's ability to help unprepared students regarding referrals to helpful resources, communication, collaboration, documentation, and follow-up. At this community college, advisors make referrals but do not document and follow up on information that could potentially affect students' lives. Useful advice and recommendations could be generated to help unprepared students through communication and collaboration among counselors, professors, and other academic support services (Barkley, Cross, & Major, 2004)**.** Documentation and follow up would provide the team of education professionals and Institutional Research Departments with vital information about student procedures, educational plans, and referrals.

Because of these efforts, the community college could notice improvement in the following ways:

- The development of social skills among the unprepared student
- Successful completion of remedial courses
- Students staying in school until degree completion
- Stronger and more supportive relationships between faculty and staff
- More productive use of resources. (O'Banion, 1997, p. 8)

Conversational interviews with faculty and students supported the fact that both faculty and students want college programs, policies, and procedures that support student success. The case studies pointed out gaps in the study community college system and the need for corrective measures to keep students in college from wasting their own financial resources and from underutilizing the financial and other resources that are in place for the success of students.

Faculty and staff must have the support of administration to be able to provide remedial education in a respectful, caring, and supportive environment that encourages active learning. I recommend that all new community college students receive the same resources and support that are given to returning students, for all adult students learn best in an environment that is conductive to learning.

Coordinating retention activities between academics and student services is a simple and beneficial process for faculty, staff, and students. Retention strategies for the unprepared students might include (a) educational plans that consist of courses the students will need to take; (b) monthly staffing meetings that respond to students' attendance and class participation; (c) regular visits with students; (c) tutorials; and (d) encouragement of students to participation in student activity event each semester. However, even with the implementation of these efforts, most institutions will still be faced with the issue of unprepared students. In conversations with students during my research, I found that the students expressed their need to have additional guidance and contact with their counselor or the appropriate "go to" person and/or their professor at the college. Students need specific guidance regarding balancing work hours, debt burden, course load, and addressing family issues. These students need to develop critical thinking skills to work through problems as they arise. In the process of student interviews, it was apparent that many of these students missed important information or received the information, but did not understand what to do with it. Asking questions and getting clarification would possibly help keep students on campus to complete the semester successfully.

College administrators often address student retention, like other issues, by forming committees and discussing their personal agendas instead of the problems. The recommendations of my study are limited to a specific college, and the research was collected from a small group of students who did not represent the diversity of the campus community; therefore, this study does not have the capability of being generalized to other schools with similar academic issues with unprepared students. However, the suggestions submitted in my study relate significantly to unprepared students and professors who teach these students.

Conclusion

This study presents information and suggestions for practice at the study community college. The results of this study support the findings of the reviewed literature, indicating that providing remedial courses is not enough to accommodate the deficits of the unprepared. The community college studied in this research lacks an overarching, holistic approach with specific procedures and resources discussed in the literature provided by other colleges that have undergone transformation to accommodate students who are unprepared. The unprepared students in this study sensed a disconnection with community college faculty and staff, and faculty and staff sensed a disconnection with students. It must be the faculty, staff, and administration who takes the initiative to change—to make the connection with students coming from high school through initiatives and strategies like those created for the returning learners. All new students whether from high school or returning after a long period of time are the same.

The case studies illustrated the difficulties faced by both the students and the institution. Brian, whose main concern was his job and ability to demonstrate to his

family that he was capable of being successful in college, faded from contact. Brian missed several appointments to discuss his educational program because he was involved with personal concerns with which he was dealing at the time. He did not return calls or letters requesting his assistance in this process of gathering information.

Edith struggled with her mathematics studies throughout the semester. She was determined to be successful in her courses, and her hard work paid off. Edith managed to pass her courses with the help of on-campus academic resources and group sessions she formed with other students in her remedial courses. She has registered for spring classes and will be taking college-level courses during the spring semester.

Melody was less fortunate. Melody reported that she was doing well in her courses. She said she had talked to her professors and they did not indicate that she was at risk of failing. The college generally mails notices of academic problems to students after the mid-term. This notice alerts students to meet with their professors and develop a plan for achievement, if possible. Otherwise, students have the opportunity to drop their classes before F's were reported on their transcript. In Melody's situation, her final grades were F's in all of her subjects except one. Melody had financial aid that afforded her the opportunity to attend college. Unfortunately, she was unable to return to college because she did not meet the required percentage of courses completed successfully during the semester in order to maintain her financial aid eligibility. Melody appeared defeated when she said she was unable to pay for her classes for the spring semester. Her situation is a perfect illustration of unprepared students who leave college due to inability to compete in college-level courses. However, another element in Melody's case is important in building better information systems and monitoring procedures for students

who are unprepared. Monitoring a shared informational system would have resulted in a better system of informed communication between Melody and her professors and student advocates or mentors. Providing Melody with an advocate to explain policies and procedures during her first semester might have resulted in a different outcome for her during her first college experience.

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Appendix A

IRB FORM

LINDENWOOD UNIVERSITY

Application for IRB Review of
Research Proposal Involving Human Subjects

1. Title of Project: *A Study of At Risk Students on a Community College*

2. Dissertation Chair: *Dr. S. Sherblom - Department: Education-Extension: e mail:ssherblom@lindenwood.edu*

3. Primary Investigator(s): *Peggy Sherwin*-Department: *Education*-Local phone: 636-970-1494 e-mail:psherwin@stchas.edu

4. Anticipated starting date for this project (data collection cannot begin until this IRB application has been approved): _____December 2008_____

5. Anticipated ending date for this project: __November 2009___

6. State the purpose and rationale of the proposed project.
The purpose of this research study will illustrate how at risk students get lost in the community college educational system and ultimately leave without completing their degree.

7. State the hypothesis(es) or research question(s) of the proposed project:
Can at-risk students complete college if provided support in a holistic approach to their educational needs?

8. Has this research project been reviewed or is it currently being reviewed by an IRB at another institution? If so, please state when, where, and disposition (approval/non-approval/pending).
No.

9. Participants involved in the study:

a. Indicate how many persons will be recruited as potential participants in this study.

LU participants ____ Undergraduate students
_____ Graduate students
_____ Faculty and/or staff

Non-LU participants _____ Children
_____ Adolescents
15 Adults
____ Seniors
____ Persons in institutional settings (e.g. nursing homes, correctional facilities, etc.)
Other (specify):

b. From what source(s) will the potential participants be recruited?
_____ LU undergraduate and/or graduate classes
_____ LU Human Subject Pool (LU HSP)
_____ Other LU sources (specify) _____
_____ School Districts _____
_____ Community Agencies (please list)
_____
_____ Businesses (please list) _____
_____ Health care settings, nursing homes, etc. (please list)
_____
Other (specify): *St. Charles Community College*

c. If any persons within the selected group(s) are being excluded, please explain who is being excluded and why. (Note: According to the Office of LU HSP, all students within the LU Human Subject Pool must be allowed to participate, although exclusion of certain subjects may be made when analyzing data.).
All students that have been identified as at-risk will be contacted. From the pool of at- risk students, 15 names will be pulled to participate in a pilot program. An additional 15 names will be pulled to provide the counseling/advisement that generally has occurred in an advising session.

d. Describe the process of participant recruitment. Provide a copy of any materials to be used for recruitment (e.g. posters, flyers, advertisements, letters, telephone and other verbal scripts).
1. *Surveys given to all at-risk students*
2. *Letter asking students to participate*
3. *Outline of the pilot program in which they are asked to participate*

e. Where will the study take place?
X On campus – Explain:
The study will take place on St Charles Community College campus during the students regular class time. St. Charles Community College is a commuter college. The pilot project will provide the necessary treatment during the hours students are on campus and will hopefully add to their willingness to participate.

_____ Off campus – Explain:

10. Methodology/procedures:

a. Provide a sequential description of the procedures to be used in this study.

1. A survey will be given to all students identified as at-risk

2. Developmental classes scheduled will be selected from the list of success semester classes

3. Weekly 50 -minute group advising to discuss any problems or concerns that might cause students to leave school before degree completion.

4. Provide referrals, to financial aid, counseling or community agency assistance and tutorial assistance.

b. Which of the following procedures will be used? Provide a copy of all materials to be used in this study.

_____ Observing participants in a research setting (i.e. classroom, playground, school board meetings, etc.)

_____ Survey(s) or questionnaire(s) (mail-back)-Are they standardized?

X Survey(s) or questionnaire(s) (in person)-Are they standardized? *No*

_____ Computer-administered task(s) or survey(s)-Are they standardized?

_____ Interview(s) (in person)

_____ Interview(s) (by telephone)

X Focus group(s)

_____ Audiotaping

_____ Videotaping

_____ Analysis of secondary data (no involvement with human participants)- specify source

_____ Invasive physiological measurement- explain:

11. How will the results of this research be made accessible to participants? Explain and attach a copy of any feedback forms that will be used.

The information will be made available by the Research and Development Department in the yearly college statistical report.

12. Potential Benefits and Compensation from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits (perhaps academic, psychological, or social) to the participants from their involvement in the project. *The benefits will be to the students and the college. Students will remain in school, thus addressing the retention problem that has escalated over the past five years.*

b. Identify and describe any known or anticipated benefits to society from this study.

Society will benefit because there will be more individuals educated and trained to take jobs left vacant by worker retirement. Society will also benefit because of the increasing number of single parents receiving public assistance increased. Retaining those students will aid in possibly lowering taxes and putting single parents to work.

c. Describe any anticipated compensation (monetary, grades, extra credit, other) to participants.

Students will not be compensated to participate in the pilot project. The pilot project is intended to assist students in completing their developmental classes, building self-esteem developing and study skills.

13. Potential Risks from the Study:

a. Identify and describe any known or anticipated risks (i.e. physical, psychological, social, economic, and legal, etc.) to participants involved in this study.

There is no known risk to students participating in this project.

b. Will deception be used in this study? If so, explain the rationale.

Deception will not be used in any form.

c. Does this project involve gathering information about sensitive topics? Such topics include: political affiliations; psychological disorders of participants or their families; sexual behavior or attitudes; illegal, antisocial, self-incriminating or demeaning behavior; critical appraisals of participants' families or employers; legally recognized privileged relationships (lawyers, doctors, ministers); income; religious beliefs and practices. If so, explain.

Sensitive subject matter will not be used, discussed or referenced in this pilot project.

d. Could any of the participants be considered physically or emotionally vulnerable (children, institutionalized persons, pregnant women, persons with impaired judgment)? If so, describe the procedures or safeguards in place to protect the physical and psychological health of the participants in light of the risks/stresses identified above. Include procedures for handling any adverse events, providing referrals for services, etc.

All participants will be considered emotionally healthy and stable enough to attend a Community College.

e. Explain the procedures to be used to ensure anonymity of participants and confidentiality of data both during the data gathering phase of the research, in the storage of data, and in the release of the findings. How will confidentiality be explained to participants?

Students are not asked to share their name during the survey process. Any information will be used to address the needs of this population in a holistic

manner. Information gathered will be kept in the student's files until they are moved to a permanent storage handled by the college.

f. Indicate the duration and location of secure data storage and the method to be used for final disposition of the data.

Paper Records

__X_ confidential shredding after __5__ years.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

_____ Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Audio/video Recordings

None Erasing of audio/video tapes after _____ years.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

_____ Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

Electronic Data N/A

None Erasing of electronic data after _____ years.

_____ Data will be retained indefinitely in a secure location.

Where? _____

Data will be retained until completion of specific course and then destroyed.

14. Informed Consent Process:

a. What process will be used to inform the potential participants about the study details and to obtain their consent for participation?

__X_ An information letter with a written consent form for participants or their legally authorized agents; provide a copy.

_____ An information letter with a written or verbal consent from director of institutions involved; provide a copy.

_____ An information letter with written or verbal consent from teachers in classrooms or daycare; provide a copy.

Other (specify):

b. What special provisions have been made for providing information to those not fluent in English, mentally disabled persons, or other populations for whom it may be difficult to grant informed consent?

The interview process will provide information related to the study and why the study is being conducted. Students who have difficulty understanding may be asked to bring a parent who will be able to sit in on the interview to assist the student in making a decision to participate or not participate in the pilot project.

15. All supporting materials/documentation for this application are to be submitted electronically to IRB@lindenwood.edu. Please indicate which appendices are included

with your application. Submission of an incomplete application package will result in the application being returned to you immediately.

__X__ Recruitment materials: A copy of any posters, fliers, advertisements, letters, and telephone or other verbal scripts used to recruit/gain access to participants.

__X__ Data gathering materials: A copy of all surveys, questionnaires, interview questions, interview themes/sample questions for open-ended interviews, focus group questions, or any standardized tests used to collect data.

_____ Feedback letter for participants.

Informed Consent:

__X__ Information letter and consent forms used in studies involving interactive participants.

_____ Information/Cover letters used in studies involving surveys or questionnaires.

_____ Parent information letter and permission form for studies involving minors.

_____ Medical screening Form: Must be included for all physiological measurements involving greater than minimal risk, and tailored for each study.

_____ Other:

Appendix B

Success Semester

An Invitation

Dear Student:

I would like to take this opportunity to extend a personal invitation to you to participate in a pilot project designed to enhance the academic success of students who are placed in developmental classes.

St. Charles Community College is dedicated to the academic success of each student. The pilot program is in part a project that involves research for my Doctoral dissertation paper at Lindenwood University, and St. Charles Community College Faculty and Staff Student Retention Work Group Initiative Committee who are taking additional supportive measures to increase student success.

The focus of the project was designed to retain and improve the academic skill level of students who tested into remedial English, mathematics and reading. As a participating member of this group, you would agree to participate in several activities related to your academic success.

If you are interested in being involved in this project, please bring this letter with you to my office for further details (Adm. Room 1204). Please understand, you are under no obligation to participate in this project. Participation in this project is strictly volunteer. However, if you decide to participate the information that is obtain may provide vital data to you and other students' academic achievement.

Thank you for taking the time to consider you involvement with Success Semester Pilot Project. I am looking forward to working with you to meet your educational goals.

I can be reached at 636-922-8541. My office is located in the Administration Building, 1204 Suite P.

Peggy Sherwin

Development Coordinator

Appendix C

SURVEY INSTRUMENT

1. I am concerned about a college education.
2. I attended high school regularly.
3. I have difficulty understanding what I have heard.
4. I know how to study for class.
5. I have difficulty taking tests.
6. I have difficulty asking for help.
7. I am the first generation in my family to go to college.
8. I am a single parent.
9. Childcare is an issue for me.
10. Transportation is an issue for me.
11. I have graduated from high school.
12. I have a general equivalency diploma (GED).
13. I receive financial aid and/or loans for college tuition.
14. School was always a challenge for me.
15. I have a reliable support system to assist me through college.

PEGGY R. SHERWIN

Biography

After high school, I attended the community college in Moline, Illinois where I completed an associate's degree in nursing. I worked in several hospitals and mental health facilities. My last nursing job was with Head Start Programs in Iowa. I completed a bachelor's degree in Psychology at Saint Ambrose University, in Davenport, Iowa. Next, I completed a master's degree in counseling at Western Illinois University and started my practicum at Comprehensive Mental Health in East St. Louis, Illinois. Prior to Lindenwood, I was a counselor at St. Charles Community College. I graduated with a Doctor of Education degree from Lindenwood University in 2012.