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College of Education

Doctorate of Education Program

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A Phenomenological Study of Factors Affecting the High Dropout Rate of Nontraditional

African American Students in Community College

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College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Education in

Higher Education

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Abstract

Nontraditional students comprise 75% of the higher education student population (Complete College America, 2011). These students maintain employment and care for their families while juggling the demands of college courses. Two-year colleges face challenges retaining nontraditional learners and more than 50% of nontraditional African American students fail to complete their associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). The purpose of this phenomenological research study was to identify factors affecting the degree completion of nontraditional African American students in a community college setting and to offer institutional recommendations to retain this population of students to graduation. The researcher utilized a phenomenological research study with a survey component to collect and to analyze data on factors affecting the degree completion of nontraditional African American students in community college. This research study investigated factors impacting the persistence, retention, and graduation of nontraditional African American students in community college. Five areas, poor faculty-student relationships, ineffective student services and academic counseling programs, the need for additional financial aid to complete programs, the lack of student engagement activities to connect the nontraditional African American student to their learning experience, and the absence of family support, influence the retention and graduation rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college.

Keywords: nontraditional, African American, adult learner, dropout, attrition, retention, 2-year college, community college, associate degree

Dedication

I dedicate this research study to Jesus Christ, my Lord and Savior. Thank you for never leaving nor forsaking me, and for reminding me "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13, KJV).

To my two amazing young adult children, James Junior and Shareia Haynie, you have been with me on this educational journey from the very beginning. Thank you for your words of encouragement and for understanding the demands often placed on my time. As you continue your individual educational endeavors, remember success is achieved with discipline, time management, and a commitment to finish what you have started. Regardless of the struggle, trust that all things are possible! You can do anything. I will always love you!

To the memory of my dear friends, Icesonnia P. Horsley, electrical engineer, and Tawanna B. Dixon-Cherry, M.D., your friendship remains a treasure. As successful graduates of North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University (A & T), you were great role models for me early in my life. To the memory of my belated pastor, Pastor Mary Helen Smith, I am eternally grateful for your discipleship, mentoring and friendship that shaped my life in Christ.

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My prayers continue to be with you during your studies and also as you walk in you calling as a minister of the Gospel. You will do well.

To my awesome friends, the Hope Coaches, Toby and Tawana Williams. There are no words to describe how blessed my life has been to have the two of you in it. I love you. To Ms. Kim Lilley and Dr. Armunda Hancock, thank you both for allowing me to be a part of your television ministry, T*he Armunda Hancock Gospel Productions.* It has been a pleasure to work with you. I value our friendship. To Dr. Kaira Bullock, thank you for your support and guidance along this journey. You are simply the best! To all my friends, and colleagues who have studied with me and encouraged me along the way, thank you. A very special thank you to all the participants in this research study. I appreciate you.

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and support. Continued blessing to you all.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

For more than 100 years, 2-year colleges have provided educational opportunities and job training programs to meet the needs of our local communities. To date, more than 100 million students have attended one of the 1,166 2-year schools which make up the U.S. community college system (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Open access and low tuition fees are two factors contributing to the increased enrollment at community colleges. Studies by Complete College America (2011) revealed 75% of students currently pursuing higher education are nontraditional students. These students may be classified as young single parents, financially independent adults, welfare recipients, students of color and of immigrant backgrounds, first-generation college students, older students, and disabled students; taken together, students in these categories make up a significant share of community college enrollees (Purnell, Blank, Scrivener, & Seupersad, 2004).

As the enrollment of nontraditional adult learners steadily increased in U.S. colleges, the specific needs of these students challenged educators who were accustomed to serving traditional students. Four-year colleges made progress in retaining their nontraditional students to graduation by focusing on the unique needs of the student population. Unfortunately, the retention rate of nontraditional students at the community college level has declined over time for nontraditional African American adult learners. Today, nearly 50% of nontraditional African American students depart from the community college before completing an associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Improving the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American adult learners at community colleges may require a collaborative effort between faculty and student support services to ensure the needs of nontraditional African American students are being met effectively. The infrastructure of the

community college may require adjustments to successfully meet the needs of traditional and nontraditional students alike. One of the goals of higher education is to retain students to graduation. Although nontraditional students comprise the largest segment of the student population, the graduation rate for this demographic continues to decline. Many nontraditional students have families and maintain employment while earning a degree. These factors can negatively influence their academic persistence.

The race of the nontraditional student is a characteristic which significantly impacts the success of adult learners between 25 and 40 years of age in a community college setting. Degree completion is even more difficult for nontraditional students who are African American. African American students may experience poor relationships with faculty, lack adequate financial aid to complete degree programs, and may not be knowledgeable about campus-wide academic programs to support their educational goals. The success of nontraditional African American students in community college may require additional institutional support to alleviate the challenges of degree completion faced by African American older students. Success for the nontraditional African American student at a 2-year college may be measured by their increased retention and higher graduation rates.

Will community college leaders agree systematic approaches to serve the students must reflect today's educational climate and changing student needs? Each community college may have different challenges on their campuses, but the high attrition of nontraditional African American students may become an issue affecting the delivery of affordable quality education at the nation's 2-year colleges. These students have high enrollment rates, but their low degree completion rates may cause an increase in community college tuition fees. This study does not provide a one-size-fits-all solution for improving retention and graduation rates among

nontraditional African American students. However, it does bring the attrition of African American nontraditional learners to the forefront to evaluate the loss of student potential, to consider the future affordability of community college and to consider how higher education can graduate more of these underserved students with associate degrees.

Introduction to the Problem

Community colleges offer a quality education which is also affordable for students. Despite this fact, the amount of debt students accrue in pursuit of an education has increased significantly from previous years. The researcher reviewed reports that stated student debt in the U.S. is currently over $1.5 trillion (Friedman, 2018). When students fail to graduate from their degree programs within six years, they cost billions of dollars in forgone income and taxes which affect the economy. These students are still required to repay educational loans and may not have the income to make repayment possible. Often, students default on these loans and force colleges to absorb unpaid educational debt which may lead to higher tuition fees for future students (Blum & Jarrat, 2013).

Almost half of the nontraditional students enrolled in degree programs at the community college do not complete their programs of study (National Student Clearinghouse Center, 2019). While 4-year colleges have implemented services to address the needs of nontraditional students, community colleges have not systematically met the needs of this student population. Nontraditional students have specific challenges which affect their success as students, and African American nontraditional students have additional issues which influence their retention and academic persistence. The goal of this study was to examine how these challenges impact the attrition of nontraditional African American students and to share strategies to improve the retention and graduation of this underserved student population.

Background, Context, History and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

　　History. The community college has provided quality, accessible education to U.S. citizenry since 1901 (Trainor, 2015). Community colleges were often referred to as "junior colleges." These institutions were created to expand the practical training offered by early land-grant colleges and universities (Trainor, 2015). Community colleges were inexpensive, often public-funded and made education accessible to a broader cross-section of Americans. The students who attended the early community college were predominately White males who comprised a high percentage of the working-class society.

　　In 1944, Congress passed the GI Bill of Rights which allowed 2.2 million veterans to pursue higher education (Trainor, 2015). These educational benefits provided financial assistance to servicemen and women who eagerly enrolled at the community college. During the 1940s and 1950s 2-year colleges experienced rapid growth which continued in the 1960s with the open-doors policy. From 1960 to 1970, new community colleges opened on an average of one per week and provided educational opportunities to the Baby Boomer Generation (Trainor, 2015). Community colleges were desegregated at a faster pace than 4-year colleges. Minorities had access to higher learning through 2-year colleges and this diversity in the student population continues today. The community college system remains diverse, and continues to enroll students from various racial, ethnic, and socio-economic backgrounds (Trainor, 2015). Unlike the admission criteria at 4-year colleges, students attending a 2-year college do not pay an application fee. Also, acceptance to a community college is not dependent on a student's performance score on standardized tests such as the SAT (Scholastic Assessment Test) or the ACT (American College Test).

Background. The researcher reviewed the literature on undergraduate attrition and the nontraditional student which focused primarily on students attending 4-year colleges. However, poor attrition is a problem experienced by nontraditional African American students attending 2-year community colleges. Today, almost 50% of nontraditional African American adult learners leave the community college before obtaining an associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Center, 2019). These students require support in specific areas challenging them as they work to complete their degrees.

Many nontraditional African American students consistently juggle family responsibilities while maintaining employment and attending college. Student services is important to ensure the academic needs of students are met to include strong faculty-student support, effective academic counseling, additional financial aid opportunities and increased student engagement, which was the focus of this study. The researcher conducted initial research on the retention of nontraditional African American adult learners in community college, which yielded these overall findings:

1. The retention rate among nontraditional African American students increased when students had positive faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013).

2. Student service programs did not provide services to meet the specific needs of nontraditional African American students (Purnell, Blank, Scrivener & Seupersad, 2004).

3. Financial aid opportunities did not meet the needs of students to persist to graduation (Grabowski, Rush, Ragen, Fayard, & Watkins-Lewis, 2016).

4. Nontraditional African American students in community colleges were not aware of the benefits of academic support and failed to benefit from these services (Purnell et al., 2004).

5. The lack of programs to promote student engagement in campus activities increased the attrition rate of the nontraditional African American adult learner who had difficulty "fitting in" on the community college campus (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

6. The lack of family support impacted the dropout rate when students did not receive encouragement to continue in their programs (Grabowski et al., 2016).

The researcher reviewed several theories which explained the integration of students to college and examined reasons for attrition such as Tinto's theory of student integration (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 1994), Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014), Schlossberg's theory of transition (Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton & Renn, 2010), and Locke's and Latham's goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002). Tinto's and Bean and Metzner's theories supported the goals of this study and were applied to this research on the attrition of nontraditional African American students in community college.

Tinto theorized students who socially integrated into the campus community increased their commitment to the university and were more likely to graduate (Rendon et al., 1994). Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition paralleled Tinto's theory and stated academic and social integration led to a greater commitment to instruction and graduation (Bergman et al., 2014). The retention of nontraditional African American students was affected by inadequate academic support and the inability of students to socially integrate on campus.

These students were goal-oriented but lacked the support to persist in their programs of study. The researcher did not incorporate Latham's goal setting theory which was not effective in addressing the issues which led to low retention and poor graduation rates of nontraditional African American students. The goal setting theory is based on the premise students perform better when they have difficult but attainable goals. According to this theory, when students had easier, non-specific goals they did not perform as well as students with more difficult goals (Locke & Latham, 2002). The researcher did not use Latham's goal setting theory because the task of identifying the difficulty of each participant's goal required multiple variables difficult to evaluate. Theories by Tinto, Bean and Metzner provided a guideline to effectively study this issue.

  Context. Students enrolled at community colleges have various goals. Some of these students may have experienced a layoff and may need new skills to become gainfully employed. Research indicated 50% of students enrolled in the community college system were nontraditional adult learners who maintain employment and care for their families while simultaneously pursuing an education (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). The characteristics associated with this student population require institutional support to retain and graduate the nontraditional community college student. Four-year colleges have proactively implemented services to support the success of their nontraditional students. However, for the nontraditional African American student, these hardships were compounded by racial disadvantages which added to the difficulty of degree attainment. It was the goal of the researcher to demonstrate the need for community colleges to develop new programs or to redesign old ones to better support the nontraditional African American student to graduation. The accessibility, affordability, and diversity of the community college attracts nontraditional

African American students who seek higher learning. Yet, community college leaders and administrators should not ignore the gulf between the admission rate of nontraditional African American students and their graduation rate. Strategies should be explored to decrease the gap between the number of nontraditional African American students who enroll at the community college and the number of African American nontraditional students graduating with a degree.

Conceptual framework. The researcher reviewed the literature and determined the pedagogical community supported the idea nontraditional students were not being served effectively in the higher education system. Nontraditional students arrived on college campuses with various responsibilities to include employment and caring for families while pursuing higher learning. During the research, the principal researcher discovered nontraditional students who were African American had additional obstacles related to race which threatened degree obtainment at the community college level.

Several concepts were significant to the retention of the nontraditional African American student in the community college setting. These concepts included the following:

1. Students were committed to providing for their family while enrolled in college (Grabowski et al., 2016).

2. A positive relationship with faculty was conducive to student success (Wood & Ireland, 2013).

3. Programs from academic support and student services must target specific student needs (Purnell et al., 2004).

4. Additional financial aid opportunities were required to ensure the completion of degree programs (Grabowski et al., 2016).

5. Effective student engagement activities assisted in connecting the student to their learning experience (Purnell et al., 2004).

6. The support of family and friends to persist to degree completion (Grabowski et al., 2016).

Embedded within these concepts were institutional challenges if not properly monitored could affect the academic success of the nontraditional African American student. This should be a concern of higher education leaders who are committed to the success of all students. Additional support services may be needed to close the gap between the retention and graduation of the nontraditional African American student in the community college setting. The low retention of nontraditional African American students at community colleges was studied utilizing a phenomenological research method with a survey component. The concepts or factors affecting the poor retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students was investigated further using theories by Tinto (Rendon et al., 1994), and Bean and Metzner (Bergman et al., 2014) to evaluate student separation, transition, and campus integration. The results of this study may be used to guide decisions to revise old institutional programs and to develop new ones which may lead to improvements in the retention and graduation of this underserved student population.

Statement of the Problem

Nearly 50% of nontraditional African American students dropped out of community college and failed to obtain an associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). These students were not able to compete for jobs requiring a specific education or skills. Their failure to complete college could lead to higher tuition for future students because colleges are forced to absorb the loss in tuition fees. These students become frustrated by

educational debt they are financially unable to repay on their current salaries. Community colleges offer a quality education which is cost-effective for most students. However, students who have dropped out of college cited difficulty with financial aid and tuition as factors leading to attrition. Student debt has increased significantly, and for the first time in history it has exceeded credit card debt at an amount over 1.5 trillion dollars (Student Loan Hero, 2019).

When students fail to complete their degree programs, this decision affects the student, their families, and the community college. Wildavsky, Kelly, and Carey (2011) shared retaining current students was less costly than recruiting new students. Therefore, the infrastructure of the community college may require a shift to effectively meet the needs of the nontraditional African American learners included in this majority student population. The enrollment of nontraditional African American students is high, but their degree completion rate is low. These students balance family and work obligations while navigating institutional challenges further complicated by race (Grabowski et al., 2016).

Purpose of the Study

The researcher utilized a phenomenological research study with a survey component to evaluate the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students from 25 to 40 years old who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may care for a family while attending a North Carolina community college. The researcher's goal for this study was to identify areas where community colleges can improve their academic support to nontraditional African American students. The results of the research may allow the researcher to share strategies to improve the retention and graduation rates of other nontraditional African American students attending community colleges throughout America.

Research Questions

The purpose of this phenomenological research study with a survey component was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high drop-out rate of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community colleges?

RQ2. What can community college leaders do to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the community college?

The researcher reviewed the literature and six factors affecting the retention rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college were identified. These areas were the following:

1. Poor faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013).

2. Ineffective student services and academic counseling programs (Purnell et al., 2004).

3. The need for additional financial aid to complete programs (Grabowski et al., 2016).

4. The lack of student engagement activities to connect the nontraditional African American student to their learning experience (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

5. The absence of family support (Grabowski et al., 2016).

The researcher chose not to focus on external family support as a factor addressed by community college leaders. This phenomenological research study with a survey component will focus on measures controlled by the community college to better serve the target population in this research. This research provided community college leaders with additional information on the needs of nontraditional African American students which may lead to additional strategies to retain and to graduate more students from this population. Understanding the academic,

institutional, and racial challenges of nontraditional African American students can equip community college leaders with data to develop programs and strategies to support students to graduation. The lack of external family support was beyond the responsibility of the community college and was not included as a factor monitored for improvement by the academic institution.

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

Rationale. The researcher examined the literature on nontraditional students and on African American students in the community college system. The researcher conducted an empirical review of the literature and learned nontraditional African American students were a population underserved on the community college campus. Nearly 50% of nontraditional African American students dropped out at community colleges without completing their degree programs (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). This academic population is a significant portion of the student body on the community college campus. Based on the literature review, the researcher suggested improving faculty-student relationships, redefining student service and academic support programs, and providing additional financial aid services would retain more students to graduation. The researcher tested these concepts at a North Carolina community college to determine if the outcome paralleled with the data shared on the poor retention of nontraditional African American students at community colleges.

Relevance. This study on the poor retention and low graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in the community college system was relevant to today's educators. This issue was a trend occurring in higher education as older adults return to college to gain better employment. New skills will allow adult learners to compete for well-paying jobs created by advancements in technology. Adults are experiencing lay-offs as factories and companies downsize their workforce and outsource their labor to overseas companies to reduce their

production costs. There is also increased use of automation leading to more downsizing. Some of these older adults will have to learn new skills to contribute to the American workforce.

Therefore, the community college should be concerned when approximately 50% of its student body is failing to complete degree programs. The failure of the nontraditional African America student to obtain an associate degree makes it difficult for these citizens to succeed in a workforce requiring additional skills for success. The dropout rate of this targeted population also affects higher education when colleges must absorb unpaid student debt which increases the cost of tuition. Discovering methods to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students will lead to better employment for students, better opportunities for their families, and the ability of higher education to continue to offer quality education accessible and affordable to all members of the community.

Significance. Previous research on the retention of students was primarily on methods for retaining traditional and nontraditional students at 4-year colleges. However, nontraditional African American adult learners at community colleges are dropping out of school at an alarming rate without completing their degree programs. As an African American nontraditional student who was actively pursuing higher education on a graduate level, I understood the significant role institutional support played in the retention and the academic success of nontraditional African American students. I was also interested in this issue because I was a student and an instructor at a community college. The community college system is diverse and offers educational programs to students from various backgrounds and ethnicities. As an instructor at the community college, my classes were composed primarily of nontraditional students who attended the community college, maintained employment, and cared for their families. These students managed various responsibilities and encountered challenges not experienced by traditional students.

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As an instructor, I was flexible with these students and understood circumstances affecting their student performance. Nontraditional students experienced challenges in completing their degree programs such as family responsibilities made academic persistence difficult. The African American nontraditional student encountered these challenges plus additional obstacles due to their race. Therefore, the purpose of conducting this study was to evaluate the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students from 25 to 40 years old who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may care for a family while attending a North Carolina community college. The researcher examined the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students and surveyed the specific academic needs of these students while evaluating the effectiveness of the specified North Carolina community college's student services department to retain and support these students to graduation.

Definition of Terms

This phenomenological research with a survey component utilized terms to describe the study. These terms are defined as follows:

Adult learner. A student who is 25 years old or older, who works full-time or part-time while managing family responsibilities and pursuing higher education. This term is interchangeable with the term adult student (Oblinger, 2003).

Adult student. A student who is 25 years old or older, who works full-time or part-time while managing family responsibilities and pursuing higher education (Oblinger, 2003).

Four-year college. This term refers to a college or university in which a student can receive a bachelor degree within a 4-year period.

Junior colleges. An educational institution offering two years of studies corresponding to those in the first two years of a 4-year college and often offers technical, vocational, and liberal studies to the members of a community (Merriam-Webster, 2018).

Nontraditional student. An adult learner between 25 and 40 years of age who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may care for a family while attending the community college (Ely, 1997).

Traditional student. A student who typically enters college immediately following high school. These students are usually financially dependent on their parent's income but may work part-time (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

Two-year college. This term refers to a community college. Students can receive an associate degree in a 2-year period.

Assumptions, Delimitations, and Limitations

Assumptions. The researcher presented data on the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students that revealed a positive correlation between faculty relationships, student engagement and an increase in the retention rate. I believed after conducting a review of the North Carolina community college's student services department these findings will be consistent with data reported in the literature review. According to the data, when nontraditional African American students developed positive relationships with their faculty, they were more likely to complete their degree programs. The researcher identified the factors which increased the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students attending community colleges. As stated by the research, the academic support from faculty, effective student services and academic counseling programs, financial aid opportunities, student engagement, and family

support affected the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in community college.

The researcher verified these assumptions through the research conducted at the North Carolina community college. When the researcher successfully used data to validate these assumptions, community colleges should evaluate their student services practices to better serve their nontraditional African American students. I believed data from this research study would confirm these assumptions. Blum and Jarrat (2013) offered a guideline to improve services to nontraditional students should be reviewed by community college student services departments utilizing Tinto's (Swail, 2004) integration theory. Tinto's theory put the low retention of nontraditional African American students in the proper frame to be studied to improve the retention of more students to graduation in the community college system.

Delimitations. The initial research plan was to interview students who had dropped out of their programs and did not receive an associate degree from the community college. However, the researcher encountered difficulty with identifying a method to effectively gather reliable data on nontraditional African American students after they departed from the community college. The researcher altered the study to focus on nontraditional African American students who currently attended a North Carolina community college to explore their student experiences. The researcher identified a population of at-risk students who were currently enrolled at the college. These students contributed valuable data to the research question on the attrition of nontraditional African American students. The researcher's goal was to learn about obstacles which made it difficult for nontraditional African American students to persist in their degree programs. The researcher concluded if these barriers to academic success could be identified

prior to attrition, higher education leaders could develop strategies to retain more nontraditional African American students to graduation.

The current literature on nontraditional student attrition was on students attending 4-year colleges. However, poor attrition was also a problem experienced by nontraditional African American students attending 2-year colleges. The lack of literature on the attrition of African American students at community colleges created a dependency on Tinto's theory of integration (Rendon et al., 1994). Tinto's theory did not focus specifically on the issues of African American students who had additional barriers based on race which may have affected successful degree completion.

The researcher chose to focus on nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in at least one developmental course and degree programs. The goal of this research was to identify reasons for the high attrition rate of nontraditional African American students at community college. This problem was studied with a phenomenological research approach with surveys and interviews to collect data. Research techniques such as data triangulation, methodological triangulation, member checking, reflexivity and bracketing were used to ensure the validity of the data. The researcher used this study to examine factors contributing to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students at a North Carolina community college and made institutional recommendations to retain them to graduation.

As a former nontraditional African American community college student who encountered many of the factors contributing to attrition, it was a challenge to remain unbiased. While I understood the reasons for the attrition of nontraditional African American students in the community college, I allowed the research to speak for the study. The challenge to remain objective required me to ignore my experiences as a previous nontraditional African American

community college student. The obstacles I experienced as a nontraditional African American community college student were similar to those barriers experienced by nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges today.

The researcher will investigate factors affecting nontraditional African American students by distributing interviews and surveys to a target population of students for data collection. To collect data from nontraditional African American students who are currently enrolled in a community college, the researcher will utilize the participating North Carolina community college's database to demographically select students to receive the survey link and invitation to participate in interviews. Survey questions are designed to identify the race and the age of student participants for the collection of data on nontraditional African American students. The researcher relied on the participating North Carolina community college's student database to select the nontraditional African American students who are currently enrolled at the community college who meet the research criteria. Community college students participating in the survey are required to respond to demographic data to verify their race and age. If a student participates in the survey but is not identified as a nontraditional African American student aged 25 to 40, their responses to the survey will not be collected as data and will not be included in the research findings.

Nontraditional African American students receiving the invitation letter for participation in the interviews will be selected by the participating North Carolina community college's student database. Nontraditional African American students aged 25 to 40 who are currently enrolled at the community college will receive the invitation letter for interview participation. Interested students who meet the research criteria will be required to contact the researcher for further interview participation instructions. Upon selection of interviewees, the researcher will

verify the race and age of potential interviewees by distributing an inquiry to students via email to verify interested participants are currently enrolled African American male and female students aged 25 to 40. The participants who notify the researcher of their interest in the interviews who also meet the research criteria will be chosen for participation on a first-come-first-serve basis. Before interviews are conducted, nontraditional African American students will be required to present student identification from the participating North Carolina community college to confirm current enrollment, and a driver's license to verify the age criteria is met for interview participation in the research study. The researcher will distribute the survey link and invitation letter for interview participation to students who meet the research criteria via student email. These students will be currently enrolled nontraditional African American male and female students aged 25 to 40. The researcher will distribute an invitation of participation letter in the interviews to students via student emails. These students will be currently enrolled nontraditional African Americans aged 25 to 40. The researcher did not consider the student's academic ability or college preparedness in the selection of survey and interview participants which may or may not influence the experiences of nontraditional African American students enrolled in a community college setting. The goal of this study is to identify the institutional support required for the academic success of nontraditional African American students after they became members of the community college campus.

Limitations. A limitation of this research study was the inability to distribute surveys directly to students at the community college and to extend an invitation for participation in interviews. The researcher could not physically visit classrooms on the participating North Carolina community college campus to distribute the survey to a total of 500 students. The researcher was not allowed to visit the participating North Carolina community college to

generate interest in the research study The composition of these students was to include 250 nontraditional African American students enrolled in at least one developmental courses and 250 nontraditional African American students enrolled in degree programs. The participating North Carolina community college shared a link with the survey electronically to nontraditional African American students who met the research criteria. An invitation to participate in the interviews was shared by the participating North Carolina community college electronically to nontraditional African American students who met the research criterial. The researcher did not interact directly with students in the administration of the surveys or in the distribution of invitations to students for interview participation.

The participating North Carolina community college distributed the survey to students who were African American, at least 25 years old, who were or were not employed, and who may or may not have a family. The characteristics and demographics of students who participated in the survey and demonstrated interest as an interviewee were beyond the control of the researcher. Therefore, the researcher was uncertain of the number of nontraditional African American students enrolled in developmental courses and in degree programs who would participate in surveys and interviews. This limitation affected the sample size of the research study and impacted data collection results.

Summary

Complete College America (2011) stated 75% of students currently pursuing higher education are nontraditional students. These students are older and have responsibilities to their families and employers while being faced with the academic demands of college. This group of students have specific needs which are different from the needs of traditional students who may enroll in community college after high school and who may still be dependent on their parents.

Nontraditional African American students are challenged to maintain employment and care for their families while enrolled in community college too. However, nontraditional African American students may have additional obstacles associated with their race and ethnicity which can affect their ability to obtain an associate degree. These challenges may include poor faculty relationships, the lack of sufficient financial aid to complete degree programs, and being unaware of campus-wide services to support academic goals. Today, nearly 50% of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college fail to complete their degrees (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). This research will identify barriers hindering associate degree completion by nontraditional African American students, and seek institutional solutions to improve the retention and graduation rates of this student population. The success of the nontraditional African American student in community college may be connected to the ability of community college leaders to effectively meet the needs of this student population by improving existing services and programs or by the development of new ones.

The specific needs of the nontraditional African American student in a community college will be examined with recommendations given to retain students to graduation. Institutional services will be reviewed to determine practices effectively meeting the needs of nontraditional African American students. This study is comprised of five chapters which are as follows: The first chapter, the introduction of the problem. The second chapter includes a literature review of adult learners, factors affecting the attrition of nontraditional African American students in a community college setting, and the theoretical framework for the study. The third chapter will describe the phenomenological research approach with a survey component for this study. The fourth chapter offers a description of the results of the study, and

the fifth chapter will discuss the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. Recommendations will be made to increase the retention rate of nontraditional African American students based on the research findings at a North Carolina community college. The researcher will allow these findings to lead to recommendations which can be successfully duplicated at other community colleges to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in the U.S. community college system.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

Community colleges provide educational opportunities and job training programs to meet the needs of local communities. Millions of students have been attracted to 2-year schools because of open access and low tuition fees (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Today, older nontraditional students account for 75% of the student population on U.S. college campuses. Studies by Complete College America (2011) revealed 75% of students currently pursuing higher education were nontraditional students. The enrollment of the nontraditional, adult learner is steadily increasing in higher education, but the retention and graduation rates of these students have consistently declined. Higher education has continued to implement programs to serve the needs of traditional students, but these students are no longer the majority on U.S. college campuses. This research defined a nontraditional student as an adult learner who was between 25 and 40 years of age, was employed either part-time or full-time, and balanced family obligations while pursuing an education at a 2-year or 4-year college (Oblinger, 2003).

The community college offers a quality education which is also affordable for students. However, nontraditional African American students have often cited the lack of finances as one of the reasons for separating from the community college. Minority students tended to avoid educational debt and do not view student loans as financial aid. Community colleges are widely attended by low-income minority students who may have negative views on accumulating educational debt. However, community college students work more and borrow less than students attending 4-year colleges. Community colleges students took out loans at a rate of only

12% while over 40% of students from other types of institutions used loans as a method to complete degrees (Burdman, 2005).

The amount of educational debt students accrue has increased significantly from previous years. Recent reports have indicated for the first time in American history, student debt exceeded credit card debt at an amount of $798 billion (Touryalai, 2013). The American Institution of Research (AIR) stated of the 1.1 million students who entered college in 2001, 500,000 of them failed to graduate in six years and cost $4.5 billion in foregone income and taxes, both State and Federal (Blum & Jarrat, 2013).

The community college student population mirrors the diversity existing in our society. As returning adult learners nontraditional African American students have various needs believed to affect their academic success in a community college setting. Research indicated several factors contributed to the poor retention of nontraditional, African American students to include poor faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013), ineffective student services and academic counseling programs which do not adequately meet the needs of these learners (Purnell et al., 2004), the need for additional financial support to complete degree programs (Grabowski et al., 2016), the lack of student engagement activities to connect the nontraditional African American student to their learning experience (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011), and the absence of family support (Grabowski et al., 2016).

The infrastructure of the community college should accommodate the needs of its nontraditional learners who currently represent the majority student population. A shift to meet the needs of the new student who has a family and maintains a job while earning a degree demonstrates a growth mindset and a willingness to embrace diversity. Community college leaders should be intentional about implementing methods to improve the retention of students

like the nontraditional African American adult learner. Through this study, the researcher evaluated the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students aged 25 and older who were employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may have cared for a family while attending a North Carolina community college. The goal of this study was to identify areas where community colleges may be underserving its nontraditional African American student population. The researcher conducted this study to address the needs of the nontraditional African American students attending a community college. The researcher is hopeful that strategies may be proposed from this study to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students at community colleges based on the research findings at a participating North Carolina community college. The successful duplication of these strategies by other community colleges may lead to increased degree completion of nontraditional African American students enrolled at other 2-year colleges in the U.S. higher education system.

Study Topic

Based on an empirical research on the causes of high dropout rates for nontraditional African American students, there was a connection between poor faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013), ineffective student services programs (Purnell et al., 2004), insufficient student financial aid (Grabowski et al., 2016), and the absence of family support (Grabowski et al., 2016). When nontraditional African American students experienced these obstacles while pursuing higher education at community colleges, they were less likely to persist in their degree programs.

After the study was conducted on the nontraditional African American students at a North Carolina community college, the findings were consistent with data from the literature

review. This researcher examined a local community college's nontraditional African American students to learn if this population was being served effectively based on the institution's retention and graduation rates. The results of the research may lead to proposals for improving the academic success of nontraditional African American students at the community college to be shared with other colleges.

The Context

Currently, 75% of the students on college campuses are nontraditional students (Complete College America, 2011). These students are constantly balancing their family responsibilities and employment while attending college. Student success was influenced by the ability of the student services department to meet the needs of nontraditional African American students by ensuring strong faculty support, implementing effective academic counseling programs, increasing financial aid opportunities like responsible student loans, providing effective student engagement through institutional programs, and encouraging supportive family relationships.

All nontraditional students were challenged to use their time and energy efficiently to care for their families, to maintain employment, and to succeed academically in their degree programs including nontraditional African American students who had additional challenges influenced by race and ethnicity. According to research findings, African American students did not have strong faculty relationships, and they lacked family support in the achievement of educational goals. The purpose of this study was to examine the challenges which influenced the attrition of nontraditional African American students. As a result, the outcome of this research may lead to the development of strategies designed to improve the retention of this underserved student population.

The Significance

  The majority of research regarding the retention of students was on retaining traditional and nontraditional students at 4-year colleges. Four-year colleges utilize resources, time, and effort to ensure students who live on campus are connected to their learning experience. Student engagement for campus residents is a priority at 4-year colleges. The researcher examined studies which stated the retention rate was higher for students who resided on campus in comparison to those who resided at home (Sheehy, 2015). Campus residents receive academic support encouraging degree completion. Most 2-year colleges do not have dorms allowing students to live on campus. Therefore, community college administrators face challenges with effectively connecting students to their learning experience (Sheehy, 2015). This disconnection to the campus affects student engagement and impacts the retention rate of the community college student.

  As an African American nontraditional student who both taught in and attended a community college, I understood the essential role institutional and familial support play in the academic success of nontraditional African American students. As an instructor at a community college, most of my students were nontraditional and attended school while maintaining employment and caring for their families. These students managed multiple responsibilities and were challenged in areas not experienced by traditional students who were not employed and did not have families.

  In general, nontraditional students do experience challenges in completing their degree programs. However, research indicated African American nontraditional students encountered more obstacles than other traditional or nontraditional students with persistence and degree completion. Like other community college students, the nontraditional African American student

lives off-campus, and may not feel connected to the learning experience. Studies indicated the nontraditional African American student lacked strong faculty relationships, and the emotional support of family and friends to persist academically. These factors along with a disconnection from the community college campus contributed to the high attrition and low graduation rate of nontraditional African American students.

The purpose of conducting this study was to specifically evaluate the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students from 25 years old and older who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may have cared for a family while attending community college. The researcher performed a review of the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students to examine the academic needs of these adult learners to determine factors challenging them to be retained to graduation.

Problem Statement

Approximately 50% of nontraditional African American students dropped out of community college and failed to obtain an associate degree (National Research Center, 2019). Unfortunately, these students were not able to compete for jobs requiring a specific education or skill. The researcher utilized this study to identify factors influencing the attrition and the poor retention of nontraditional African American students at community colleges.

Community colleges offer a quality education that is cost-effective for students. However, students who have dropped out of college cited difficulty with financial aid and tuition as a factor leading to attrition. Student debt has increased significantly because students who fail to graduate are still required to repay loans. Without an increase in their salaries, students often pay loans late and become delinquent. This issue affects the student, their families, and the

community college. Colleges are forced to absorb these costs which eventually lead to an increase in tuition fees.

However, retaining current students is less costly than recruiting new students. (Wildavsky et al., 2011). The college spends more money to recruit new students when students do not complete the degree programs. The average cost of recruiting and enrolling a new student at a public and private non-profit college increased from $1,684 in 2004 to $2,408 in 2010 (Blum & Jarrat, 2013). Raisman, as cited by Blum and Jarrat (2013), noted "the churn and burn of continually bringing new students through the front door, and then just watching them go out the back door, is killing college enrollments and individual and institutional futures" (p. 72).

Community colleges should become intentional about implementing methods to improve the retention of students like the nontraditional African American learner. Burdman (2005) observed a connection between academic progress and financial aid. Burdman's study indicated more colleges were recognizing the importance of making financial aid services more available. For example, the University of Oklahoma once enforced a policy preventing students from re-enrolling if they owed the school as little as $50. Today, this policy has been abandoned and the school has established a $50,000 loan fund to assist students who experience short-term financial problems (Burdman, 2005). The implementation of additional financial assistance by the institution can support academic persistence when students encounter monetary hardships threatening degree completion.

The American Association of Community Colleges 21st Century Commission on the Future of Community Colleges has challenged community colleges to close the achievement gap by increasing the percentage of students who complete developmental programs. The National Center for Education Statistics noted of the 857,607 first-time students who enrolled at 2-year

public institutions in fall 2007 only 26.5% completed degrees or certificates from their starting institution within six years (Coley, Coley, & Lynch-Holmes, 2016).

Some educational and government leaders support performance-based funding in higher education which requires an evaluation of retention and graduation rates of colleges before granting state support. Thirty-two states, including Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Texas, have policies to allocate a portion of funding based on performance indicators such as time to degree, course completion, transfer rates, the number of degrees awarded and the number of low-income and minority graduates (National Conference on State Legislature, 2018). With performance-based funding, colleges are accountable for retaining and graduating students before receiving financial support. Through state funding colleges receive resources to assist in the efficient and effective operation of the institution. Practices promoting higher retention and graduation rates ensure colleges remain eligible for state funding. Presently, the literature on undergraduate attrition and the nontraditional student was primarily on students attending 4-year colleges. However, high attrition is a problem also experienced by nontraditional African American students attending 2-year community colleges. To date, almost 50% of nontraditional African American adult learners leave the community college before obtaining an associate degree in their field of study (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019).

The retention rate was defined as the percentage of students who returned to college for their sophomore year. The retention rate at the participating North Carolina community college in 2017 was 50% for full-time students and 46% for part-time students. The participating North Carolina community college has a graduation rate of 17.82% which meant 190 students out of 1,066 candidates completed their degree within 150% normal time or within three years for an associate degree (Univstats, 2019). The graduation rate for African American students attending

the participating North Carolina community college was 9.93%. This statistic demonstrated 45 out of 453 African American students enrolled at the community college completed their degree programs. The graduation rate for African American students (9.93%) was less than half the rate for White students who had a graduation rate of 27.06% (Univstats, 2019).

Murdock (2017) suggested community colleges should mirror 4-year colleges by proactively meeting the needs of African American nontraditional learners who are balancing family, employment, and educational responsibilities simultaneously. Through a review of the literature, the researcher identified several concepts which were significant to the nontraditional African American student's retention in the community college setting. These concepts included the following: First, a positive relationship with faculty was conducive to student success. Second, programs from academic support and student services should target specific student needs. Third, additional financial aid opportunities were instrumental in ensuring the completion of degree programs, and fourth, effective student engagement activities assist in connecting students to their learning experience.

A review of the literature repeatedly referred to Tinto's (Tinto, 1993) theory on the study of student integration to explain why some students voluntarily departed from colleges before obtaining a degree. Tinto's theory was developed in 1975 and considered such variables as age and gender while focusing on six components:

1. Pre-enrollment characteristics of students

2. Initial commitments to their goals and the institution

3. Academic and social systems of the institution

4. Degree of academic and social integration

5. Changes in goals and institutional commitments as a process of academic and social

integration

6. The decision to drop out or persist (Tinto, 1993)

Tinto's theory of student integration is longitudinal and primarily guided the research for this study. This theory was used to examine the retention process at the participating North Carolina community college which may lead to the development of additional programs designed to improve the academic success of nontraditional African American adult learners.

The low retention of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college was identified as the research problem. The researcher investigated factors influencing poor retention using Tinto's model (Tinto, 1993) of retention to evaluate the separation, transition, and incorporation of students with other members of the institution. Surveys and interviews were used in the research study to evaluate the needs of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college. The researcher will use findings from this research to encourage other community colleges to evaluate the effectiveness of their programs to improve the retention and graduation rates of their nontraditional African American students.

Organization

The literature review was organized to demonstrate the problem of the retention rate of the nontraditional African American student. The needs of these students were examined to determine if institutional practices were meeting the needs of this population of students. The conceptual framework described the research questions and supported a review of the literature. Methodological concepts were reviewed to explain the techniques used to study the low retention of African American students in community colleges while exploring possible methods for

conducting the research for this dissertation. A study was conducted to determine why the low

retention of nontraditional African American students was an issue at the participating North

Carolina community college. The research methods utilized to conduct the research are described

in Chapter 3. The research findings are included in this study.

Guiding Research Questions

The purpose of this study was to answer the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American

students enrolled in community colleges?

RQ2. What can community college leaders do to improve the retention and graduation

rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the

community college?

A review of the literature provided six areas affecting the retention rate of nontraditional African

American students in the community college. These areas of concern answered the first research

question, "What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American

students?" The literature informed the researcher of several factors contributing to the poor

retention of nontraditional African American students to include:

1. The need to successfully fulfill obligations to provide for family

2. Poor faculty-student relationships

3. Ineffective student services and academic counseling programs inadequate in meeting

the needs of African American adult learners

4. The need for additional financial support to complete program

5. The lack of student engagement activities connecting the nontraditional African

American student to their learning experience

6. The absence of family support

The lack of external family support was examined due to the impact it has on academic achievement among African American students. However, the lack of family support was not considered a responsibility of the community college since the academic institution cannot successfully monitor it internally.

The researcher utilized Tinto's theory of integration (Rendon et al., 1994) to identify areas to be improved by institutional resources in the student services department and academic counseling centers. In Tinto's theory, the researcher examined factors which influenced a student's decision to depart from the college. Tinto theorized students who socially integrated into the campus community increased their commitment to the university and were more likely to graduate (Rendon et al., 1994). Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student Attrition stated academic and social integration led to a greater commitment to instruction and graduation (Bergman et al., 2014). While both theories were examined to learn about factors impacting attrition, the research rested primarily upon Tinto's theory of integration.

To improve the retention of nontraditional African American students, community college leaders should provide professional development opportunities and additional training to increase faculty-support and interaction. Also, the development of specific student services and academic programs to meet the specific needs of nontraditional African American students who work, care for families, and attend community college will decrease the attrition rate by promoting student engagement.

In Complete College America (2011), students stated need-based funding should be established for nontraditional students to complete their degree programs. Also, providing on-site childcare facilities were beneficial to parent-students. Parent-students who utilized on-site

daycare services earned higher grades and were more likely to graduate from their degree programs than the students who did not use on-site childcare services. Parent-students who used on-site childcare services had a 26% higher achievement rate than students in the general student population (Arnold & Hickman, 2012). Based on the empirical research of the literature, the pedagogical community of scholars consistently supported the idea nontraditional students were not being served effectively in the higher education system. While the research on nontraditional students could have taken various paths, the researcher chose to focus on the needs of nontraditional African American students in a community college setting. Previous studies on nontraditional students and African American students in community colleges revealed the challenges in retention both groups encounter. Therefore, nontraditional students who are also African American encounter issues as older students returning to college as well as cultural challenges which affect their student success.

The factors contributing to the poor retention of nontraditional African American students included:

1. The need to successfully fulfill obligations to provide for family

2. Poor faculty-student relationships

3. Ineffective student services and academic counseling programs not meeting the needs of nontraditional African American learners

4. The need for additional financial support to complete programs

5. The lack of student engagement activities to connect the nontraditional African American student to their learning experience.

6. The lack of family support

A critique of the literature revealed the issue identified by the researcher is a problem which should be addressed by educators. This literature will be reviewed in Chapter 2.

The Conceptual Framework

The affordability and access of higher education through the community college system has led to a steady increase in the enrollment of nontraditional, adult learners who pursue associate degrees. Despite the increase in enrollment at the community college, the African American population of nontraditional students was experiencing a significant decline in retention and graduation rates. Approximately 50% of nontraditional African American students left the community college before obtaining an associate degree in their field of study (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). According to the literature, nontraditional African American students have a high attrition rate due to the failure of the community college to assure the needs for these students have been met.

The struggle of nontraditional African American students to balance family responsibilities along with institutional challenges does not promote the completion of 2-year degree programs by this student population. This should be a concern of higher education leaders who are committed to the academic success of students. Additional support services may be needed to close the gap between the retention and graduation of the nontraditional African American student in the community college setting.

Four-year colleges have made progress in developing programs and services to meet the needs of nontraditional students, but community colleges have not experienced similar results in retaining their nontraditional students. Unlike 4-year institutions, community colleges continue to develop programs geared toward traditional students who recently graduated from high school and remain financially dependent on their parents. The community college may need to expand

their scope of services to address the needs of African American adult learners who are a part of the majority, nontraditional, student population on campus. Intentionally designed methods to improve the retention of older, African American students may positively influence retention rates and graduate more students from community college.

Seventy-five percent of the students on college campuses were nontraditional students (Complete College America, 2011). African American nontraditional students were included in this statistic. When students failed to complete their degree programs, their contributions to the economy were limited, and they were unable to participate in a skilled citizenry. These students often amassed large sums of educational debt they were financially unable to repay. Unfortunately, the outcome often resulted in students who defaulted on their educational loans.

The premature departure of students without degree attainment affected the college and eventually led to an increase in student tuition (Wildavsky et al., 2011). Community colleges may consider implementing programs to better serve the needs of their nontraditional African American students to maintain the accessibility and affordability of 2-year programs to attract students (Complete College America, 2011).

Community colleges may be able to increase the retention of nontraditional African American students by integrating institutional resources in student services, and academic counseling to better support the needs of these students. In an effort to improve retention, community college leaders should promote positive faculty-student relationships, provide adequate financial aid opportunities to students, and develop effective, student engagement activities connecting students to the community college experience may improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students. Unless these institutional challenges were overcome, nontraditional African American students will continue the

unproductive cycle of enrolling at 2-year colleges in large numbers but then failing to complete their degree programs. Their attrition had a domino-effect which lowered institutional retention and graduation rates, promoted student debt accumulation, higher default rates, and elevated tuition fees for future students (Touryalai, 2013).

A review of the literature repeatedly referred to Tinto's (Tinto, 1993) theory on the study of student integration to explain why some students voluntarily departed from colleges before obtaining a degree. Developed in 1975, Tinto's theory considered such variables as age and gender while focusing on six components:

1. Pre-enrollment characteristics of students

2. Initial commitments to their goals and the institution

3. Academic and social systems of the institution

4. Degree of academic and social integration

5. Changes in goals and institutional commitments as a process of academic and social integration

6. The decision to drop out or persist. (Tinto, 1993)

Tinto's theory of student integration is longitudinal and the researcher used this work to guide the study. Swail's (2004) retention framework was discussed through the lens of Tinto's (Tinto, 1993) student integration theory. Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition paralleled Tinto's theory and stated academic and social integration led to a greater commitment to instruction and graduation (Bergman et al., 2014). The researcher gained insight into factors which impacted the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college setting. Several other theories offered explanations addressing student retention such as Schlossberg's theory of transition (Evans et al., 2010), and Locke's and

Latham's goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002). The three theories closely aligned to the goals of this study and was applied to this research included the works of Tinto, Bean and Metzner, and Swail.

Tinto theorized students who socially integrated on campus were more likely to persist to graduation (Rendon et al., 1994). Swail's (2004) retention framework recognized the connection between social integration and student persistence in higher learning. Concepts from Schlossberg's theory of transition (Evans et al., 2010), and Locke's and Latham's goal setting theory (Locke & Latham, 2002) were not used in this study to evaluate how nontraditional African American students transitioned through college to graduation.

These theories did not contain concepts to effectively evaluate the experiences of nontraditional African American students in community college. A premise of the goal setting theory was students who have more difficult but attainable goals performed better than individuals who had less difficult goals. The research did not focus on the difficulty of student goals but rather the institutional resources available to support the achievement of academic goals established by African American nontraditional students. The researcher determined the theories proposed by Tinto (Rendon et al., 1994), Swail (2004), and Bean and Metzner (Bergman et al., 2014) could be effectively applied to nontraditional African American students to evaluate their separation, transition, and integration in a community college setting.

Tinto's (Rendon et al., 1994) theory had variables such as age and gender to study a student's decision to voluntarily discontinue their education. However, the researcher developed this study to examine the needs of nontraditional African American students despite their age or gender. The researcher believed gender and age would not significantly impact the needs of students in this population. The outcome of the research identified the overall needs of the

students which provided a guide for the development and revision of programs to support nontraditional African American students to graduation regardless of the age and gender.

Through an empirical search of the literature, the researcher learned nontraditional African American students did not readily seek support from student services or academic counseling when they encountered issues threatening their educational success. Community colleges should find creative ways to connect with these students by emphasizing the value of student services and academic counseling in the achievement of educational goals. For example, Arnold & Hickman (2012) confirmed students who used on-site childcare were four times more likely to graduate than student-parents who did not utilize this campus service. If students did not interact with student services and academic counseling, they may not be aware of on-site childcare services. For this reason, students may prematurely depart from the university because of family obligations. The researcher identified issues like childcare when if used could positively impact student retention.

As a former African American nontraditional community college student who did not complete the associate degree due to financial hardships, it was a challenge to remain unbiased. While I understood the reasons for the attrition of African American adult learners at the community college level, I had to allow the research to speak for the study. The challenge to remain objective required me to ignore my experiences as a previous nontraditional African American student in a community college setting. Another limitation of this study was the deliberate focus on available institutional resources to support the academic success of African American nontraditional students and not the student's academic ability or college preparedness. The goal of this study was to identify the institutional support required for the academic success of nontraditional students after they become members of the community college campus.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature

The current literature on nontraditional student attrition was on students attending 4-year colleges. However, poor attrition was a problem experienced by nontraditional African American students attending 2-year community colleges. Today, nearly 50% of nontraditional African American adult learners leave the community college without obtaining an associate degree in their field of study (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). These students required additional support in specific areas to decrease their attrition rates. Nontraditional African American students consistently juggled family responsibilities while maintaining employment and attending college. To relieve the stress of providing adequate childcare for children, on-site childcare can be implemented by the community college to make campus enrollment beneficial to these students.

Student services and academic services departments should be concerned about students having positive faculty-student relationships, effective academic counseling, additional financial aid opportunities, and increased student engagement to improve their retention rates. The initial research conducted on the retention of nontraditional African American adult learners in community college yielded these overall findings:

Students were committed to meeting the needs of their family. In the report *Time is the Enemy: The Surprising Truth About Why Today's College Students Are Not Graduating,* researchers with Complete College America (2011) cited difficulty balancing the need to provide and care for family while enrolled in college as a factor contributing to the departure of nontraditional African American students from community college. Complete College America researchers conducted a study to determine factors preventing U.S. students from graduating and entering the skilled workforce. Researchers with Complete College America gathered

educational data from 33 states, and North Carolina, the site of this research study on nontraditional students in community college, and shared statistics on 2-year and 4-year colleges. Educational representatives from these 33 states reported data to Complete College America utilizing the Complete College America/National Governors Association Common Completion Metrics. The purpose of this study was to examine student graduation rates from 2-year and 4-year colleges and to identify factors hindering graduation. The governors of the participating states are concerned that when students do not graduate from their fields of study, the U.S. workforce has a less skilled citizenry unable to contribute to local and global economies (Complete College America, 2011).

Researchers with Complete College America reported that nontraditional African American students are usually employed either part-time or full-time while enrolled at the community college. Four out of 10 (40%) public college students attend college part-time because they maintain employment to provide for their families (Complete College America, 2011). According to Complete College America (2011), 75% of students today juggle a combination of responsibilities to include employment, family and school. Due to these responsibilities, nontraditional African American students often choose to attend community college part-time. However, difficulty juggling their family responsibilities while pursuing an associate degree often lead to a discontinuation of their education. Nontraditional African American students attending community college part-time had a low completion rate despite their high rates of enrollment (Complete College America, 2011).

Nontraditional African American students had a high enrollment rate in community college but when they encountered conflicts between the need to provide for family and their desire to attend college, students prioritized caring for their families (Complete College America,

2011). Murdock (2017) and Slater (2007) agree that nontraditional African American students have specific needs that if left unmet will result in attrition. These students experience difficulty balancing multiple responsibilities and have often cited family issues as the cause of departure from college. Two-year schools have failed to address the specific needs of this population which has resulted in high enrollment but low completion rates. The enrollment rate of nontraditional African American students at community college has increased while the graduation rate continues to decline (Complete College America, 2011). Like Complete College America, Murdock and Slater recognize the challenges of nontraditional students in the completion of degree programs and challenge community college leader to proactively seek solutions to retain these students to graduation. The significant background of nontraditional African American students impact degree completion.

In 1975, 11,245 children were raised in single-parent homes. This number has increased drastically since 1975 as the family dynamic has changed to reflect the rise in single-parented households (Duffin, 2018). In 2018, 19.65 million children were raised in a single-parent family (Duffin, 2018). In 2016, the Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018) reported 66% of all African American children were raised by a single parent. These single parents who are the head of their households often attend community college seeking additional education for better job opportunities. When single parents encounter difficulty providing for their families while enrolled in community college, they often abandon their educational goals to care for their families. As the sole provider of their household, the single parent prioritizes the care of dependent children and family members. Nontraditional African American students who are not from a wealthy family have difficulty providing for family and financing educational outlays like books, tuition and travel when they are not covered by financial aid. These students are

challenged to finance these educational expenses which are not included in their household budgets. Ultimately, this conflict leads to a decision to depart from the community college in order to provide for family members and to financially maintain their households (Slater, 2007). These factors prompted researchers of Complete College America to encourage U.S. governors from the 33 states participating in the study to examine the needs of nontraditional African American students, and to seek solutions to retain a higher percentage of them to graduation. The ability to do so impacts our delivery of higher education as well as our local and global economies (Complete College America, 2011). The community college serves a diverse population of students who are nontraditional, African American, employed students wo may or may not have children. The goal of researchers is assist educators in developing methods to best serve the specific needs of nontraditional African American which will lead to greater associate degree attainment.

Retention rates increased with positive faculty-student relationships. Clark (2012) and Wood and Ireland (2013) noted positive faculty-student relationships decreased attrition. The frequency of student-faculty interactions positively predicted persistence which led to a commitment of students and an increase in retention. Further, studies by Barnett (2011) and Arteaga (2015) have also indicated students succeeded when they had supportive faculty relationships. When nontraditional African American students were supported by faculty, their persistence increased, and they were motivated to complete their programs. Also, the diversity among the college faculty and staff had a positive impact on the retention of nontraditional African American students. When diversity among the staff increased on the campus more African American students remained in their programs of study and graduated (Hughes, 2015).

Positive relationships with faculty were important for nontraditional African American students who often lacked family support in the pursuit of their goals. This lack of encouragement contributed to the dropout rate and students left the community college without a degree (Grabowski et al., 2016). Since African American students often lacked emotional support from their family, the faculty creatively filled this void which had a positive impact on the retention of the students. Murdock (2017) encouraged community college leaders to be proactive in implementing resources to retain nontraditional African American students by identifying the specific needs of this student population. When nontraditional African American students have a positive relationship with faculty, these students feel connected to their community college experience and have higher retention rates (Barnett, 2011).

Nontraditional students returning to school at a later age and juggle multiple responsibilities while attending the community college. Balancing work, caring for a family and college leaves little time for socialization outside of the classroom. Nontraditional African American students lack the emotional support from family members to persist toward degree completion (Complete College America, 2011). Adult learners without a parent who attended college were more likely to depart from the community college before completing an associate degree. Nontraditional African American students who lacked the emotional support from family members had greater academic success when they experienced positive faculty-student relationships. Students pursuing higher education readily departed from their degree programs when they did not have a parent who attended college (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). When nontraditional African American students lacked supportive family, positive relationships with faculty motivate students to persist to degree completion. Encouragement and support from

faculty led to improved retention and graduation rates among older African American adult learners.

Nakajima, Dembo, and Mossler (2012) indicated students attending community college persist to degree completion when they have positive relationships with their faculty. Nakajima et al. concluded student persistence and graduation rates were affected by the ability to develop significant relationships with faculty members. Community college administrators have increased the part-time faculty hired to instruct students. While part-time faculty are qualified to teach students, they are limited in their interactions with students due to their lack of accessibility on the community college campus (Nakajima et al., 2012). These part-time faculty members are on campus only to teach their classes, and they do not have offices to schedule appointments with students who may need additional assistance. Part-time faculty may lack basic equipment such as a phone and a computer which would limit their interaction to their students. For some faculty, their only interaction with their students is during class which makes it difficult for students to develop a positive relationship with their faculty members. The more nontraditional African American community college students felt cared for by their instructors, the more likely they were to return to the institution and to persist to graduation (Nakajima et al., 2012).

Nakajima et al. (2012) conducted a study on the multiple factors that contributed to student persistence in community college students. The participants in their research study on persistence consisted of 427 students who were enrolled in 19 courses during fall 2007. Survey participants included 157 males (36.8%), females 256 (60%), and 14 students (3.3%) who did not identify their gender. Of the 427 student participants, 21 (4.9%) were African American, 43 (10.1%) Asian, 162 (37.9%) Hispanic, 26 (6.1%) Other Non-White, 136 (31.9%) White, and 39 (9.1%) did not identify themselves in any category. The age range of the participants was from

18 to 74 with a mean age of 24.64. Additionally, 56.1% of the student participants were enrolled part-time during this study, and 43.9% of the students were enrolled full-time (Nakajima et al., 2012). Within the target population, the researchers shared a survey to identify variables contributing to student persistence on a community college campus. Nakajima et al. learned from their study that when students believed the faculty was genuinely concerned about their academic success these students were more likely to be retained to graduation. Their study demonstrated the importance of faculty-student relationships despite the employment status of the faculty. While full-time faculty members are able to spend more time with students, the quantity of time was not an issue when part-time faculty developed a positive relationship with students.

Community college administrators experienced higher retention and graduation rates among nontraditional African American students when these students experienced positive relationships with their faculty members. The length of time faculty interacted with students did not have an impact on student retention and graduation rates. Rather, when college administrators reported an increase in retention and graduation rates, nontraditional African American students also indicated they had positive relationships with their faculty members (Nakajima et al., 2012). The survey used by Nakajima et al. did not specify the quantity of time faculty interacted with students to develop positive relationships. The researcher's goal in their study was to examine the quality of faculty interaction with students. Nakajima et al. discovered the quality of faculty interactions was just as important as the quantity of the interactions nontraditional African American community colleges students spent with faculty members. While Nakajima et al. provided data in their study to support the empirical research finding that positive faculty-student relationships improve the retention and graduation of nontraditional

African American students, they also agree additional research is required to study how the quantity of time faculty spends with students impact the retention, persistence, and graduation of nontraditional African American students in a community college setting.

Nakajima et al. (2012) reported demographic data in their study that were similar to statistics shared by Complete College America (2011). Researchers with Complete College America reported 60% of students were full-time; 40% were enrolled at the community college part-time. Also, the racial composition of the students in the Complete College report was similar to the population comprising the persistence study by Nakajima et al. Researchers in the Complete College report examined the community college students from North Carolina in the 2004 cohort which included White (62%), African American (24%), Hispanic (4%), and Other Races (9%). Researchers with Complete College America examined the retention and graduation rates of full-time and part-time community college students in North Carolina. They reported in North Carolina the retention rate of part-time students attending community college in 2004 declined drastically after the first year of enrollment. By year two, 29.7% of students returned to the community college to complete degrees, and by year three, this number had fallen to 17.1% (Complete College America, 2011).

Complete College America (2011) researchers shared 8.8% of full-time community students graduated on time (within two years) while 6.8% of part-time community students graduated within three years in North Carolina with an associate degree. Among part-time North Carolina community college students, only 3.8% of African American students completed an associate degree within three years, and 9.3% of students aged 25 and over graduated within three years from the community college. The researcher shared the North Carolina statistics for part-time nontraditional African American students attending community college because 75%

of students attending community college are nontraditional students juggling work, college and family responsibilities (Complete College America, 2011). These nontraditional African American students attend community college part-time to continue to work in order to provide for their families. These statistics are relevant to the research questions being studied and reveal the challenges of retaining nontraditional African American students attending community college to graduation. The graduation rates for nontraditional African American students with associate degrees is low because students encounter difficulty managing work, family, and school responsibilities (Complete College America, 2011).

Developing positive relationships with faculty can provide support to students who encounter multiple challenge with degree completion. The graduation rates for nontraditional African American community college students continue to be low, and motivation from faculty can assist in the retention of more students to graduation (Complete College America, 2011). North Carolina's 2007 graduation rates for African American students pursuing degrees was 22% (Complete College America 2011) while Ginder, Kelly-Reid & Mann (2017) indicated for the 2012 cohort year, 24.7% of African American students graduated from 2-year colleges in the U.S. According to these statistics, little progress has been made in five years to retain more African American students to graduation. Positive faculty relationships increased the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional students in the study by Nakajima et al. (2012) and may be instrumental in retaining more nontraditional African American community college students to graduation.

Student services programs did not meet specific student needs. Through an empirical review of the literature, the researcher learned student services programs often do not utilize their resources to meet the specific needs of nontraditional African American students. The majority

of nontraditional students in community college worked at least part-time. Forty-one percent (41%) of community college students attended school part-time while maintaining full-time jobs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Unfortunately, student services had not implemented programs and services to support the stressors encountered by these students (Clark, 2012).

Purnell et al. (2004) reviewed the programs provided by student services and concluded the programs did not reflect the diverse population of students to include minorities and low-income families enrolled at 2-year colleges. Current community college resources do not address the specific needs of students who work and have families (Gulley, 2016). Like other students pursuing higher education, nontraditional African American community college students expect the institution to meet their academic needs to ensure success in their programs of study (Oblinger, 2003). Although students have these expectations, Ashburn (2006) shared nontraditional African American students rarely used student services to assist their educational needs. While student services programs are a part of the campus, Ashburn suggested for community college leaders to be creative in their approach to educating nontraditional African American students on their provided services.

Nontraditional African American students have multiple responsibilities outside of the classroom environment and may not be proactive in learning about the assistance available through student services programs. Approaches successful with traditional students may not be effective with nontraditional African American students who rarely consult student services for educational assistance (Oblinger, 2003). External factors to include family obligations and employment impact the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students in the community college. Today, student services programs will have to address external and

institutional issues affecting the ability of students to remain in college and offer support to students to assist their academic success. Swail (2004) concluded African American students have personal, emotional and family problems which challenge degree attainment. These students also experience difficulty adjusting to college life and may have feelings of isolation. Student services should develop a campus climate that is safe, inclusive, and diverse. Community college leaders can develop, and to a degree control a campus climate which is pluralistic, embraces diversity, supports the learning of their students, and reflect the changing society in which we live. Nontraditional African American students persist to degree completion when they feel supported to succeed by an institution that understands their specific student needs (Swail, 2004).

Flexible scheduling is ideal for nontraditional African American students who work and have families. Community college administrators can assist nontraditional students by providing various times students can enroll for courses to include evenings and on weekends. Student services leaders can provide additional sections needed to graduate during the evening, on weekends and on-line. Some nontraditional African American students may encounter difficulty with travel to the community college for classes. Student services administrators should ensure access to the campus by the public transportation system. When students have difficulty getting to the campus for courses, they are less likely to persist to degree completion (Swail, 2004). Programs developed by student services leaders should address the following areas to support nontraditional African American students' needs: academic guidance counseling, academic support (direct instruction/tutoring), career counseling, personal guidance and counseling, and supplemental support such as travel, childcare and book vouchers (Arteaga, 2015).

According to Swail, students involved in counseling felt supported to degree completion. Nontraditional African American students are at-risk but their retention rates increase when they received counseling through student services. Faculty members who interacted face-to-face with students made the students feel valued and important to the institution. Community college administrators should be knowledgeable of the needs of nontraditional students who are now the new majority on college campuses by dealing with the added stress and burden associated with the lives of their students which may impact their ability to achieve an associate degree. Today's students are older, are employed, have families and juggle multiple responsibilities while enrolled in college. The success of nontraditional African American community college students will depend on institutional programs like those provided by student services to effectively meet the needs of these students. When students are supported despite their academic challenges, the retention rate increases and more students graduate from their degree programs (Swail, 2004).

The lack of financial aid led to separation from college. Students failed to complete programs due to the lack of available financial aid support to assist with the cost of tuition. Nontraditional African American students face financial challenges which hinder their ability to finance their education. The inability to pay for college was repeatedly cited as a factor influencing academic departure (Grabowski et al., 2016). Financial issues contributed to the dropout rate of African American students (Slater, 2007). According to Nakajima, Dembo, and Mossler (2012), students cited financial hardships as the factor which significantly impacted their departure from the community college. Garagiola-Bernier (2016) suggested additional financial aid funding should be awarded to nontraditional African American students on a need basis.

Low-income and minority students often encounter financial challenges preventing the completion of an associate degree. Nontraditional community college students prioritize their need to provide for their families while pursuing an education. However, when these students are forced to utilize family funds to finance a degree, they often drop out of college (Complete College America, 2011). Community college financial aid departments can implement additional emergency funding for nontraditional African American students who may encounter financial hardships during a semester due to the unexpected cost of books, healthcare and travel. Readily available emergency funds allow nontraditional African American students to focus on their studies and persist to degree completion. When these students do not encounter the stress and pressure of financing their education and are not required to use monies allocated to care for their families, they are able to focus on their coursework and persist to graduation. Providing emergency funding to offset educational cost is beneficial to nontraditional African American students and eliminates an economic challenge than can prevent students from completing an associate degree at the community college.

Students were not aware of the benefits of academic support services. Nontraditional African American students in community colleges may not be aware of the advantages of academic support and fail to benefit from these services. The researcher learned from the literature students who enrolled in a study skills program had higher retention rates than students who did not enroll in the program. Academic services should develop programs like these to meet the needs of students and to improve their retention rates (Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014). Minority students attending a community college had greater academic success when they experienced integration on campus. A partnership between student

services and academic support could improve a student's integration.in their learning environment.

Ashburn (2006) shared student advising was rarely used by students. Nontraditional African American students reported they were not aware of the services provided by academic counseling. As a result, these students did not take advantage of programs designed to improve their retention and they failed to connect to their learning experience. Community college leaders can utilize creative measures to share information about the availability of academic counseling and faculty can reinforce these efforts by sharing this information with students enrolled in their courses. Also, faculty can immediately refer nontraditional African American students to academic counseling when a student's grades reflect difficulty with grasping course material. When faculty are proactive with referring students for academic assistance more students feel supported to persist to graduation (Swail, 2004).

Academic services includes six components: academic counseling, supplementary instruction, tutoring and mentoring, research opportunities, precollege programming, and bridging programs. Community college leaders implement academic counseling services to assist students in effectively navigating through their degree programs to ensure timely degree completion. Academic counselors advise students and consider the needs of the student when developing the student's career plan (Swail, 2004). College administrators often implement cost-effective methods to meet the needs of the institution such as hiring part-time faculty and utilizing computer-based advising systems. Part-time faculty are still effective and can be intentional in their development of positive faculty relationships with students. However, computer-based software systems do not allow students to interact directly with faculty to develop positive relationships. When students interact with faculty members outside the

classroom, they develop trust in them. Nontraditional African American students who trust their faculty feel supported academically and are motivated to persist to degree completion (Swail, 2004).

Academic counselors provide a two-fold service to nontraditional students through their various services. They build trust with students by developing positive relationships with them, and they assist students with the navigation of a career plan that results in the achievement of an associate degree. By implementing effective academic counseling services, community college leaders build the confidence of nontraditional African American students, assist with career planning and increase the retention of students who become motivated through the positive academic counseling services they receive to persist to completion in their programs of study. An integral component of a retention program is the participation of student services as a learning-centered environment promoting persistence by fostering a growth mindset in students (Murdock, 2013).

Community college leaders can be creative by utilizing texts and emails to inform students of the benefits of academic counseling and their services. Although these methods may be useful, nontraditional African American students benefit from positive faculty relationships. Therefore, faculty can share information about academic counseling in their classes, in the syllabus, and by providing flyers and brochures highlighting services provided by academic counseling. Well-informed students will be aware of academic counseling services to support their educational success and will improve the retention rate of this population of students (Windham, Rehfuss, Williams, Pugh, & Tincher-Ladner, 2014).

The lack of programs to promote student engagement increased attrition. Three theories were used to address the integration of students to college and to examine reasons for

attrition to include Tinto's theory of student integration (Rendon et al., 1994), Bean and

Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition (Bergman et al., 2014), and

Swail's (2004) retention framework. Tinto indicated socially integrated students had an increased

commitment to the campus and were more likely to complete their degree programs (Rendon et

al., 1994). Swail, Bean and Metzner paralleled Tinto's theory and stated academic and social

integration led to a greater commitment to instruction and graduation (Bergman et al., 2014).

This research study offered examples of retention programs by Maya (2013), and Swail that were

designed to decrease attrition, increase persistence and motivation which led to degree

achievement. Student engagement is required for student success and promotes the retention and

graduation of the nontraditional African American students by connecting students to the

campus, promoting inclusion, and by making students feel supported to succeed in their studies

(Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

In *A Fly in the Buttermilk Study* (Davis et al, 2004), 11 African American male and

female participants from 21 to 26 years of age participated in a research study on university life

at a predominantly White Southeastern university. The researchers revealed the importance of

student engagement in connecting the African American student to the campus. Researchers in

this study shared when students did not feel supported to succeed from faculty or by college

programs this promoted feelings of isolation among the 11 participants in the study. The African

American students were lonely and did not feel they belonged on the campus. However, these

same students felt valued when faculty, other students, and college programs acknowledged their

presence and welcomed their participation in campus events. This study demonstrated the

importance of student engagement for African American students despite their traditional or

nontraditional student status (Davis et al., 2004)

Students in the *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study (Davis et al., 2004) reported they were motivated to persist to degree completion when they felt connected to their studies. Student engagement for the students in this study included positive relationships with faculty members, positive interactions with students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds, and a variety of culturally inclusive campus activities embracing diversity among students. These students did not feel they belonged on the campus; they did not feel supported to succeed. Davis et al. shared the research participants in their study felt isolated on a predominantly White campus by faculty and students. Some students did not have positive relationships with their faculty, were not able to engage in positive interactions with fellow students, and did not feel part of a campus that welcomed diversity. The African American participants in this study felt left to their own resources to navigate the successful completion of their degree programs. Although the *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study occurred on a 4-year campus with traditional African American students, the experiences among nontraditional African American students are similar.

Student engagement for nontraditional students includes positive relationships with faculty, positive interactions with students, and diverse campus activities that are inclusive. Slater (2006) agrees that a nurturing campus environment does have a positive impact on the retention and graduation rates of African American students. When nontraditional African American students feel disconnected from their education due to negative experiences in class or on the campus, they are not likely to persist to degree completion (Tinto, 1993). Nontraditional African American students in community college persist to degree completion when they feel connected to their learning experience by supportive faculty, through positive interactions with other students, and by diverse campus activities that are inclusive and reflect the needs of students (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011).

The lack of family support impacted the dropout rate. The lack of family support affected the retention and persistence of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college. Nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college often did not have parents or other family members who graduated from college or pursued higher education. Therefore, these students received little if any encouragement from family members who did not understand the demands and challenges of degree completion (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Kraemer (1996) conducted research at St. Augustine College in Raleigh, North Carolina, a predominantly African American college, to identify factors impacting attrition. Students in this study cited family and home problems among reasons for withdrawal from college. During these difficult times, if encouraged by a family member to persist to degree completion, these students may have been retained to graduation. African American students, traditional and nontraditional, often lack the encouragement and emotional support from family and friends to continue their educational pursuits (Strayhorn, 2011).

In *Black Student Graduation Rates Remain Low, But Modest Progress Begins to Show,* Slater (2006) reported an increase in the number of African American students who were enrolling in higher education. Despite the spike in enrollment nationwide, less than 50% of African American students were completing their degree programs (Slater, 2006). Slater indicated the lack of family support as one of the factors affecting the degree completion of African American students. Students enrolled in college but when they experienced family hardships they often discontinued with their education. The lack of family support was identified as a factor hindering degree completion as well as financial assistance with college expenses when needed. Nontraditional African American students may be from a low-income family and may not be financially prepared to pay for additional expenses associated with college (Swail,

2004). The absence of support from family and friends impacts the decision of nontraditional African American students to persist to degree completion. When African American students feel isolated and unsupported on their college campuses, it was often the support of family members and friends that motivated these students to persist to degree completion (Davis et al., 2004). When nontraditional African American students experience support and encouragement from family members, they are motivated to persevere through challenges and are more likely to be retained to graduation. Although family support is not a factor controlled by the institution, this research recognizes the importance of family support in improving the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students attending community college.

Low retention and graduation rates among nontraditional African American students in community college are affected by a student's commitment to meeting family needs, positive student-faculty relationships, ineffective student services programs, a lack of adequate financial aid, a lack of knowledge regarding student services counseling, and a lack of family support to persist to degree completion. The goal of this research is to utilize a phenomenological research approach with a survey component to study factors affecting the retention rate of this student population and to offer recommendations guided by research findings to improve their graduation rate.

Review of Methodological Issues

The research literature and methodological literature on the retention of nontraditional African American students focused primarily on traditional students attending a 4-year college instead of a 2-year college. The literature on the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students attending 2-year colleges was limited and impacted the data used to support this research study. Factors affecting the retention of nontraditional African American

students in 2-year colleges varies from the factors affecting the retention of students attending a 4-year college. Nontraditional African American community college students have specific needs that are different from those of students who depend on their parents and live on the campus. Nontraditional students juggle work responsibilities and family obligations while attending community college (Complete College America, 2011). Studies such as those by Tinto (1993), Nakajima et al. (2012), and Davis et al. (2004) failed to consider the specific needs of this population of students that influenced their ability to be retained to graduation.

Tinto (1993) studied student retention extensively, but his work focused primarily on nontraditional students attending 4-year colleges. While his work added significantly to the study of retention, it failed to focus on specific characteristics impacting the retention of community college students such as race, age, and institution type which could have further supported this research study. Tinto stated when students residing on campus were socially integrated to their learning environment, they were more likely to persist to graduation. While this is significant on a 4-year college campus, the same may not be true for nontraditional African American students who take classes at a community college, but do not live on the campus. Most community colleges do not have dormitories for students to reside on campus. Community college leaders are committed to student engagement, but they are challenged to connect students to the college who commute to campus for classes. Bean and Metzner (Bergman et al., 2004) recognized the importance of social integration but considered the characteristics of nontraditional students along with environmental factors affecting their ability to be retained to graduation (Bergman et al., 2004). The researcher utilized the theoretical models of Tinto, Bean and Metzner to study the retention of nontraditional African American students. Three methodological issues for the literature used in this study are: (a) sample size, (b) selection method, and (b) transferability.

Sample size. In *A Fly in the Buttermilk,* Davis et al. (2004) studied the low retention of traditional African American students in a 4-year college utilizing a phenomenological method. The researchers used a phenomenological research method to collect descriptive data and to gain insight through personal interviews on the lived experiences of 11 African American research participants. Using the interviews, Davis et al. developed themes and made connections with data results from a small group of research participants. Utilizing a phenomenological approach with a small sample size may have limited the *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study to broad conclusions. Despite the small sample size, the researchers analyzed the data which can be applied by educators in a general sense. The researchers in *A Fly in the Buttermilk* were able to gather rich descriptions for data analysis from the small sample size of research participants. However, due to the small sample size the researchers may be uncertain if the outcome of the study is significant to only the research participants or whether or not the results will hold true for a larger population of research participants as well. The research could have benefitted from a larger sample size that included nontraditional African American male and female students beyond age 26. The age of the students in *A Fly in the Buttermilk* were from ages 21 to 26. The perspectives of African American students older than 26 attending the predominantly White 4-year southern college were not considered. The lived experiences of this target population of students age 21 to 26 may be different from nontraditional African American male and female students age 27 and older who were enrolled either part-time or full-time at the college.

Davis et al. (2004) failed to include nontraditional African American students older than age 26 in their study. The researchers' inclusion of older nontraditional African American students in *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study would have increased the sample size and enriched findings by expanding data collection efforts to include the perspectives of older students in the

study who may not have resided on the campus. Davis et al. missed an opportunity to identify trends and patterns in the data between traditional and nontraditional African American male and females attending the 4-year college in their study. The researchers could have used their study to identify if the needs of traditional and nontraditional African American students attending the 4-year college were similar or different. Davis et al. could have made comparisons in the data to determine the specific academic needs of traditional and nontraditional African American students attending the same college. The researchers could have shared data on traditional and nontraditional African American students attending college that could have strengthened this study by validating how the academic needs of traditional and nontraditional students pursing higher education vary to ensure their retention and graduation from degree programs.

Selection method. Davis et al. (2004) selected 11 African American students in their study who had successfully completed degree requirements and were preparing to graduate. The researchers concluded the selection of successful students (those preparing to graduate) would produce unbiased data free from the fear of academic difficulty and failure. The researchers also chose students who were preparing to graduate to track any significant changes in their academic journey over the last four or five years leading to degree completion. Davis et al. failed to include African American male and female students in their study who were not ready to graduate and students who were at-risk of failing early in college. The researchers missed an opportunity to include these students in their research for early detection of factors threatening the persistence of these students to graduation.

Davis et al. (2004) could have gathered data from these students and identified any trends and patterns between the African American students preparing to graduate and the African American students who were not preparing to graduate as well as those students who were at-risk

of dropping out of college. The researcher's collection and analysis of this data had it been

gathered, could have enriched this study on the high dropout rate of nontraditional African

American students by providing data to identify factors promoting the success of students in *A

Fly in the Buttermilk* study. Students in this study could have been compared to other students

who were not preparing to graduate and to older nontraditional African American students at risk

of persisting to graduation. Davis et al. did not account for the characteristics of 2-year colleges

in relation to nontraditional African American students persisting to graduation along with the

challenges commuting students face connecting to their college experience. African American

students who failed to complete course requirements for graduation were not considered for

participation in the study. The researchers avoided students who failed to complete degree

programs to eliminate biased data which may have resulted from academic difficulty. The

researchers in *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study missed an opportunity to gather data from African

American students who did not persist to degree completion which may have revealed

institutional services needing to be improved to support the retention and graduation of this

student population.

Nakajima et al. (2012) conducted a study on the persistence and graduation of community

college students and concluded the students most likely to be retained to graduation earned good

grades and had good English skills. However, these findings may have been due to the

participant selection process that Nakajima et al. utilized in their study. The research participants

in the study demonstrated academic ability according to their reported GPA. Students enrolled in

developmental, remedial and ESL (English as a Second Language) classes were excluded from

the research study. The goal of the researchers was to ensure participants understood survey

questions in order to indicate responses accurately for data collection and analysis. Nakajima et

al. based much of their findings on the self-reports of students who may have responded favorably if they thought their responses would be viewed by a faculty member (Nakajima et al., 2012).

Nakajima et al.'s (2012) *Student Persistence in Community Colleges* diminished environmental factors impacting the persistence and graduation of community college students. The researchers focused on the student's GPA to examine the characteristics of students who demonstrated academic success in their degree programs. The researchers did not examine the effects of English proficiency and remedial courses on the persistence to students to graduation. The participants in Nakajima et al.'s study may not have needed the support of institutional services to succeed in college. Selecting students based on GPA and their enrollment in remedial and English proficiency classes eliminated responses from the students who were possibly at a greater risk of dropping out of the community college than the participants enrolled in the study.

The researchers missed an opportunity to gather data from at-risk nontraditional African American students who comprise 75% of the students enrolling in higher education today (Complete College America, 2011). Gathering data from this student population could have presented the researchers with data useful in improving services and methodologies to retain at-risk students to graduation. Nakajima et al. minimized the effects of environmental factors on retention and graduation and focused primarily on the GPA of students as indicators to success and may have missed an opportunity to provide relevant data to higher education to improve the retention of nontraditional African American students to graduation in the community college system.

Transferability. Davis et al. (2004) conducted research on the lived experiences of African American students at a predominantly White southern university and Nakajima et al.

(2012) studied retention issues at a community college located in an urban area. The location of the colleges participating in the study and the demographics of the students served may have impacted research results and may not be duplicated at colleges in various regions. Students attending a rural college may have different needs than students attending college in an urban area which may influence factors affecting the retention and graduation of students. For example, students attending college in rural communities may have limited access to the campus due to the availability of public transportation to the college. Colleges located in urban areas have a variety of public transportation options readily available to assist students pursuing higher education. Educators duplicating studies by Davis et al. (2004) and Nakajima et al. (2012) should consider the location of the research, the demographics of the students served and the resources available to each area which can influence research findings. There is a need for further research in order to apply findings to other geographic areas and to other demographics of nontraditional African American students within the community college system.

Synthesis of Research Findings

The affordability and accessibility of community college has led to an influx of older, nontraditional African American students who pursued associate degrees. While enrollment steadily climbed, the retention rate of African American students was approximately 50% at the community college level (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). These issues were addressed by Tinto's theory of integration (Rendon et al., 1994) which included institutional resources aimed at improving student outcomes. According to Tinto, students who socially integrated on campus were better connected to their learning environment and were more likely to graduate with a degree. Swail (2004), Bean and Metzner, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), supported Tinto's findings and emphasized the significance of social integration in the

degree attainment of nontraditional African American students. The roles of academic counseling and student services were connected to the retention efforts of nontraditional African American learners who may have experienced cultural barriers in their academic pursuits.

Arnold & Hickman (2012) demonstrated parent-students benefited tremendously from the convenience of on-site childcare. Students who utilized campus daycare services were four times more likely to graduate with a degree than those students who did not use these childcare services. Nearly 40% of nontraditional students in higher education attend college part-time due to their family and employment responsibilities. When students attend part-time they take longer to graduate and often fail to complete an associate degree from the community college. (Complete College America, 2011). Higher education has failed to address the specific needs of nontraditional African American students if unmet leads to attrition. Nontraditional African American students are older and encounter stress managing employment while providing for families which is often not experienced by traditional students attending college. When conflicts occur between providing for their family and financing their education, nontraditional African American students prioritize caring for their family and often choose to drop out of college. Nontraditional African American students experienced greater student satisfaction when community colleges met their needs to include childcare, academic counseling, and financial aid (Slater, 2007). When community college leaders successfully address the specific needs of nontraditional African American students, more students will be retained to graduation.

Scholars indicated positive interactions with faculty built academic relationships which motivated students to continue in their degree programs. Nakajima et al. (2012) shared that African American students often lacked the encouragement and emotional support from family and friends to continue their educational pursuits. In many cases, these nontraditional African

American learners were first generation college students who did not have relatives within the home to support their academic goals. Therefore, these students needed encouragement and motivation from their faculty to succeed in the classroom. The development of stronger faculty-student relationships in the classroom provided the psychological support needed for nontraditional African American students to persist in their learning experience.

Today, the majority of students enrolled in higher education are nontraditional students. While there has been a shift in the type of students comprising U.S. college campuses, the way in which these students are being supported institutionally has changed very little. The needs of nontraditional students differ from traditional students. Therefore, programs provided by the student services department and academic counseling should be diverse and meet the needs of the students. Although nontraditional students have high enrollment rates, their graduation rates are low because they experience challenges that hinder their retention and graduation from degree programs (Swail, 2004). In order to effectively retain nontraditional African American students to graduation, community college leaders should educate students about their beneficial programs and provide institutional resources to support the academic and external needs of students.

Nontraditional African American students often experience financial difficulty paying tuition and fees that are not covered by financial aid. Also, when students experience an emergency and are not financially able to pay unexpected fees, they often depart from the community college (Garagiola-Bernier, 2016). Administrators can establish emergency funding for students who qualify for the assistance. The inability to remain in college due to financial issues was one of the reasons most cited for attrition among nontraditional African American students. These students balance family, employment and school and when faced with financial

challenges affecting their ability to provide for their families, they often choose to drop out of college (Swail, 2004). When community college leaders provide emergency funding to offset educational cost to students who qualify, stress is minimized and economic challenges hindering degree completion are eliminated.

Through years of study, Tinto (1993) concluded socially integrated students had higher retention rates. Tinto's research was primarily on traditional students who attended 4-year colleges. He shared methods with 4-year colleges on how to improve the retention and graduation rates of their students. However, these strategies did not consider the differing characteristics and dynamics associated with students on a 2-year community college campus and may not be effective at the community college level. Nontraditional African American students develop student engagement through positive relationships with faculty. Although community colleges employ a large percentage of part-time staff, nontraditional African American students connect to the campus through these positive faculty relationships (Nakajima et al., 2012). It is not the length of time that faculty spends with students, it is the quality of the interaction that increases persistence and degree completion. The positive relationship that nontraditional African American students have with faculty also provides encouragement for students to persist to graduation. African American students may not have supportive family to encourage their academic success and their positive relationship with faculty connects them to their learning experience motivating them to obtain associate degrees.

Critique of Previous Research

Through an empirical research of the literature, the researcher learned nontraditional student needs were not met by the services provided at the community college level. Nontraditional students had specific academic needs arising from their employment

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responsibilities and their obligations to care for their families. The researcher reviewed data on nontraditional African American students enrolled at a North Carolina community college. In 2017, the graduation rate for African American students at the participating North Carolina community college was 9.93% with 45 out of 453 African American students graduating with an associate degree (Univstats, 2019). African American adult learners experienced a higher separation rate than other racial groups enrolled at 2-year colleges. Based on these factors, I concluded nontraditional African American students attending community college were underserved which led to a decrease in their retention and graduation rates.

The researcher examined previous studies on nontraditional learners and on African American students in community colleges to learn of the retention challenges both groups encountered. The researcher learned from the literature nontraditional students who were African American experienced issues as older students returning to college and cultural obstacles affecting their academic success. The attrition rate of nontraditional students was a current issue in community colleges and in 4-year colleges too. However, 4-year colleges have implemented institutional retention programs to retain more students to graduation. The researcher's evaluation of the academic needs of nontraditional African American adult learners showed faculty-student relationships, student service programs, academic counseling services, and financial aid services played a significant role in decreasing the dropout rate of this underserved student population. The researcher's critique of the literature revealed the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American learners was a problem requiring additional research.

The researcher examined Tinto's theory of student integration (Rendon et al., 1994) to support the claim that socially integrated students were more likely to graduate from their degree programs. Students who were socially integrated in their academic setting developed positive

faculty-student relationships which contributed to increased retention. Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition paralleled Tinto's theory and considered the specific needs of students enrolled in a community college setting (Bergman et al., 2014).

Community colleges served diverse students but failed to develop programs to successfully meet nontraditional student needs. Community college leaders provided programs that did not reflect the current needs of the nontraditional African American students enrolled in their degree programs (Dill & Henley, 1998). The researcher reviewed current student services departments and concluded the programs did not support the needs of nontraditional African American students (Purnell et al., 2004).

African American students face financial challenges hindering their ability to complete their education. The inability to pay for college was repeatedly cited as a factor influencing academic departure (Kraemer, 1996). Community college leaders did not use their resources to address the specific needs of students who worked and had families (Gulley, 2016). Scholars advocated for the development of student service programs to support the academic and financial needs of nontraditional African American students.

Researchers viewed the issues of nontraditional African American students in higher education through a separate lens. The cultural challenges of African American students and the personal demands on the nontraditional student were treated individually. These issues were addressed separately and focused on student populations located primarily at 4-year colleges. Research was limited on the impact of positive faculty-student relationships, effective student services programs and financial aid opportunities on the retention and graduation rates of this student population. These factors impacted the retention and graduation of African American

adult students enrolled in community college and required research dedicated to developing methods to increase student retention.

This research will address the specific needs of nontraditional African American students and the challenges they encounter being retained to graduation from 2-year colleges. Tinto (1993) dedicated years of research on retention outcomes from 4-year colleges and methodologies of retaining students to graduation by socially integrating them to their learning experience. Tinto's research did not consider the specific challenges of nontraditional African American students attending the community college. The challenges African American students may encounter on a 4-year college differ from the issues associated with attending a 2-year college which require students to commute to the campus (Gilardi & Guglielmetti, 2011). These are challenges that will be addressed by this research. Nakajima et al. (2012) conducted research on the retention of community college students. The researchers did not focus solely on nontraditional African American students and participant selection was based on a student's GPA. Students who were enrolled in remedial or English proficiency courses were not included in the study.

Nakajima et al.'s research missed an opportunity to examine the needs of at-risk nontraditional African American students and how higher education leaders can retain these students to graduation. Although Davis et al. (2004) conducted research on the persistence of African American students in higher education, the researchers examined students attending a 4-year college who were preparing for graduation. The previous research did not identify the specific challenges of nontraditional African American community college students who may have been at risk of persisting to graduation. This research will examine the specific needs of nontraditional African American students and will not make exclusions based on GPA or

graduation readiness. This research will also make recommendations for retaining this target population of students to graduation.

Chapter 2 Summary

Today, seventy-five (75%) of students enrolled in institutions of higher learning are older than twenty-four years of age, employed, and balance family obligations while pursuing an education (Complete College America, 2011). While 4-year colleges have made progress in developing programs and services to meet the needs of their nontraditional students, community colleges have not been as diligent in their efforts to ensure academic success for their nontraditional students, especially their African American adult learners. A review of the literature highlighted six areas which promote the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students, namely, the ability to successfully meet family obligations, the development of positive faculty-student relationships, effective student services/academic programs, student engagement, additional financial aid resources and family support.

Tinto (1993) theorized retention rates were higher when students were socially integrated to the learning experience. Tinto focused on 4-year colleges and examined the issues these students had persisting to degree completion. While his findings were valuable to the pedagogical community, it failed to examine nontraditional African American students attending 2-year colleges. Community college students commute to the campus and methods used to connect them to their learning experience will vary from those used to integrate traditional 4-year college students to the campus. Nakajima et al. (2012) and Davis et al. (2004) conducted studies to guide the direction of this research. Nakajima et al. studied community college students based on their GPA and did not focus solely on the needs of nontraditional African American students in degree completion. Davis et al. examined the persistence of African American students on 4-

year college who were preparing for graduation. These studies failed to address the specific

challenges and needs of nontraditional African American students in the community college

system. This research will identify factors impacting the retention of nontraditional African

American students in community college and offer recommendations to improve their graduation

rates based on their specific needs.

Chapter 3: The Methodology

Introduction to Chapter 3

The purpose of this phenomenological research study with a survey component was to understand the challenges associated with retaining nontraditional African American students in community college. The data were collected using interviews and a survey to document the lived experiences of nontraditional African American students. The researcher examined the impact of a student's commitment to provide for family while enrolled in college, faculty-student relationships, student services and financial aid programs, academic support, student engagement and family support in the graduation of the nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges. The phenomenological research approach with a survey component consisted of a methodological design, study setting, instrumentation, participant selection, validity and ethical issues and data analysis procedures.

Research Questions

Researchers may use a combination of methods to explore their research question. The researcher implemented a phenomenological research approach with a survey component to collect both quantitative and qualitative data to investigate the research questions on nontraditional African American students who failed to complete associate degrees (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The research questions the researcher investigated in this study using a phenomenological research method with a survey component were:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional, African American students?

RQ2. What can community college leaders to do improve the retention and graduation

rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the

community college?

The researcher conducted a phenomenological study with a survey component to generate qualitative and quantitative data to study the research questions. Using dual methods, the researcher had options to explore richer perspectives and to quantify certain responses (Johnson & Onwuegbuzie, 2004). The researcher used interviews to develop themes and to make connections with data results. The researcher gathered statistics from the surveys on the attrition of nontraditional African American students from the community college.

The researcher implemented a phenomenological approach which gave clarity to the research by providing insight on the reasons nontraditional African American students failed to complete their degree programs. The researcher made connections in the data to identify possible trends impacting the retention of nontraditional African American students in 2-year colleges. The researcher used a phenomenological research approach with a survey component because it gave a complete perspective of the topic by drawing on both qualitative and quantitative research methods.

Purpose and Design of the Study

Purpose. The researcher reviewed the literature and learned of six areas affecting the retention rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college. These areas of concern answered the first research question, "What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students?" Several factors contributed to the poor retention of nontraditional African American students to include the inability to provide for family (Grabowski et al., 2016), poor faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013), ineffective

student services and academic counseling programs which do not adequately meet the needs of these learners (Purnell et al., 2004), the need for additional financial support to complete programs (Grabowski et al., 2016), the lack of student engagement activities connecting the nontraditional African American student to their learning experience (Purnell et al., 2004) and the absence of family support (Grabowski et al., 2016). However, since the lack of external family support was beyond the responsibility of the community college, the researcher focused primarily on factors successfully controlled and monitored by the academic institution.

The researcher relied predominantly on Tinto's theory of integration (Rendon et al., 1994) to understand the reasons students departed from college. Tinto's theory stated a commitment to the college increased when students were socially integrated into their campus community. It was noted these students persisted and were more likely to graduate (Rendon et al., 1994). Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), and Swail's (2004) stated academic and social integration led to a greater commitment to instruction and graduation.

Quantitative researchers such as Nora and Cabrera, as cited in Rendon et al. (1994), agreed sufficient empirical evidence existed to establish the validity of Tinto's model on student persistence. Tinto stated in his theory social and academic integration were necessary for retaining students. Tinto recognized the continuous interactions between the student and the academic institution in social and educational communities through a variety of formal and informal circumstances increased the retention of students (Rendon et al., 1994). In the 1960s, researchers believed student success for minorities was dependent on the student's ability to adapt, integrate, and adjust to White culture on campus. The accomplishment of this task

required minority students to separate from their language, values, culture, and traditions to become members of the predominant culture (1994).

In the 1970s and 1980s, researchers such as Caplan and Nelson (Rendon et al., 1994) shared issues regarding retention were examined as person-centered or situation-centered issues. They noted person-centered problems were caused by individual characteristics and system-centered issues involved the need to change the manner of which a system operated. However, the past twenty years have motivated researchers to consider the interactions between individuals and systems. Researchers examined the effect systemic inequities, racism, and discrimination have impacted minorities in an academic setting using this approach. This study did not focus on discrimination or racism which may have been a factor in the persistence of nontraditional African American students on community college campuses. The researcher used this study to examine the effectiveness of institutional systems like the student services department with programs to support the retention and graduation of all students. Are the nontraditional African American students, the target population in the research, being supported to academic success by these institutional systems?

Historically, colleges have resisted change. Sadly, for almost a century no successful system-wide change has occurred in the academic environment to educate undergraduate students (Wildavsky et al., 2011). As technology drove change in the world, centers of learning were forced to meet these demands. The inability to reflect the changing world through the delivery of higher education will decrease the United States' ability to successfully compete on a global stage.

Because colleges often resisted change, they may be challenged to meet the needs of nontraditional African American students to retain them to graduation (Wildavsky et al., 2011).

Failure to graduate students on time prevented them from contributing to the workforce and created additional student debt difficult to repay. Today, 75% of college students were nontraditional students who may have families, jobs, and other responsibilities. The higher education system was not succeeding when 38 million employed adults reported their highest level of education as "some college, no degree" (Wildavsky et al., 2011). Students failing to complete their degrees did not have the education to qualify for skilled occupations, and they were unable to compete globally for employment. This phenomenological study with a survey component examined the experiences of nontraditional African American students at the community college to gain insight into their needs to ensure their degree completion. Utilizing a phenomenological approach explains the problem with the degree completion of nontraditional African American students in community college and fills a gap in our understanding of the needs of these students to persist to degree completion (Astalin, 2013).

Design. The researcher will examine reasons nontraditional African American students separate from the community college but did not classify these reasons based on whether a student was or was not enrolled in a developmental course or a degree program. The researcher will utilize student responses on the surveys and in the interviews to assist in gaining insight on the reasons nontraditional African American students failed to complete degrees at the community college level. Through this phenomenological inquiry, the researcher will collect data from the surveys and interviews to validate factors believed to impact the persistence of nontraditional African American students in community college. Surveys provide quantitative data demonstrating the manner in which research participants responded in a certain way while the interviews allow participants to share their lived experiences as nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college. The interviews will provide qualitative data

providing descriptive data that fills any gaps in understanding the challenges faced by nontraditional African American students in the community college system. Other higher education institutions can replicate this study by implementing a phenomenological study with a survey component to study the retention of nontraditional African American students at both 2-year and 4-year colleges. The findings may differ based on the geographic location of the institution, student demographics and environmental factors that may impact a student's ability to persist to graduation.

The purpose of this phenomenological study with a research component was to understand the meaning participants placed on lived experiences. When participants described the essence of a lived event, they gave insight to others who may interact with the participants but were not members of their group. Students outside this group did not perceive these same events from the viewpoint of the participants, nor did they understand the feelings associated with or produced from these experiences shared among the participant group. Creswell (2009) explained "phenomenological research identifies the 'essence' of human experiences concerning a phenomenon, as described by participants in the study" (p. 18). For this reason, understanding what a person experienced, "marks phenomenology as a philosophy as well as a method" (Creswell, 2009, p. 18).

Davis et al. (2004) utilized a phenomenological inquiry and gave research participants the freedom to describe their experiences as African American students on a predominantly White campus. With this strategy, researchers optimize the use of the open-ended interview procedure allowing the researcher to receive first-person descriptions from minority students performing within a predominantly White educational system. Davis et al. (2004) used phenomenological interviewing which allowed questions to emerge from the flow of dialogue. The researchers used

this method to provide clarity and understanding meant to give rich descriptions to the phenomenon being studied (Davis et al., 2004). Davis et al. (2004) studied the university life of successful African American undergraduate students at a predominately White southern college using a phenomenological method to study the racial climate on a predominately White campus. The researcher was confident a similar research approach would provide insight into factors impacting the attrition of nontraditional African American students enrolled at community colleges. The survey on nontraditional African American students was conducted at the participating North Carolina community college electronically utilizing Qualtrics software. After data were collected from the surveys, the researcher reviewed the responses of nontraditional African American students who participated in the study.

The purpose of the interviews was explained to participants in an introduction letter and distributed electronically to students who met the criteria by the participating North Carolina community college (see Appendices A and B). The researcher ensured the confidentiality of the nontraditional African American students who volunteered to participate in this study. A $40 gift card was offered as an incentive to research participants to demonstrate the researcher's gratitude for their participation in the research. The gift card displayed a valid Master Card or Visa logo and can be utilized to make purchases at locations determined by the research participant. The 10 interview participants were a combination of four currently enrolled nontraditional African American students, three nontraditional African American students who graduated in 2018, three students who separated from the community college. The researcher desired responses from nontraditional African American students who were at risk academically, as well as those in degree program courses who may have considered separating from the community college.

Research Population and Sampling Method

The participants in the study on the high attrition rate of nontraditional African American students consisted of males and females 25 years old and older. These individuals may have been married, may have had children, and may have been employed part-time or full-time while currently attending the North Carolina community college where the research was conducted. A brief survey contained 26 multiple choice questions was administered electronically to participants. The first question on the electronic survey served as a consent for the research study. The researcher provided space at the end of the survey for additional comments to be made by interview participants. This area on the survey provided interview participants an opportunity to share additional information about their experiences which may not have been addressed in the interview. Allowing the interviewees the opportunity to share information about their experiences provided the researcher with additional information which may not have been discovered in the empirical research concerning factors promoting attrition among nontraditional African American students in the community college setting. The final question on the survey informed the researcher of additional factors contributing to the low retention and decreasing graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in the community college setting.

All students who met the research criteria at the participating North Carolina community college received a link in their emails for the electronic survey. The researcher focused on responses from the nontraditional African American students fitting the research criteria outlined for this study. The quota sampling was not reached and a total of 103 students participated in the survey. The researcher wanted to have equal numerical representation of nontraditional African American students from both the developmental courses and the degree program courses at the community college.

The researcher used a snowball sampling method to increase participation in the research study. A researcher using the snowball sampling method allows participants in the study to solicit another friend to participate in the research. Each participant can engage in this process until the researcher has reached the sample size. However, the snowball method may contain biases because participants with higher social connections may have a higher chance of selection. One of the advantages of the snowball method was the response rate from participants in this method was usually higher (Research Methodology, 2018). The researcher used the snowball sampling method in the faith-based community to increase research participation. Members of various congregations contacted their family members and friends who met the research criteria for this study.

In the second phase of the data collection process, the researcher used interviewing to gain insight regarding the experiences nontraditional African American students have encountered during their enrollment at the community college research site. The principal researcher planned to visit randomly selected developmental courses and courses in degree programs located on the community college campus. The researcher had an introduction letter drafted for electronic distribution to students enrolled in developmental courses and in degree programs. The faculty liaison at the community college research site did coordinate with the principal researcher regarding the date and time the research introduction letter was distributed to students at the participating North Carolina community college. The introduction letter was not distributed to students enrolled in specific developmental courses or degree programs. The research site coordinator at the community college identified approximately 1,600 nontraditional African American students who met the research criteria by using the community college's current student database to extract demographic data. The letter was sent to 1,600 nontraditional

African American students and explained the nature of the research study on nontraditional

African American students enrolled in a community college. The introduction letter was brief

and contained the criteria for participation and was forwarded to all students who met the

research criteria.

Instrumentation

Instrumentation in quantitative research is a device for measurement such as surveys,

tests, and questionnaires (Biddix, 2009). There are two categories of instruments, researcher-

completed instruments and subject-completed instruments. Researcher-completed instruments

are administered by the researcher which may include rating scales, flowcharts, tally sheets and

observation logs. The subject-completed instruments refer to those instruments completed by

participants and include questionnaires, attitude scales, and personality inventories (see

Appendices C and D; Biddix, 2009).

The researcher conducting the interview served as an instrument in this research study.

The researcher was responsible for compiling and distributing materials needed for the research.

During the data collection process, the researcher was responsible for identifying trends and

themes in the data by coding them. The primary data gathering instrument was the distribution of

a survey link to 1,600 nontraditional African American students who met the research criteria.

Nontraditional African American students who received the survey link made the decision

regarding their participation in the survey after receiving the survey link electronically. The

researcher conducted interviews with 10 nontraditional African American students. These

students were contacted through the community college's student portal electronically by a

faculty member from the participating North Carolina community college monitoring the

research study. The students were invited to participate in the study as interviewees. The

interview consisted of 16 questions (see Appendix C). An introduction letter was electronically distributed to 1,600 students inviting them to participate in the study. The identity of the students who received the invitation letters to participate in the research study remained confidential. The researcher became aware of the identity of the students if they contacted the researcher expressing an interest of participating in the study. The interviewer recorded all interview sessions with the 10 interviewees which last no longer than 30 minutes each. The interview questions were phrased in "how" or "why" open-ended questions to learn of the community college experiences of nontraditional African American students.

The researcher developed a survey to reflect the experiences of nontraditional African American students attending community college which may have impacted the academic success of the student. This survey consisted of 26 brief questions (See Appendix D). These questions were multiple choice and they were check off responses. The survey link was electronically distributed to 1,600 students which gave them the opportunity to participate in the survey. Following the completion of the surveys, the researcher reviewed the electronic results and generated reports for data analysis. The researcher provided data from the surveys and interviews to learn about the issues affecting the academic success of nontraditional African American students in order to improve the retention and graduation rates of this targeted population.

Data Collection

The researcher conducted a study on the low retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in community colleges and identified factors contributing to this issue and sought solutions to improve nontraditional African American student academic outcomes. The researcher used a phenomenological research method with a survey component to capture quantitative and qualitative data to provide multiple perspectives on

this issue based on data collection. During the data collection process, the researcher utilized open-ended questions during the interview to help the researcher examine a variety of perspectives and collect unbiased data (see Appendix C). The methods of data collection included surveys, interviews, and statistics. The following is a description of the data collection process used to gather data on the experiences of nontraditional African American students who departed from the community college before completing their degrees:

1. Faculty assisting the research from the participating North Carolina community college distributed a survey link to 1,600 students enrolled who met the research criteria. The goal was to have at least 250 nontraditional African American students enrolled in developmental courses and at least 250 nontraditional African American students enrolled in degree programs and no developmental courses to complete the survey.

2. The questions on the interview were designed to identify the reasons nontraditional African Americans students did not complete their degrees at 2-year colleges. The responses on the surveys allowed the researcher to code the responses to identify themes and patterns from the survey responses. A section at the end of the survey allowed comments from participants who made additional comments regarding the attrition of the research population which may not have been revealed in the empirical research.

3. Interviews of 10 nontraditional African American students currently enrolled at a North Carolina community college site was conducted. The researcher planned to select five students from developmental courses, and five students enrolled in degree programs and no developmental courses.

4. Alternate interviewees were to be selected from both developmental courses and degree programs based on the date and time their confirmation emails were received. If a primary interview candidate was unable to fulfill the obligations of the interview process, an alternate enrolled in developmental course sections or in the degree program course sections would replace the candidate to ensure equal representation from students in a developmental course and students in degree programs were equally represented in the research study.

5. Ten interview candidates were screened to ensure they met the research criteria. The alternate interviewees were to be screened as well and were to be briefed on their participation in the study if a primary research candidate was unable to complete the interview process for the research. The expectations of the interview were carefully reviewed with primary interviewees and with alternate research candidates upon their selection in the research study.

6. The initial verbal consent was utilized as the participant's commitment to start the participation phase of the research study. From this initial interest to participate in the research study, the researcher and the participant arranged a date, time, and location for the interview phase of the research.

7. The researcher forwarded written documentation to each research participant outlining the date, time, and location of the interview. The researcher forwarded consent forms to each participant and asked for it to be completed before arriving to the interview. The researcher thanked each participant who volunteered to be in the research study.

8. The researcher arrived at the interview location 30 minutes before the agreed upon time to ensure recording devices were properly set up and functioning for the interview. The researcher recorded the interviews which were reviewed following the initial interview with participants. The researcher used the recorded interviews to transcribe the interviews and to code the interviews for themes, patterns, and emerging trends prevalent in the study. The researcher made notations during the interviews. The researcher greeted participants, collected consent forms, reviewed the purpose of the interview and research protocol with participants, and ensured the confidentiality of each student's participation in the research study.

9. Within three weeks of the interview, the researcher transcribed the interviews and sent the transcription of the interviews to research participants for member checking and accuracy. Member checking was a valuable tool used in phenomenological research studies. It was a validation technique in which "data or results are returned to participants to check for accuracy and resonance with their experience" (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). Each interviewee had the opportunity to read their transcribed interview, to offer additional feedback, and to verify their responses.

10. The researcher presented each interviewee with a gift card of $40 following the completion and final phase of the interview process. The interview process included participant selection, the actual interview, and the review/revision of the transcribed individual interview.

Identification of Attributes

Culture of origin. Complete College America researchers stated 75% of students enrolled in institutions of higher learning were nontraditional which meant they were older than

twenty-four years of age, were employed, and balanced family obligations while pursuing an education (Complete College America, 2011). The researcher utilized these descriptions as attributes of the target population in this phenomenological research study. Approximately 50% of nontraditional African American students dropped out of community college and failed to obtain an associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Unfortunately, these students were not able to compete for jobs requiring a specific education or skill. Research suggested nontraditional African American students face financial challenges hindering their ability to finance their education. Although these students balanced work, family, and school responsibilities, they viewed educational loans negatively and may choose to abandon their degree programs. The inability to pay for college was repeatedly cited as a factor influencing the academic departure of African American students (Grabowski et al., 2016). African American students lacked adequate family support systems which lowered the motivation to persist in degree attainment.

Engagement. The majority of nontraditional students in community college worked at least part-time. Forty-one percent of community college students attended school part-time while maintaining full-time jobs (American Association of Community Colleges, 2017). Unfortunately, some student services departments at community colleges have not implemented programs and services to support the stressors encountered by these students (Dill & Henley, 1998). The community college serves a diverse population of students to include minorities from low-income families. The researcher examined findings with African American students having poor faculty-student relationships which decreased the academic persistence of the nontraditional African American student. Tinto stated students were more likely to graduate from their degree programs when they were socially integrated into their college community (Rendon et al., 1994).

Therefore, community colleges should invest in programs to engage adult African American learners to retain them to graduation.

Persistence. The retention rate among nontraditional African American students was increased when students had positive faculty-student relationships. Clark (2012) and Wood and Ireland (2013) reported the frequency of student-faculty interaction positively predicted persistence which led to a commitment of students and an increase in retention. When African American nontraditional students were supported by faculty, their persistence increased and they were motivated to complete their degree programs.

While positive faculty-student relationships were identified as a factor to improve the retention of nontraditional African American students, this factor was confirmed by the data collected at the participating North Carolina community college. The relationship between faculty and students was vital to the persistence of minority students. At the participating North Carolina community college, the researcher discovered faculty-student relationships were vital to a student's persistence, retention, and graduation from a 2-year college. The results were significant because the researcher learned the factors influencing the retention of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college. The factors identified in this study which impacted retention and graduation rates may or may not be an issue on other community college community college campuses.

Student success and completion. Students failed to complete programs due to a variety of unmet needs. Student success can be supported when higher education identifies the needs of the underserved nontraditional African American student and implemented programs and provide services to meet their needs. When African American nontraditional students were supported by faculty, their persistence increased, and they were motivated to complete their

programs. Also, the diversity among the college faculty and staff had a positive impact on the retention of nontraditional African American students. When diversity among the staff increased on the campus more African American students remained in their programs of study and graduated (Hughes, 2015).

Positive relationships with faculty were important for nontraditional African American students who often lacked family support.in the pursuit of their goals. This lack of encouragement contributed to the dropout rate and students left the community college without a degree (Grabowski et al., 2016). Since African American students often lacked emotional support from their family, the faculty should creatively fill this void to retain the student. An empirical review of the literature shared student services programs did not utilize their resources to meet the specific needs of nontraditional African American students. These students were employed and had family obligations along with educational responsibilities (Dill & Henley, 1998).

Since students persisted when they felt connected to their collegiate experience, higher education may consider investing in programs to accomplish this goal if it will increase the retention and graduation rates of this student population. The traditional 18-year old college student is no longer the majority on today's community college campus. Therefore, the success of the nontraditional African American student will depend greatly on the ability of community college administrators to meet the specific needs of these students. If the needs of this population continue to be unmet, higher education may experience the cycle of admitting students to their programs only to have them depart with no degree and large sums of educational debt. Success for the nontraditional African American student includes the implementation of programs and services to improve faculty-student relations, provide efficient academic counseling, implement

student service programs successfully connect adult learners to their college experience, provide

campus childcare for student-parents and supply adequate financial aid opportunities to meet

tuition costs.

Data Analysis Procedures

When analyzing the data, the researcher used methods described by Creswell (2009). The

data analysis process was as follows:

1. Organize the data and create data files

2. Read interview transcripts repeatedly, making notes to assist in the coding of themes

   and patterns in the data

3. Described the data and interpreted codes and themes

4. Interpreted the data by making sense of it

5. Conducted member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data provided by interview

   participants

6. Developed a summary of the group's themes on both the interviews and the surveys

Following the interviews, the researcher reviewed the recorded interviews and the notes

to accurately transcribe them. The researcher reviewed the interview transcriptions to ensure

accuracy and validated the content of individual interview sessions. Following the transcription

of the interviews, the researcher sent the transcriptions to each participant to ensure the accuracy

of the interview content. The interviewer required a confirmation email from each participant

indicating the transcript was accurate and represented their comments during their interview

session. If the participant wished to revise or correct statements, the researcher allowed the

revisions. The revisions were made on the interview transcription. The transcription was resent

to the interview participant. Upon review of the transcribed interviews, the researcher required a

confirmation email from the research participants to ensure the contents of the transcription accurately represented the statements made during the interview.

The researcher analyzed the data to identify the common themes expressed during the interviews and those emerging from the survey responses. The researcher believed the data supported the factors to increase the attrition of nontraditional African American students outlined by the empirical research. The researcher also expected other factors to emerge from the study to offer additional explanations for the high separation rate of this target population from the community college system.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

A limitation of this phenomenological study was the participation of students who departed from the community college. These students may have biases since they are no longer enrolled in college. Despite their failure to persist to degree completion, these contributed valuable data to the research question on the attrition of nontraditional African American students. The target population shared data on academic obstacles which made it difficult for nontraditional African American students to persist in their degree programs..

I am a former nontraditional African American community college student who failed to complete the associate degree. Therefore, I understand the reasons for the attrition of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges. Despite my lived experiences leading to departure from the community college, I remained objective in this study by utilizing reflexivity and bracketing to ensure the validity and credibility of the data. Another delimitation of this study was the researcher's deliberate focus on available institutional resources to support the academic success of nontraditional African American students and not the student's academic ability or college preparedness which may influence the quality of the student services

received by the nontraditional African American student. The goal of this study was to identify the institutional support needed to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students on a community college campus.

Validation

The researcher incorporated triangulation to ensure the credibility and validity of the data collected. The researcher used triangulation to validate the data collected on the attrition of nontraditional African American students in the community college. The researcher implemented this methodology to validate the utilization of different types of data collection procedures (Guion, 2006). There are five types of triangulation methods which include data triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation, methodological triangulation, and environmental triangulation. When conducting the research study on the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students in community college, the researcher utilized data triangulation to establish validity of findings and data.

Data triangulation is the use of different sources of data or information. In this research study on the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college, the researcher gathered information from nontraditional African American students by utilizing interviews and surveys. The researcher identified the same factors impacting attrition from the surveys and the interview responses which indicated the data findings were more than likely a true research finding (Guion, 2006).

Methodological triangulation was used to establish the credibility and validity of data. The researcher collected qualitative and quantitative data on the attrition of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges using surveys and interviews. The interviews were a method to gather qualitative data on the research topic, and the researcher incorporated surveys

to produce quantitative data for studying the issue. If the surveys and the interviews reflected identical reasons for the attrition of nontraditional African American students, then the validity of the methods have been established. When a phenomenological research method (interviews) with a survey component yielded identical research findings, the data is more than likely valid and can be trusted as credible evidence.

Reflexivity and bracketing equipped the researcher with the tools needed to ensure trustworthy study results. In phenomenological research being reflexive by bracketing was important because it allowed the views of the participants to freely emerge without making those views fit into the researcher's ideas or the concepts associated with previous research findings. Bracketing was done through dialogue with fellow researchers about biases or past experiences, by keeping a memos/bracketing journal, and by writing about bracketing in the final research report. The researcher incorporated the use of all three bracketing types by discussing biases with the dissertation committee, by keeping a journal to remind the researcher of biases, and by sharing the researcher's biases in the final reporting of the study (Flipp, 2014). Including the researcher's biases in the final report makes the audience aware of the researcher's biases when the results of the data were reviewed and interpreted. The researcher used triangulation, reflexivity, and bracketing in the research to ensure trustworthiness was established and data were credible.

Credibility. The researcher incorporated a phenomenological research approach with a survey component to include the use of surveys and interviews. A phenomenological research study on the attrition rate of nontraditional African American students in community college allowed the researcher to utilize methodological triangulation to establish validity of findings and data. The researcher compared the data from both interviews and the surveys which produced

qualitative and quantitative data and was useful in establishing validity and credibility of the research.

Dependability. The researcher ensured data were trustworthy by using member checking to verify the accuracy of data supplied by the research participants. The research participants had an opportunity to review interview transcripts to ensure the accuracy of their responses. The interviewees reviewed, corrected, and revised statements provided in the interview to ensure data accuracy. The research study established credibility and dependability through the researcher's notes, transcripts, and tape recordings of the actual participant interviews. Although the researcher did not utilize peer briefing, the researcher incorporated reflexivity and bracketing to eliminate bias in the production of research findings and data results.

Expected Findings

After conducting a phenomenological research study with a survey component on the attrition of nontraditional African American students enrolled in the community college system, the researcher expected to discover validation of this approach by using surveys and interview research methods. The researcher believed the results of the surveys and interviews verified the empirical research regarding the attrition of African American students attending community college.

The researcher believed the research data verified the target population in this study requiring additional support in specific areas to decrease their attrition rates. Nontraditional African American students consistently juggled family responsibilities while maintaining employment and attending community college like other students from different racial and ethnic backgrounds. However, these students faced additional challenges due to cultural and ethnical origins impacting degree achievement. The study examined the current procedure for supporting

nontraditional African American students and evaluated institutional services and programs to be used to retain these students to graduation.

The researcher expects to learn of the challenges of nontraditional African American students attending community college. The researcher believed the experiences of these students would be very similar. Community colleges like most public colleges in the higher education system have limited funding. Therefore, these institutions of learning monitor the spending of their educational dollars. Limited funding requires community colleges to be creative in the management of resources.

The goal of this research was to identify issues preventing the degree completion of nontraditional African American students. These research findings may or may not initiate an evaluation of current resources on the community college level to identify if current services can be combined, deleted, or restructured to meet the needs of all students but especially those significant to the success of the nontraditional African American student. While the findings of this research may be limited to the dynamics of the community college research site studied, the methodology for evaluating the academic needs of nontraditional African American students can be implemented by other community colleges in the higher education system.

Ethical Issues

The researcher developed a consent form to be signed by the participants prior to participation in the survey and interviews which comprised the research study. The researcher ensured the confidentiality of all data by securing these materials in a locked file cabinet. During the interview process, the researcher was aware of the identify of participants but ensured their confidentiality. Interviews were audio recorded. The audio recordings and any electronic documentation were stored on a password-protected computer using password protection

software. All recordings were transcribed by the principal investigator and deleted following member checking for accuracy of the interview transcripts. The destruction of research data is allowed specifically for audio recordings, but all other research documents will be maintained for 3 years after the completion of the research project.

Any personal information provided by participants will be coded so it cannot be linked to individual participants. Any names or identifying information given by participants will be kept securely in a locked file cabinet inside the principal investigator's home. Upon analysis of the data, the principal researcher did not use any names or identifying information relating to the research participants. The principal researcher used a secret code to identify the participants when analyzing the data. The research participants in the study will not be identified in any publications or reports. The information compiled during this research study will be kept private at all times and all study documents will be destroyed three years after the completion of the study. The principal investigator completed the guidelines, requirements and protocol established by the IRB at Concordia University-Portland to ensure a safe and ethical research study.

The principal investigator completed and submitted permission forms to the IRB of the participating North Carolina community college where the recruitment and research took place. The researcher completed these forms and submitted them to IRB of the participating North Carolina community college to receive approval to conduct the research at the institution. These forms included detailed information regarding the purpose of the study, the targeted student population, any risks to participants, data collection and analysis procedures and measures implemented to safeguard student data during data collection, data analysis and after the completion of the study. The principal investigator completed all forms required by the IRB at Concordia University-Portland and by the IRB at the participating North Carolina community

college to conduct the research study. All required forms were completed and submitted to both academic institutions and the principal investigator was granted permission to conduct this research study.

Conflict of interest assessment. The researcher does not have any conflict of interest impacting the research or affect the collection of data in the study. The principal researcher was employed at a community college previously, but this employment ended in 2015. At the initiation of this study, the researcher will not gain financially in any capacity from the research. Due to previous employment at a local community college, the principal researcher was acquainted with faculty and staff who are currently employed in the community college. This was the extent of the personal connection to the community college research site. These relationships will assist the principal researcher in gaining access to conduct the research but will provide no other personal or monetary gain considered as benefits to the principal researcher.

Researcher's position. The researcher was a nontraditional African American student who attended community college but failed to complete the degree. Therefore, I understood the disappointment associated with departing from college without obtaining a degree. As a nontraditional African American student, I faced financial hardships preventing me from obtaining a degree. Because I already had an undergraduate and a master's degree, I was not eligible for any loans or financial aid provided by the community college. As a part-time employee of the community college, I was required to pay full tuition without reimbursement. Eventually, I exhausted my funds and was forced to abandon my goal of receiving a degree in Mortuary Science.

My experiences with the community college created a bias potentially impacting the results of my data if I failed to utilize reflexivity and bracketing techniques. Keeping a

bracketing journal allowed me to write down my biases as I encountered them. Daily review of this journal served as a constant reminder I must set my previous experiences and preconceptions aside to allow the data to reveal factors impacting the attrition of the nontraditional African American adult learner. While the researcher maintained a bracketing journal to annotate biases which may affect the research if the researcher was unaware of them. These biases were included in the final report of findings to be reviewed by the audience/reader. The researcher was transparent and wanted to make the reader aware of biases which existed as the outcome of the research was being reviewed by readers.

Chapter 3 Summary

According to Wildavsky et al. (2011), 38 million adults attended college but failed to obtain a degree. Sadly, an economic crisis will occur if nontraditional students do not complete their programs or are delayed in graduating with a degree. As a result, the U.S. will have less skilled workers who are prepared to contribute to the global economy. The National Center for Education Statistics noted "of the 857,607 first time students who enrolled at 2-year public institutions in fall 2007 only 26.5% completed degrees or certificates from their starting institution within six years" (Coley et al., 2016, p. 4). The researcher's goal was to identify factors contributing to attrition and to encourage the development of retention programs to graduate more nontraditional African American students from community college. Utilizing a phenomenological research approach with a survey component provided statistical facts and personal accounts on the needs of nontraditional African American students who were currently attending a community college. The results of this data may lead to new policies and procedures from educational leaders designed to improve the retention and graduation of more nontraditional African American students from the community college system.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

Nontraditional African American students were the target population of this research study to determine factors leading to the high dropout rate of these students enrolled in a North Carolina community college. The target population encountered challenges interfering with degree attainment. Nontraditional African American students experienced difficulty balancing family and work responsibilities while being employed part-time or full-time. The researcher investigated empirical findings and implemented data collection techniques to validate these findings. This research design was a phenomenological research approach with a survey component to examine six factors, specifically, regarding their impact on the degree completion of nontraditional African American students in a community college setting. These factors were:

1. The ability to fulfill obligations to family while attending college

2. Faculty-student relationships

3. Student services programs/academic counseling programs

4. Financial aid

5. Student engagement

6. Family support

Introduction of Data Analysis and Results

This chapter provides a brief overview of the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions and the role of the researcher. Essential components of the research design; briefly presented in this section includes the sample, method, and analysis procedures. A summary of the findings from the Qualtrics survey and data from 10 nontraditional African American student interviews were given based on six key factors. These six factors emerged from the data and may influence the degree completion of nontraditional African American male

and female students in a community college. The original delimitations projected for this research study were 250 nontraditional African American male and female survey participants between 25 and 40 years old currently enrolled in at least one developmental course at a North Carolina community college and 250 nontraditional African American male and female survey participants between 25 and 40 years old currently enrolled in a degree program and no developmental courses at a North Carolina community college. Other delimitations were 10 male and female nontraditional African American interview participants currently enrolled at a North Carolina community college. Five of the interview participants were planned to be male or female nontraditional African American students enrolled in at least one developmental course and five of the interview participants were planned to be male or female nontraditional African American students in degree programs and not enrolled in any developmental courses at a North Carolina community college. This chapter will conclude with a detailed presentation of the data and results given in relationship to the five key factors affecting the degree completion of nontraditional African American students in a North Carolina community college. The researcher used a phenomenological research design with a survey component. A survey was distributed electronically; 10 individual interviews were conducted with nontraditional African American students.

       Statement of the problem. Nearly 50% of nontraditional African American students drop out of community college and fail to obtain an associate degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). These students may require support in specific areas which challenge their persistence in obtaining a degree. The enrollment of nontraditional African American students is high, but their degree completion rate is low. The enrollment rate of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college

is 37.3% ($N = 16,800$) (The Fact Book, 2019). These students balance family, school and work obligations while navigating institutional challenges further complicated by race (Grabowski et al., 2016).

Purpose of the study. The purpose of a phenomenological research design with a survey component was to understand the challenges associated with retaining nontraditional African American students to graduation in the community college system. The researcher examined the impact of faculty-student relationships, student services, and financial aid programs, academic support, student engagement and family support on the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students at a North Carolina Community college. This information was collected using a phenomenological research design with a survey component to document the lived experiences of these nontraditional African American students through interviews and surveys.

The research questions. The researcher utilized a phenomenological research design with a survey component which included a survey and interviews to study the following research questions:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in a community college?

RQ2. What can community college leaders to do improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the community college?

Through a phenomenological research design with a survey component, instruments were designed to collect quantitative and qualitative data. A survey comprised of 26 questions was composed and powered by Qualtrics software for data collection. The questions were designed to

identify emerging themes and patterns associated with factors leading to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college. This research design documented the lived experiences of these nontraditional African American male and female students through interviews to identify patterns and themes leading to attrition. The researcher evaluated these findings from the study which may lead to new policies and procedures from educational leaders to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in the community college system throughout the United States.

The concepts of positive relationships with faculty, programs from academic support and student services to meet specific student needs, additional financial aid opportunities, effective student engagement activities to connect students to the campus and family support were explored throughout this phenomenological research study. Questions were designed in the survey and in the interviews to gather data on the community college experiences of nontraditional African American students. The researcher used survey and the interviews to provide data to identify factors which supported or hindered the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students attending a North Carolina community college. Family support was identified as a factor impacting student persistence, but this research will focus on the institutional resources available to all students on campus which may affect the retention of nontraditional African American students to graduation in a community college setting. Family support may influence academic persistence, but it could not be effectively measured by the researcher or controlled by the academic institution.

Role as the researcher. As the principal investigator, I ensured research participants could successfully access the survey utilizing various technological devices to include laptop computers and cellular phones. I facilitated the research interviews of nontraditional African

American students and maintained a bracketing and reflexivity journal to ensure I remained

unbiased during the data collection and analysis processes. I am both a former community

college instructor and a nontraditional African American community college student who failed

to complete an associate degree in Mortuary Science. As an instructor, I observed nontraditional

African American students in my classes experienced challenges such as the lack of financial

aid/funding to pay for tuition, and difficulty balancing the responsibilities of family, work and

school which threatened degree completion. I was a nontraditional African American student

enrolled at the community college where I was employed, and I experienced similar obstacles

like my students which eventually led to my decision to drop out of community college.

Community college leaders may use these findings from this research to develop institutional

programs to meet the specific needs of the nontraditional African American student to retain

them to graduation.

Description of the Sample

The original criteria for the research on the high dropout rate of nontraditional African

American students in community college consisted of African American males and females

between the ages of 25 and 40. These individuals were or were not married, had or did not have

children and were unemployed, retired or employed part-time or full-time while currently

attending a North Carolina community college, the site of the research. The phenomenological

research design was to include 10 interviews of African American male and female

nontraditional students between 25 to 40 years of age who were currently enrolled in a

participating North Carolina community college. The quantitative data were to be collected by

distributing a Qualtrics survey to obtain responses from at least 250 nontraditional African

American students currently enrolled in at least one developmental course and 250 students who

were not presently enrolled in a developmental course at the participating North Carolina community college. The data were collected by interviewing nontraditional African American male and female students and by distributing a Qualtrics survey to nontraditional African American students at a North Carolina community college based on the established research criteria. The original delimitations for the research included: interviews from 10 nontraditional African American male and female students between 25 to 40 years of age who were currently enrolled in a North Carolina community college. These students had families, were employed full-time or part-time, were retired, unemployed, married or unmarried, with or without children. The researcher's target sample for collecting qualitative data were five interviews consisting of nontraditional African American male and female students who were enrolled in at least one developmental course and five nontraditional African American male and female students who were not currently enrolled in a developmental course at the participating North Carolina community college. Quantitative data collection was to be generated from the distribution of a Qualtrics survey to nontraditional African American male and female students at the North Carolina community college who met the research criteria. The goal of the survey was to obtain responses from 250 nontraditional African American students who were currently enrolled in at least one developmental course and responses from at least 250 students who were not presently enrolled in a developmental course at a North Carolina community college.

A total of 103 (6.23%) students from a sample population of approximately 1,600 nontraditional African American students responded to the survey. Sixty-one (60.4%) ($N = 103$) nontraditional African American students were enrolled in at least one developmental course and 40 students (30.6%) of the students indicated they were not enrolled in a developmental course. Due to the low response rate, the researcher did not make comparisons between the responses of

nontraditional African American students enrolled in developmental courses to the responses of students who were not enrolled in a developmental course at the participating North Carolina community college. The researcher concluded any comparisons between the groups based on their enrollment in a developmental course may or may not give an accurate portrayal of issues existing between the two groups because of the low survey response rate of nontraditional African Americans students in the study.

The North Carolina community college research site electronically distributed the Qualtrics survey to 1,600 students who met the research criteria established by the principal investigator. The number of nontraditional African American male and female students providing responses to the survey was a total of 103 participants. These nontraditional African American male and female students were at least 25 years old and older, were or were not married, had or did not have children and were unemployed, retired or employed part-time or full-time while currently attending a North Carolina community college.

The adjusted sample size for the research was 103 nontraditional African American male and female students. The age of the sample size was extended beyond 40 years of age and included students 25 years old and older. The researcher abandoned the goal of collecting data from a sample of 250 nontraditional African American male and female students enrolled in at least one developmental course and the data from 250 nontraditional African American students who were not enrolled in a developmental course. The low participation rate of nontraditional African American students in the Qualtrics survey affected the sample size which resulted in the inclusion of students who were 25 years old and older who were not categorized by their enrollment in a developmental course to gather data to answer the research questions on factors impacting the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students

enrolled in community college. The 10 interview participants were to include five nontraditional African American students enrolled in at least one developmental course and five nontraditional African American students who were not enrolled in any developmental course at the participating North Carolina community college.

To improve survey activity and interview participation, the researcher visited local libraries which served community college students in the area, utilized social media to increase awareness of the research study and networked with local faith-based communities, churches, and ministries to increase data collection. To reduce participant concerns of being exposed to computer viruses by accessing the provided survey link, the researcher monitored participants as they completed the survey utilizing her personal laptop computer. The nontraditional African American interview participants for this phenomenological research design with a survey component consisted of three female students who were currently enrolled in a North Carolina community college, one male student who was presently enrolled, one African American male student who graduated in 2018 and two nontraditional African American female students who graduated in 2018. The interview participants also consisted of one male student who separated from the community college within the last two academic years and two nontraditional African American female students who failed to be retained to graduation within the last two academic years. The diverse enrollment status of this sample population from 10 nontraditional African American male and female students produced data from three stages of academic achievement to include persistence and retention, graduation, and separation without degree completion which was vital in answering the guiding research questions for this study.

Sampling method. I utilized the Qualtrics software to design a survey distributed to 1,600 nontraditional African American students who satisfied the research criteria. The sample

population consisted of students who currently attended the participating North Carolina community college. The researcher reviewed descriptive quantitative data from the Qualtrics survey which included statistics found in the analysis and findings sections of this study. I interviewed 10 nontraditional African American male and female students who provided qualitative data through their detailed responses to questions pertaining to their community college experience. Creswell's (2009) data analysis process was used to identify common themes emerging from the survey and interviews. This process included organizing the data, reading and coding interview transcripts, interpreting codes and themes, member checking and summarizing the themes in the survey and interviews. A nonprobability sampling method was used to study nontraditional African American students with specific characteristics vital to the research on the high attrition of nontraditional African American students in community college. The characteristics of the target population were the following:

- African American adult learners

- African American students who were at least 25 years old

- Nontraditional African American students who were currently enrolled in the community college part-time or full-time,

- Nontraditional African American students who recently graduated in 2018

- Nontraditional African American students who separated from the community college within the last two academic years

- African American students who were single, married, employed full-time or part-time, unemployed, retired and may or may not have children.

The nonprobability sampling method was the most convenient approach and it allowed the researcher to focus on complex social phenomena in the target population. The researcher

utilized consecutive sampling which is a nonprobability sampling method. With this method, the researcher was allowed to select subjects meeting the inclusion criteria until the required sampling size was achieved. The participating community college distributed the survey to 1,600 nontraditional African American students at the participating community college who met the research criteria. When the limited number of three survey distributions had been reached by the community college, the researcher was responsible for distributing research information to nontraditional African American male and female students who satisfied the research criteria. The survey link and interview participant information were shared throughout the faith-based community and in public forums targeting nontraditional African American students who attended the participating North Carolina community college until the research goals for the study had been achieved. Davis et al. (2004) served as a blueprint for strategically choosing participants for this study on the attrition of nontraditional African American students at community colleges. As in Davis et al., the participants in this study included African American students who shared truthful information about their community college experience.

Four of the students in the research study were currently enrolled at the North Carolina participating community college, three of the nontraditional African American students had graduated from the community college in 2018 and three of the nontraditional African American students had separated from the participating community college within the last two academic years. The level of academic achievement or failure by these nontraditional African American community college students did not interfere with their ability to provide unbiased responses regarding their community college experiences during the interviews. The participants' rich description of their community college learning experiences led to the identification of key factors possibly influencing the retention, persistence, graduation, and separation of

nontraditional African American students from the participating North Carolina community college.

During quantitative data collection, the researcher did not interact directly with survey participants. Therefore, it cannot be determined if nontraditional African American research participants were biased in their survey selections. Question 26 on the Qualtrics survey allowed participants to provide additional insight about their community college experience. The 103 survey responses did not contain comments on question 26 perceived by the researcher as a bias. Data collection methods were altered from the researcher's original plan to gather the data, but the validity of the results was not compromised. Participants received the survey electronically as an email from the participating North Carolina community college. When social media was utilized to increase survey participation, the principal investigator emphasized current students were needed for the survey. Students who participated in the survey via the community college were current students. The researcher believed those students responding to the survey via social media followed instructions and completed the survey because they were current students at the participating community college. The goal of utilizing a phenomenological research approach with a survey component was to generate data from the surveys and interviews to provide insight to educational practitioners to improve the graduation rate of nontraditional African American male and female students in community college.

Sampling procedure. For this phenomenological research study with a survey component, I utilized Qualtrics to produce a survey for quantitative data. The survey and the interview participants were nontraditional African American male and female students who were currently enrolled or were recent graduates from the North Carolina participating community college. I was employed at a community college for over 10 years and had studied as a

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nontraditional African American student in the Mortuary Science program. A year prior to this research study, I contacted the participating North Carolina community college's institutional effectiveness department and reviewed the type of data collected on their community college students. The early exposure to the type of information the community college collected was extremely beneficial with the development of instruments for data collection. I received approval for the research study from the participating North Carolina community college's Institutional Review Board (IRB) on October 2018.

The approved submission to the IRB contained the research questions guiding this research, a sample of 26 survey questions comprised the Qualtrics survey and a sampling of 16 interview questions. The participating community college also requested access to the Qualtrics survey through a link which was provided by the researcher. The survey link was distributed by the participating North Carolina community college to 1,600 currently enrolled nontraditional African American male and female students who met the research criteria. The college shared the survey link with the target population for three distributions to collect data. The survey link was distributed to 1,600 nontraditional African American male and female community college students in late fall 2018.

The participating college distributed a research introduction letter in late fall 2018 along with the 16 sample interview questions to 20 deans and 80 full-time and part-time community college instructors. The deans requested for the part-time and full-time instructors to share the research information with their students. The $40 gift card was highlighted to incentivize student participation in the research study. The principal investigator's contact information was provided in the introduction letter and encouraged the participation of nontraditional African American male and female students in the interview process. For data collection, the researcher inquired

about the total number of students who received the invitation from their instructors to participate in the interviews. The principal investigator was informed by the participating community college who stated to calculate this information would be too cumbersome for the deans and instructors to do because they were finalizing end of semester grades and preparing for the winter break. For this reason, the researcher cannot report the number of students who received an invitation from their instructors to participate as interviewees in this research study.

There was no activity taking place on the Qualtrics survey during Christmas break and in early January 2019. The result of the three distributions of the survey link in late fall 2018 generated 31 responses from nontraditional African American students currently attending the North Carolina participating community college. The deans and the instructors shared information about the interview opportunity to students, but no nontraditional African American students volunteered to participate in the research study. The college did not allow additional distributions of the survey link. Due to the end of the semester, winter break and the holiday season, the deans and instructors were unable to extend additional invitations to students to participate in the research as interviewees. For this reason, the researcher incorporated social media and networking methods to increase survey responses and to secure 10 interview participants for the research. Among survey responses, 31 nontraditional African American students responded to the survey distributions from the community college. The remaining 72 survey responses resulted from the use of social media, interactions with the faith-based community and utilizing professional networking to increase survey responses and to secure interviewees for the study.

The researcher's goal was to obtain a total of 500 survey responses from a population of 1,600 nontraditional African American students attending the North Carolina community

college. Among the 500 survey responses, 250 were to be from nontraditional African American students who were currently enrolled in at least one developmental course and 250 survey responses were to be from 250 students who were not presently enrolled in any developmental courses. The inability to achieve this goal altered data collection methods to incorporate social media and multiple networking strategies to increase the survey responses from the 31 nontraditional African American community college students who participated in the study. From the three survey distributions at the participating North Carolina community college, 31 nontraditional African American students responded to the survey and 72 nontraditional African American students participated in the survey through the link shared via social media, texts, and community networking opportunities. The quantitative data collection efforts were completed on February 2019 with 103 nontraditional African American students who participated in the Qualtrics survey. The response rate was 6.23% which was disappointingly low.

The 10 interviewees for this research resulted from meetings with local ministries and faith-based networking to identify and to locate nontraditional African American male and female students who were enrolled in the participating North Carolina community college. These nontraditional African American interview participants attended various churches or were acquaintances and classmates of the church members who were visited by the principal investigator. To assist my efforts, church members from various ministries also shared the phone numbers and emails of their friends and family members who were currently attending the participating community college. The 10 participants who were interviewed for the research study were affiliated with the participating community college. Four of the nontraditional African American interviewees were currently attending the participating community college, three of the nontraditional African American community college students graduated in 2018 and

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three of the nontraditional African American male and female students had separated from the participating North Carolina community college within the last two academic years without receiving a degree. The research concluded with 103 responses on the Qualtrics survey from nontraditional African American male and female students and 10 interviews with nontraditional African American student participants. The nontraditional student participants were:

- Currently enrolled students at the participating North Carolina community college

- Students who graduated from the participating North Carolina community college in 2018 with an associate degree

- Students who departed from the participating North Carolina community college within the last two academic years without receiving an associate degree

The qualitative data collection was completed in February 2019.

Research Methodology and Analysis

Data analysis is "the process of bringing order, structure and meaning to the mass of collected data. It is a messy, ambiguous, time-consuming, creative, and fascinating process" (Marshall & Rossman, 1990, p. 111). This research study consisted of a phenomenological research method with a survey component and utilized surveys and interviews to examine factors affecting the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college. The researcher utilized Qualtrics to develop a survey with statements about the experiences of the target population on a North Carolina community college campus. The survey contained a total of 26 questions with question one being a consent for participation in the study, and question 26, the final question, giving space for survey participants to make additional comments regarding their community college experience as nontraditional African American students. The researcher studied the quantitative data from the study and utilized the statistics as

evidence for the study. The researcher reviewed numerical data and statistical analysis reports on the proportion of nontraditional African American students answering a question in a certain way.

The researcher used the qualitative data from the interviews to identify themes emerging from the data. Utilizing thick description, the interviewees gave insight regarding their community college experience. This technique included the individual's culture, emotions, feelings, and social interactions as significant data. By doing so, the research participants' voices were heard and meaning emerged from their narratives on their community college experiences (Ponterotto, 2006). The meaning was derived from thick description was coded and created six themes useful in guiding this research. These were as follows:

1. Fulfilling obligations to family

2. Positive faculty-student relationships

3. Financial aid to assist with tuition

4. An awareness of academic/student services

5. Student engagement connecting the student to the campus and motivates them to persist to degree completion

6. Family support

The researcher organized the descriptive events shared in the interviews by coding them. The researcher utilized topic coding to organize the rich descriptions into related topics. Analytical coding allowed the researcher to develop concepts from the qualitative data and to recognize the emergence of new themes not previously addressed in the empirical research. The quantitative and qualitative research findings provided evidence to support the empirical findings outlined in Chapter 2 of this study and provided additional data on factors affecting the dropout

rate of nontraditional African American students in community college unknown prior to the research study. The researcher concluded from the literature review that family obligations, positive faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013), financial aid (Grabowski et al., 2016), student services and academic counseling (Purnell et al., 2004) and family support (Grabowski et al., 2016) influenced the retention and graduation of community college students. After reviewing and analyzing the data, the principal investigator discovered nine additional factors influencing the persistence and graduation of nontraditional African American students. These factors were not discussed in the literature review but resulted from the shared experiences of 10 nontraditional African American students enrolled in a North Carolina community college.

These additional themes were:

1. Nontraditional African American students who have positive faculty-student relationships sought assistance from their instructors before visiting student services and academic counseling programs.

2. Nontraditional African American students learned about the services provided by student services and academic counseling after they have problems with their grades or issues with a course.

3. Nontraditional African American students did not seek student services or academic counseling regarding financial matters. Students often made the decision to depart from the community college when they cannot pay for tuition or buy the books needed to be successful in a course.

4. Nontraditional African American students preferred speaking with a person when they needed assistance and not a computerized telephone system or having to search

for the answers to the questions on web advisor. Students preferred human contact and interaction.

5. Nontraditional African American students did not like to receive numerous emails which did not pertain to them. When these emails did not relate to the nontraditional African American students, they are not read. These students only took the time to read and to respond to those emails from their professor or instructor.

6. Nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in community college received support from family in many areas such as with childcare delivery. However, nontraditional African American students shared they are often the first person in their family to go to college and their parents/family did not understand the discipline and hard work which accompanies degree completion.

7. Nontraditional African American students who did not have parents who attended college or have a degree were more likely to drop out of their community college programs. These students felt their parents/family members did not understand their collegiate experiences.

8. Nontraditional African American students felt connected to the campus through their relationships with faculty, and their peers and not by their participation in campus events, activities, and organizations.

9. Nontraditional students rely on their faith in God to strengthen them when they had struggles and challenges with school.

Organizational overview. This phenomenological research study with a survey component was designed to discover methods and practices to be implemented by the student and the institution to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African

American male and female students in the community college system. An analysis of the factors having an impact on the persistence of this target population was organized into six emerging themes presented in the literature review. These emerging themes were:

- Fulfilling family obligations

- Faculty-student relationships

- Financial aid to assist with tuition

- An awareness of academic/student services and utilizing them

- Student engagement connecting students to the campus.

- Family support

Surveys and interviews provided an in-depth examination of these factors through a review of participant responses and narratives by 10 nontraditional African American male and female students who provided detailed descriptions of their community college experiences.

Methodological strategies. The researcher used a phenomenological research method with a survey component to combine qualitative and quantitative strategies through surveys and interviews. The research methodology included the design, research setting, instrumentation, selection of participants, validity, ethical issues, and procedures for data analysis. The researcher utilized Creswell's (2009) process of coding qualitative data to identify themes which shaped the lived experiences of participants. Results from the Qualtrics survey were used to examine the proportion of students responding in a certain manner to questions reflecting the themes identified through the data. The researcher utilized methodological triangulation to examine the quantitative and qualitative findings from the surveys and the interviews which increased the credibility of the study. The researcher analyzed the data collected from the surveys and the interviews to identify trends and themes emerging from the data. The researcher collected data

from the surveys and the interviews which identified the same factors as contributors to attrition. Therefore, the outcome is more than likely true. When the stakeholders, in this case the students and the institution, observe data on an issue collected from different methods but have the same outcome, it is probably a true and valid research finding (Guion, 2006).

Procedures for data collection on the campus of the participating community college were altered and the researcher was unable to conduct the pilot study, distribute paper surveys directly to nontraditional African American research participants in classrooms and was unable to extend a direct invitation to students to participate as interviewees who met the research criteria. These unexpected limitations possibly affected the number of students who participated in the surveys and the interviews. The low response rate on the surveys did not generate sufficient data to effectively analyze the results from nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in at least one developmental course and data from nontraditional African American students who were not currently enrolled in any developmental courses. The researcher was unable to make comparisons between interview participants who were enrolled in at least one developmental course to those nontraditional African American students who were not enrolled in a developmental course at the participating community college. The principal investigator did not receive any interview notifications from nontraditional African American male and female students at the North Carolina participating community college who were interested in volunteering for the study. The researcher networked with the faith-based community and shared research information on social media to increase survey responses and to locate interview participants. The researcher concluded the study with eight nontraditional African American male and female students who were currently enrolled in developmental courses, or were enrolled in at least one developmental course when they departed from the community college,

and two nontraditional African American students who were currently enrolled at the participating community college and had not taken any developmental courses. The researcher experienced challenges in data collection procedures affecting quantitative and qualitative research findings of nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in at least one developmental course and the results of nontraditional African American students who were not currently enrolled in any developmental courses. Therefore, data triangulation as a method to increase the credibility and validity of research findings was not used. The researcher implemented methodological triangulation to examine quantitative and qualitative data from nontraditional African American male and female students produced from the Qualtrics survey and narratives from the interviews.

The researcher implemented methodological triangulation in the study which allowed the researcher to utilize more than one method to collect data on the attrition of nontraditional African American students in the community college. The researcher used this methodology to increase the credibility of the quantitative and qualitative data collection procedures used to conduct this research study. Using dual methods, the researcher had options to explore richer perspectives of the participants and permitted the researcher was able to quantify certain responses. Johnson and Onwuegbuzie (2004) suggested the most compelling reason to use mixed methods was to be certain the study's needs were met. The researcher used a phenomenological research method with a survey component to generate descriptive statistical data and narratives reflecting the lived experiences of nontraditional African American students. The researcher delivered the best of both worlds in this study using this phenomenological research approach. The researcher explored cultures richly and thickly while objectively collecting statistical data, which was the goal of the researcher.

The researcher maintained a reflexivity and bracketing journal to ensure credibility. I attended this participating North Carolina community college as a nontraditional African American student and failed to complete my degree program. Reflexivity allowed the researcher to evaluate herself. This was important to prevent the research from contaminating the study by her previous experiences and preconception on the study topic. The researcher avoided biased interpretations of the data and allowed the findings to fully represent the questions posed in the study (Flipp, 2014). In bracketing, the researcher set aside personal experiences, biases, and preconceptions about the research topic. Because I experienced the disappointment of failing to complete my associate degree at this participating North Carolina community college, I did not allow my feelings, ideas, and past lived experiences to direct or influence the outcome of this study. As the researcher, I did not manipulate the findings to reflect my views of the issue on nontraditional African American students who failed to complete degrees at a community college. Along with the reflexivity and bracketing journal, the researcher discussed the data collection challenges at the participating North Carolina community college with the faculty chair and the dissertation committee. The researcher used methodological triangulation, reflexivity and bracketing to establish the trustworthiness of the researcher and to ensure the data reflected a credible research study.

Coding and thematic procedures. The following were Creswell's (2009) coding guidelines used to identify themes in the quantitative and qualitative data. This procedure was outlined in Chapter 3 and remained the same. While the procedures and methodologies for collecting data changed due to restrictions of the participating North Carolina community college, the researcher followed these guidelines to code the data into themes:

1. Organize the data and create data files

2. Read interview transcripts repeatedly, making notes to assist in the coding of themes and patterns in the data

3. Describe the data and interpret codes and themes

4. Interpret the data by making sense of it

5. Conduct member checking to ensure the accuracy of the data provided by interview participants

6. Develop a summary of the group's themes on both the interviews and the surveys

The researcher transcribed the 10 interview transcripts. Summaries of the individual 10 interviews were completed and then summarized to identify their themes as a group. The participants of the interviews shared their experiences as nontraditional African American students which included disappointments, challenges, difficult situations and some joyous occasions too. The researcher used their lived experiences as data to further explain factors impacting the attrition of nontraditional African American students in community college. Students shared their experiences as community college students and at the conclusion of the surveys and the interviews provided additional comments and offered suggestions for improving institutional services to support nontraditional African American students to graduation.

Summary of the Findings

The following sections include six themes and nine additional themes emerging from the 10 participating nontraditional African American students in the interviews and the 103 students who participated in the survey. These themes were:

1. Fulfilling obligations to provide for family

2. Positive faculty-student relationships

3. Adequate financial aid for tuition

4. Academic/student services awareness and utilization

5. Campus-connecting student engagement

6. Family support

Family support was identified in the empirical research as a factor influencing the persistence of nontraditional African American male and female students in the community college setting. Family support did emerge as a theme in both the quantitative and qualitative data. However, the researcher will not include family support or the lack of family support as a factor in this research since the community college system cannot control it. The goal of this research was to address factors community colleges can control and to make recommendations to improve the retention of nontraditional African American students to graduation. Focusing on factors influenced by the institution leads to the development of guidelines which may be duplicated on community college campuses nationally. While the needs of this target population may vary from college to college, some recommendations may benefit nontraditional African American students beyond this North Carolina community college campus.

The quantitative survey contained 26 multiple choice questions which addressed the student's perceptions regarding faculty-student relationships, the awareness and utilization of student services and academic counseling, financial aid, student engagement and the presence or lack of family support to persist to graduation. Although family support is not a factor controlled by the institution, 53% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional students indicated they received encouragement from family members on a weekly basis. Statistics on the survey reported 26% of the nontraditional African American students who participated in the study received encouragement from family members within the last seven to 14 days.

Ten students participated in interviews containing 16 open-ended questions relating to faculty-student relationships, the awareness and utilization of student services and academic counseling, financial aid, and student engagement. Four (40%) of the students were currently attending the North Carolina participating community college, three (30%) of the students graduated in 2018, and three of the students had dropped out of the North Carolina participating community college within the last two years. The 10 nontraditional African American students may have represented various levels of academic achievement but all of them stated in their interviews they would not have been able to start their educational journey at the community college without the support and encouragement of family and friends. Family support included:

1. Encouragement to persist at the community college

2. Care for minor children

3. Transportation to and from the community college campus

4. The purchase of supplies and books needed for courses

5. Payment of tuition when financial aid was insufficient in meeting educational expenses for the semester.

Question 26 on the survey, and question 16 on the interview provided an opportunity for research participants to provide additional comments regarding their community college experiences. Participants shared ideas and made suggestions for how to better serve current and future nontraditional African American students to retain more students to graduation. *The Fact Book 2018* ([Redacted], 2018) which included significant data regarding the participating North Carolina community college indicated:

- 60% ($N = 16,800$) of the students attending the community college are female and 40% of the students are male

- 50% of the students attending the community college in the 2016–2017 academic school year were between the age of 25 and 44 years old

- 37% of students at the North Carolina community were African American

The research study reported similar findings:

- 72% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students participating in the quantitative survey were female and 28% were male

- 70% ($N = 10$) of nontraditional African American interviewees were female and 30% were male

Presentation of Data and Results

The researcher's goal in this phenomenological research design with a survey component was to utilize quantitative and qualitative data to identify factors affecting the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American male and female students in community college. The following summary includes statistics from a survey containing 26 questions regarding the community college experience and the responses from 10 nontraditional African American male and female students who were interviewed for the research study. Six themes emerged which influenced the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students which included fulfilling obligations to provide for family, adequate financial aid for tuition, positive faculty-student relationships, academic/student services awareness and utilization and campus-connected student engagement. Support from family and friends did emerge as a sixth theme but the researcher will focus on factors monitored and improved by the institution. The researcher will report the support of family and friends emerged as a theme, but it will not be included in the recommendations of institutional practices may improve the retention and graduation of

nontraditional African American male and female students in the community college setting. The nine additional themes emerged from the research study:

1. Nontraditional African American students who have positive faculty-student relationships seek assistance from their instructors before visiting student services and academic counseling programs.

2. Nontraditional African American students learn about the services provided by student services and academic counseling after they had problems with their grades or issues with a course.

3. Nontraditional African American students did not seek student services or academic counseling regarding financial matters. Students often make the decision to depart from the community college when they cannot pay for tuition or buy the books needed to be successful in a course.

4. Nontraditional African American students preferred speaking with a person when they needed assistance and not a computerized telephone system or having to search for the answers to the questions on web advisor. Students preferred human contact and interaction.

5. Nontraditional African American students did not like to receive numerous emails which did not pertain to them. When these emails do not relate to the nontraditional African American students, they were not read. These students only took the time to read and to respond to those emails from their professor or instructor.

6. Nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in community college received support from family in many areas such as with childcare delivery. However, nontraditional African American students shared they were often the first

person in their family to go to college and their parents/family did not understand the discipline and hard work which accompanied degree completion.

7. Nontraditional African American students who did not have parents who attended college or have a degree were more likely to drop out of their community college programs. These students felt their parents/family members did not understand their collegiate experiences.

8. Nontraditional African American students felt connected to the campus through their relationships with faculty and their peers and not by their participation in campus events, activities, and organizations.

9. Nontraditional students rely on their faith in God to strengthen them when they had struggles and challenges with school.

Five out of the 10 (50%) students in the interviews shared they prayed and asked the Lord to supply the strength and guidance needed to accomplish their academic goal. These students had faith Jesus would help them to be successful.

Survey Results

The researcher presented the data from the survey based on the six themes emerging from the phenomenological research study with a survey component.

Theme 1: Fulfilling obligations to provide for family. The majority of nontraditional African American students who participated in the survey were employed while they attended community college. Students who were employed full-time represented 57.4% ($N = 103$) of the target population and 25.7% of the students indicated they were employed part-time during their community college enrollment. From the survey responses, 54% of the participants were married and 46% indicated they were not married. Among survey participants, 79% of nontraditional

African American students had children. When asked on the survey if they considered dropping out of the participating North Carolina community college, 67.3% of the participants responded they considered separating from the participating North Carolina community college. The percentage of nontraditional African American students who considered separating from the community college due to difficulty balancing family obligations, employment responsibilities and schoolwork was 44.5%. In question 12 on the survey, participants were asked if they felt stressed managing family and employment obligations while attending community college. Among survey responses, 74.3% nontraditional African American students answered they had experienced stress while managing daily responsibilities and attending classes at the community college while 25.7% of nontraditional African American students did not encounter stress in managing family and employment obligations while attending the participating North Carolina community.

Theme 2: Adequate financial aid for tuition. Question 17 on the survey asked students if they were satisfied with the amount of financial aid they received to enroll in classes at the participating community college. The nontraditional African American students who were satisfied with the amount of financial aid they received was 38.6%, ($N = 103$) and students who were unhappy with the amount of financial aid they received for tuition was 61.4%. On the survey, 36.5% of nontraditional African American students reported they considered dropping out of college because they did not receive sufficient financial aid to pay tuition. From survey responses, the lack of financial aid was cited as the second reason nontraditional African American students failed to persist in the community college until graduation.

Theme 3: Positive faculty-student relationships. From survey responses on community college experience, nontraditional African American students indicated:

- 71% had a positive community college experience

- 25% had an acceptable community college experience

- 3% had a negative community college

- 1% did not respond to the survey question

The survey response of nontraditional African American students regarding interactions with professors were identical to the responses given for the community college experience of nontraditional African American students:

- 71% had a positive interaction with their professor

- 25% had an acceptable interaction with their professor

- 3% had a negative interaction with their professor

- 1% did not respond to this question on the survey (question 10)

When nontraditional African American students were asked if they felt comfortable approaching their professor or faculty member with an issue, survey participants responded:

- 93% felt comfortable approaching their professor or faculty member

- 7% did not feel comfortable approaching a community college professor or faculty member

Nontraditional African American students indicated the frequency positive feedback was received from their professors:

- 26% received positive feedback weekly

- 41% received positive feedback within seven to 14 days

- 15% received positive feedback within the last month

- 4% received positive feedback within the last three months

- 13 % never received positive feedback

- 1% did not answer question

There were no significant differences noted among the responses of nontraditional African American male and female students.

Theme 4: Academic counseling/student services awareness and utilization. Among survey participants regarding academic counseling/student services awareness and utilization, nontraditional African American male and female students responded:

- 33% did utilize student service and academic counseling programs

- 67% did not use student services and academic counseling

- 59% were aware of student services programs and academic counseling provided on campus

- 41% were not aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling

Theme 5: Campus-connected student engagement. Among survey participants regarding campus-connected student engagement, nontraditional African American male and female students responded:

- 65% felt positive about their academic progress

- 29% felt their progress was acceptable

- 6% had negative feelings regarding their progress

Nontraditional African American students were asked if they participated in campus activities. Among those surveyed, the responses were:

- 87% did not participate in campus activities or organizations

- 13% participated in activities and organizations on the community college campus.

Interview Results

The researcher presented the data from the interviews based on the six themes emerging from the phenomenological research study with a survey component.

Theme 1: Fulfilling obligations to provide for family. Seven of the 10 (70%) interview participants were employed. Five of the 10 (50%) interview participants in the research study had children. Seven of the 10 (70%) interview participants shared they encountered stress in balancing their jobs and or family obligations while attending the participating community college. The three students who did not experience stress did not work and did not have children to care for while attending the participating community college. Two of the three (66.7%) research participants dropped out of community college because they had children and sought additional income to support their families. The seven interview participants who experienced stress while managing their family obligations and or employment found it difficult to balance academic responsibilities associated with attending a community college. Participant 6 stated, "I felt overwhelmed at times because I had my family, I have my job and then I have my homework. And I just let a lot of things go so I could get my work done." Participant 5 and Participant 7 commented that multitasking was a process that automatically involved a level of stress. Students can expect to be stressed because they must do several tasks simultaneously such as managing a household, going to work and attending classes at the community college. Participant 5 and Participant 7 added they had an excellent support system at home with family members who understood when they needed extra time to study and to complete homework. Participant 7 had flexibility on the job which allowed the student to schedule classes needed for degree completion.

While seven of the nontraditional African American students experienced some stress in managing their personal lives and being enrolled in classes at the community college, they managed their stress through the support of family and friends who assumed additional tasks such as cooking, cleaning and childcare for the students. Participant 3 managed stress by working less hours on the job to create the time needed to attend classes at the community college. Participant 4 did not reduce employment hours but made the decision to enroll in fewer classes to eliminate the stress associated with a more demanding course schedule. Research findings verified nontraditional African American students prioritized caring for their families as the most important factor leading to attrition. From the empirical research, the researcher noted nontraditional African American students do have difficulty managing their academic responsibilities while providing for their families.

Theme 2: Adequate financial aid for tuition. When asked about their satisfaction regarding financial aid received, six out of 10 (60%) nontraditional African American interview participants stated they were satisfied with the aid from the participating community college. Four (40%) of the interview participants indicated they were not pleased with aid received because they were required to pay out-of-pocket for their tuition. These four nontraditional African American students indicated they did not qualify for financial aid for various reasons. Two (20%) of the nontraditional African American students shared they did not qualify for financial aid due to their annual salary. One student could not receive financial aid due to being on academic probation and one student did not wish to elaborate on the reasons receiving aid was not an option for financing an associate degree at the participating community college. The four students did not receive financial aid were personally responsible for their tuition fees. Although payment plans were arranged for these students, one student was able to pay tuition fees with no

financial stress, two of these nontraditional African American students experienced stress when they were not able to pay for their classes, and one student would not share whether or not stress was experienced from the lack of financial aid to assist with tuition fees.

Participant 2 elaborated on the experiences she encountered with financing her education. Due to being on academic probation, Participant 2 was not eligible for financial aid. Participant 2 shared because she was a single parent, working full-time and raising her daughter was difficult to complete her course assignments. For this reason, her grades suffered, and she was placed on academic probation. When Participant 2 became ineligible for financial aid, she moved in with her parents who assisted with childcare. The student was able to continue to work and to utilize more of her income to finance her education. Participant 2 shared she had to juggle financial responsibilities and often received assistance from family members to pay monthly living expenses. Due to the financial struggles Participant 2 encountered, the student was unable to buy the books she needed for her classes. Participant 2 shared during the interview with the researcher, "I navigated through this whole 2-year degree with no books but because my professors do their stuff via power point, they print out the slides or they give us access to the slides. I just printed out the slides, and I just used the slides."

When there were instances Participant 2 had assignments from a required book, colleagues in her classes took pictures of the pages she needed to complete the assignments. Participant 2 was able to do her assignments in a timely manner although she could not afford to purchase the books. Participant 2 did consider dropping out of community college due to the lack of financial assistance to persist to degree completion. However, it was the positive encouragement Participant 2 received from faculty members encouraging her to continue. Positive faculty-student relationships were identified as a third theme influencing the retention

and graduation rates of nontraditional African American male and female students in community college. This is a significant finding.

Theme 3: Positive faculty-student relationships. During the 10 interviews, all the nontraditional African American interview participants had a positive relationship with their faculty members. They had faculty members who were genuine and made an extra effort to ensure students understood the course material. Participant 4 shared she was probably the oldest student in the class. At the beginning of the semester, Participant 4 felt uncomfortable in class. The younger students grasped the material faster than Participant 4 did but the instructor made sure she understood the material before proceeding to the next lesson. For this reason, Participant 4 persisted in the class, although previously she considered withdrawing from the course.

During the interviews, the nontraditional African American students shared details regarding their relationship with their instructors and faculty members. Participant 7 encountered a medical emergency with her young child. While enrolled in college and working full-time, Participant 7's 4-year-old son required heart surgery. The instructors and faculty were very supportive and encouraged the student during her family crisis. The instructors advised Participant 7 to contact student services and academic counseling for additional assistance during this hardship. Recalling the incident, Participant 7 stated:

> They [instructors and faculty] were willing to work with me while my son went through his surgery. I was still in school. They [instructors and faculty] understood what I was going through and they were there by email or by phone call. They were there.

Participant 6 stated she had a positive experience and began her educational journey at the community college in 2009. Participant 7 graduated with an associate degree in 2018. The student struggled with math and had difficulty passing the math requirements for the degree

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program. Overall, Participant 6 had a positive faculty-student relationship with the community college instructors but recalled one incident which affected her confidence and motivation for degree completion. Participant 6 hired a math tutor to strengthen her math skills but continued to struggle to pass the math class. Participant 6 recalled the grade on a math test shared immediately by the instructor:

> I was trying so hard and I thought that I was going to pass this class. Then when we had to take the last test and I took my paper up to him and he, he made me feel so bad. He said, 'This is the first test that you passed!' It made me feel so bad and then he failed me! So, I had to take that class over. But when I had to take the class over, I most definitely did not want him to be my teacher. He made me feel bad. You know how you take the test and everybody is in the class and then you go up and he [the instructor] checks it right then? Well, he said that to me. It just like dampened my self-esteem and that was in Math 60.

Although Participant 6 received a negative comment from one of the math instructors, she was not deterred from persisting to degree completion. The student stated this was the only negative incident she encountered during her educational journey at the community college. Participant 6 was determined to persist to graduation despite the negativity from one instructor. The nontraditional African American student continued with a hired tutor, enrolled in the math class again and requested a different math instructor. "When I took Math 60 again, my instructor helped me so much! I will never forget her" (Participant 6).

Theme 4: Academic counseling/student services awareness and utilization. Seven of the 10 (70%) ($N = 10$) students interviewed shared they were aware of student services and academic counseling programs. Students stated information about student services and academic

counseling was sent to them in an institution-wide email. Students were also informed about student services and academic counseling services on their syllabus. A representative from student services and academic counseling visited students in classrooms to share information about their programs. The seven (70%) nontraditional African American students were aware of student services and academic counseling and utilized tutoring services provided by the community college. There were no significant differences noted among the responses of nontraditional African American male and female students.

Three nontraditional African American students were not aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling. One of these three students, Participant 8, indicated she was not aware of the assistance student services and academic counseling provided because she did not need any help from them. Participant 8 stated that if she did need assistance academically, she would seek academic guidance and support. Participant 7 did not become aware of the programs student services and academic counseling provided to assist the academic success of students until she had a family emergency involving her son. Participant 7 shared faculty and community college instructors referred her to student services and academic counseling during her personal hardship. Participant 7 shared that if she had not experienced this life-challenging event with her young son she probably would not have sought assistance from student services and academic counseling.

Participant 2 was not aware of student services and academic counseling programs. Participant 2 was placed on academic probation and did not receive any assistance from financial aid to complete her associate degree. She was often frustrated when she called academic counseling because of the time spent navigating the computerized telephone system. Participant 2 stated:

The first thing that they want to tell you is all that you have to do is to go to web advisor. Well, I don't want a computer to tell me. I want to hear you [academic counseling representative] verbally tell me what I need to do next. I am an auditory learner.

Participant 2 relied on her instructors to assist with educational concerns since she had a great relationship with her instructors. Participant 2 explained her instructors advised her directly eliminating the time spent on web advisor and on the telephone. Her instructor answered her questions and referred her to other services when needed.

Theme 5: Campus-connected student engagement. All interview participants stated they did not have time to participate in campus events and were not interested in attending them. The students cited their duties and responsibilities to their family, employer, and course assignments as reasons for not participating in campus events. All the students felt welcomed on campus even though they were not interested in attending campus events or joining campus organizations. Participant 7 shared she simply did not have time to attend any of the campus events; or participate in organizations. Working a full-time job, caring for her family, and attending classes at the community college left very little time to participate in extracurricular activities (Participant 7). When asked if he attended campus activities or if he was a part of any organizations on the campus, Participant 3 stated:

No. I got so many other activities at church and with my wife and grandkids, I didn't particularly do a lot of things there [on campus]. I felt a connection to them [community college campus] because there were things that I could do if I chose to. It's just managing time and trying to do my homework and stuff. I didn't feel where I needed to do a lot of that. I didn't feel left out or anything like that.

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The 10 nontraditional African American students stated they were connected to the community college because of the caring attitude of faculty and staff and not because of the organizations or events they participated in. All nontraditional African American students felt supported to succeed in their educational endeavors. Three of the 10 (30%) students who did not complete their degrees felt supported at the community college despite failing to graduate. These students cited other factors for their incompletion. They still felt supported by the institution to succeed and planned to return to the community college to complete their degree. The nonparticipation of the students in campus activities and organizations were due to a personal choice of the nontraditional African American students. Participation in campus activities and organizations was not considered a priority by nontraditional African American students. These students prioritized caring for their families and earning income to provide for their daily needs. Nontraditional African American male and female students in this research study used their time and energy to balance family and employment responsibilities while attending the community college. There were no significant differences noted among the responses of nontraditional African American male and female students.

Because their time was already in demand, the nontraditional African American students who did attend campus events or participated in organizations did so because it affected their grades, or because it was related to their degree programs and benefited the future advancement of their career goals. The availability of events and organizations on campus and their participation in them did not make the nontraditional African American male and female students in this research study feel more or less connected to the community college. The 10 nontraditional African American male and female students who participated in the study stated in the interviews they were connected to the community college through their positive faculty

relationships and the college's commitment to provide resources to support their academic success. "I just talked to my instructors about what I needed, and they always helped me. I didn't have to use a lot of other resources on campus, but if I did, I knew where to go" (Participant 3).

Summary

The researcher reported findings associated with the research study in this chapter. A review of the statement of the problem, the purpose of the study, the research question, role of the researcher, and a description of the sample method and procedure were included with data analysis and research findings. The methodology and analysis were explained and the researcher's deviations from the original data collection plan which possibly affected the data. Creswell's (2009) thematic procedure and findings were outlined along with a presentation of the data results. The six themes influenced the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students emerged from the data:

1. Fulfilling obligations to provide for family

2. Positive faculty-student relationships

3. Adequate financial aid for tuition

4. Academic/student services awareness and utilization

5. Campus-connected student engagement

6. Family support

The researcher reported similar data from the survey and the interviews. The researcher's findings from the survey and interviews verified nontraditional African American students in community college dropped out due to obligations to care for their families and because of the lack of financial aid to persist to degree completion. The researcher reported findings from the survey and the interviews which confirmed nontraditional African American students were more

likely to persist to degree completion with positive faculty-student relationships. Data from the survey and interviews were students became knowledgeable of student services when they needed assistance, and students did not connect to the campus through activities. The researcher reported data from the survey and interviews which verified the presence of family support among nontraditional African American students encouraged degree completion.

Support from family and friends will not be included in the recommendations for institutional practices to improve the retention and graduation rates of students. Family support cannot be adequately measured or controlled by the community college. Chapter 5 will discuss conclusions from the community college experience of nontraditional African American students who participated in this research study. Factors to retain this target population to graduation will be identified.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

By utilizing a phenomenological research approach with a survey component, the researcher gathered data on nontraditional African American students through a survey and interviews. This researcher presented this data in Chapter 4. The six themes emerged from the research study were:

1. Obligations to provide for family

2. Adequate financial aid for tuition

3. Positive faculty-student relationships

4. Academic/student services awareness and utilization

5. Campus-connected student engagement

6. Support from family and friends

The participating North Carolina community college distributed the survey electronically to 1,600 nontraditional African American students who met the research criteria on November 19, 2018, December 3, 2019, and December 10, 2019. Due to low survey participation, the researcher utilized social media and networked with the faith-based community to gain participants from the participating North Carolina community college. The response rate on the survey was 6.23%. The participating North Carolina community gave an invitation to participate as an interviewee to 1,600 nontraditional African American students. None of these students contacted the researcher regarding interview participation and the researcher shared information about the research study on social media and with the faith-based community. Ten nontraditional African American students participated in the interviews.

As previously listed, six themes emerged from the data. Support from family and friends did emerge as a sixth theme but the researcher will focus on factors monitored and improved by

the institution. The researcher will report support of family and friends emerged as a theme, but it will not be included in the recommendations of institutional practices to improve the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American male and female students in the community college setting. Family support varies from student to student and is difficult to measure. The presence or absence of family support is a factor which cannot be controlled by the community college. The researcher will focus on factors controlled by community college leaders and will only report family support emerged as a theme in the data. To maximize the success of nontraditional African American students attending community college it is essential for educational practitioners to understand factors leading to degree incompletion and then to develop effective strategies to better retain and to graduate more nontraditional African American students from community college.

Introduction

The purpose of Chapter 5 is to determine what the results of the data mean to the research study. The chapter begins with a brief review of the summary of the results. Following this summary, key sections include a discussion of the results, a discussion of the results in relation to the literature, limitations, implication of the results for practice, policy and theory, recommendation for further research and the conclusion. The results of the research are presented and evaluated by adding personal insight and interpretation, by making connections between what it means to the community of practice, by discussing how the research informs the literature and by how it adds confirmation or new knowledge to the community of scholars. As a nontraditional African American student who failed to receive an associate degree in Mortuary Science, I acknowledged my biases early in the research to prevent my personal experiences at the participating North Carolina community college from skewing the results. The researcher

maintained a reflexivity and bracketing journal which held the researcher accountable for biases

and demanded the objectivity needed to allow the data to speak for itself.

Summary of the Results

Approximately 50% of nontraditional African American students leave community

college before obtaining an associate degree in their field of study (National Student

Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Factors affecting the retention and graduation of

nontraditional African American adult learners at community college were studied to develop

strategies to retain more nontraditional African American students to graduation. These factors

were positive faculty-student relationships, student services and academic counseling programs

meeting student needs, adequate financial aid to cover tuition costs, effective student engagement

connecting students to their learning experience, and family support which encouraged

persistence. A phenomenological research study with a survey component was utilized to

produce data on the community college experiences of nontraditional African American students

in North Carolina. The survey produced statistics measuring the percentage of participants who

responded to a question in a certain way. The interviews of 10 nontraditional African American

students produced insightful narratives with rich descriptions regarding the community college

experience of these nontraditional African American students.

The researcher shared findings to validate the empirical research which identified factors

impacting the attrition of nontraditional African American students in the community college

system. The researcher reported data indicating almost half (44.6%) ($N = 103$) of nontraditional

African American students departed from the community college due to family obligations and

36.5% failed to persist to degree completion due to the lack of adequate financial aid. Of the

students surveyed, 71% of nontraditional African American students had positive faculty-student

relationships which motivated them to obtain an associated degree. More than half (67%) of students did not utilize student services programs or academic counseling. Nontraditional African American students were not interested in attending campus activities due to their responsibilities before and after class. These students felt connected to the community college through their positive relationships with faculty and not as a result of their involvement in campus activities. Although the researcher reported the lack of family support as a factor affecting retention, 91% ($N = 103$) of the nontraditional African American students surveyed and all of those participating in the interviews had family some level of support which motivated them to persist to degree completion. Both quantitative and qualitative data were used to study the research questions allowing the researcher to make recommendations based on these findings.

Research questions. The following research questions guided the study on the attrition of nontraditional African American students in community college:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community colleges?

RQ2. What can community college leaders do to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the community college?

The principal investigator used the research questions as a framework to guide the research study. The researcher developed survey and interview questions to generate data to answer these research questions and to support the study. The principal investigator presented research questions to participants in the survey and in the interviews. The participants gave responses which identified factors from the empirical research that contributed to the attrition of

nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college. The participants responded to the questions, and six factors contributing to the attrition of nontraditional African American students attending community college emerged. Additional space at the end of the survey allowed respondents to share their recommendations to improve the community college experience to support more students to graduation. Interviewees spoke freely when asked about their community college experience and provided this research with recommendations to support current and future nontraditional African American students to graduation. The researcher used this phenomenological research study to ask questions on the survey and in the interviews allowing patterns and themes to emerge shaping the essence of the lived experiences of these nontraditional African American students attending community college.

Research theories. Tinto's theory of student integration, as cited in Rendon et al. (1994), and Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), supported the conceptual framework chosen for this research study on the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students attending community college. Tinto theorized students socially integrated into the campus community increased their commitment to the university and were more likely to graduate (Rendon et al., 1994). Bean and Metzner's conceptual model of nontraditional student attrition paralleled Tinto's theory and stated academic and social integration led to greater commitment to instruction and graduation (Bergman et al., 2014).The retention of nontraditional African American students indicated students departed from the community college for reasons involving inadequate academic support and the inability to socially integrate on campus. The students in Tinto and Bean and Metzner's research were goal-oriented but lacked the support to persist in their programs of

study. The work of these researchers provided a guideline to effectively study the issue of community college degree incompletion by nontraditional African American students attending community college.

Research significance. This research study on the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students is significant since most of the research on retaining and graduating students focuses on those students attending 4-year colleges. In the research on the retention and graduation of students, 2-year colleges were not discussed as often as 4-year colleges. Therefore, the factors identified to influence the retention of 4-year colleges may or may not affect the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in the community college system. Nontraditional students are not like the 18-year-old senior who graduated from high school and left home to live in a campus dorm at a 4-year college. The nontraditional student is 25 years old or older and may or may not be married, may or may not have children and may or may not be employed full-time or part-time. Unlike the typical freshman student who is attending a 4-year college, the nontraditional student is not free of responsibility and often has to work full-time or part-time to provide for their families while they are attending the community college. For some community college students, balancing family, work, and school responsibilities become a difficult task which may result in a nontraditional student dropping out of their local community college. While nontraditional students experience these challenges, nontraditional African American students encounter additional challenges because of their ethnicity.

Nontraditional students often enroll in community college to learn skills which allow entry into a new career or for advancement in their current employment. Due to a changing economy which embraces technology-related jobs, U.S. citizens are returning to college later in

life to learn additional skills to increase their income or allow entry to a new career. Two-year

colleges serve diverse students and nontraditional African American students may choose to

enroll at their local community college to take classes while balancing family and work

responsibilities. Their issues with degree completion may be different from the challenges faced

by traditional college students. The researcher used this research study to investigate these

challenges while acknowledging nontraditional African American students experienced different

challenges in community college than traditional students as well as other nontraditional students

of other racial backgrounds and ethnicities. At the participating North Carolina community

college, nontraditional African American students prioritized their obligations to family with

44.6% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students citing the need to provide for their

family members as the top reason for attrition.

Although Tinto's (Rendon et al., 1994) model focused on the attrition of the traditional

student at a 4-year college, the research was relevant and outlined the path to attrition. However,

Bean and Metzner, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), concentrated their research on the

nontraditional student who was more likely to attend a community college instead of a 4-year

college. The participating North Carolina community college reported 37.3% of their students

were African American with 50% of them being between the age of 25 and 44 years old (The

Fact Book, [redacted], 2018). This research is significant to the participating North Carolina

community college and to the U.S. community college system serving diverse populations to

include nontraditional African American students. These students may have various educational

goals such as an associate degree, a 1-year certificate or diploma in a career field, retraining for

career advancement, the completion of courses for personal interest and skill force development

(Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Students enrolled in a community college often are not traditional age

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students and they have external challenges making it more difficult for them to achieve their educational goals. Therefore, this research was significant for the participating North Carolina community college as well as for other community colleges in the United States serve a large population of nontraditional African American students. Through this research, the educational community is informed regarding the specific challenges faced by nontraditional African American students in community college. Based on the results of the study, the researcher offered recommendations to increase the retention of these students to graduation.

Seminal literature. The researcher evaluated the seminal literature. African American students may have difficulty completing their fields of study due to poor relationships with their faculty and because they lack the family support needed to persist to graduation (Grabowski et al., 2016). These factors added to the significance of this study and supported the need for research to identify other factors leading to community college attrition among this population. Further study of this issue may provide recommendations to increase the retention and graduation rates among this target population. For example, Participant 7 in this study did have a positive relationship with faculty as well as the family support needed to persist to graduation. However, Participant 7 stated although her parents assisted with childcare, they did not attend college and did not know how to encourage her academically whenever she experienced problems in a course. Like Participant 7 in this study, other nontraditional African American students may or may not have family members who attended college and understand the encouragement students need for degree completion. While educational expectations, academic preparation, family income and support from parents and schools in planning and preparing for college were all factors affecting retention, according to the National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) students were at a disadvantage when they had parents who did not attend

college (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Students with parents who did not attend college may not have received encouragement from their parents and had lower completion rates.

Representatives from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSE) measured institutional engagement and the overall community college experience of students. Student responses were used as indicators or benchmarks to represent a student's level of engagement in key areas. Active and collaborative learning and institutional support for learners were related to higher graduation rates of community college students. This finding was significant because the study controlled for institutional characteristics and student demographics (Hanover Research, 2014). Wild and Ebbers (2002) and Murdock (2017) agreed educators should be concerned with the retention of community college students, but very little has been done to examine the issue. Researchers utilized the work of Tinto, as cited in Rendon et al. (1994), and Metzner, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), to examine the dropout rate of nontraditional community college students. Although much of Tinto's research focused on the needs of traditional students attending 4-year colleges, his research findings like Bean and Metzner's were beneficial to community college students and their educational leaders.

Student engagement was identified as a factor promoting the retention of community college students. Murdock (2017) addressed the importance of engagement while addressing the fact community college students have other issues which affect their degree persistence. The high dropout rate of nontraditional students is an issue gaining momentum with each passing year and educational debt from these students is continuing to amass. At the start of this research, educational debt was $1.3 trillion, however today, it is quickly approaching 1.6 trillion (Friedman, 2018). Wild and Ebbers (2002) noted the number of minorities entering higher education through the community college continues to increase. Therefore, the goal of

researchers and community college leaders should be to examine the issue of attrition by studying indicators specific to their nontraditional African American students to retain them to graduation. While community colleges are similar by serving a diverse population with various socio-economic needs, administrators cannot ignore the increasing separation rate of nontraditional African American students from the community college. Regardless of the differences from community college to community college, students who do not complete their degrees add to the national education debt. Very little research has been done on factors impacting the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in 2-year schools. The goal of this study was to add to the research currently available on community college retention. Scholars and the educational community can further investigate the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students at 2-year schools which may direct initiatives to increase retention to graduation.

Methodology. The researcher utilized a phenomenological research approach with a survey component. Surveys and interviews from nontraditional African American students captured data. Research participants provided data from survey responses that were used as factors contributing to the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college. The researcher developed the electronic survey using Qualtrics software which generated statistical reports from participant responses and calculated percentages on the number of research participants who responded to the questions in a certain manner. The researcher used this phenomenological research approach with a survey component to generate quantitative and qualitative data with results validating methodology and data triangulation to strengthen research findings. Member checking was used by the research and allowed nontraditional African American students to review interview transcripts, to revise statements

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and to offer comments and feedback on the qualitative data collected. The researcher maintained a bracketing and reflexivity journal to ensure she remained unbiased by allowing the research findings to present themselves without interference or manipulation by the researcher.

Summary of the findings. There were six themes emerging from the 103 survey responses and the 10 interviews with nontraditional African American community college students. These themes were:

1. Fulfilling obligations to provide for family

2. Inadequate financial aid for tuition

3. Positive faculty-student relationships

4. Student services/academic counseling awareness and utilization

5. Campus-connected student engagement

6. Family support

These themes were identified in the empirical research findings. Family support emerged as a theme in the research findings and its importance to the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students was discussed in this study. However, the researcher did not examine family support as an institutional factor to improve the retention and graduation rate of the target population. The researcher focused on factors managed by the community college. Family support was not a factor controlled by institutional resources, and it was discussed to stress the importance of supportive family and friends in the achievement of an associate degree. Nine additional themes emerged from the data which were not identified in the empirical research. These were the following themes:

1. Nontraditional African American students who have positive faculty–student relationships seek assistance from their instructors before visiting student services and academic counseling programs.

2. Nontraditional African American students learn about the services provided by student services and academic counseling after they have problems with their grades or issues with a course.

3. Nontraditional African American students did not seek student services or academic counseling regarding financial matters. Students often made the decision to depart from the community college when they could not pay for tuition or buy the books needed to be successful in a course.

4. Nontraditional African American students preferred speaking with a person when they needed assistance and not a computerized telephone system or having to search for the answers to the questions on web advisor. Students preferred human contact and interaction

5. Nontraditional African American students did not like to receive numerous emails that did not pertain to them. When these emails did not relate to the nontraditional African American students, they were not read. These students only took the time to read and to respond to those emails from their professor or instructor.

6. Nontraditional African American students who were enrolled in community college received support from family in many areas such as childcare. However, nontraditional African American students shared they were often the first person in their family to go to college and their parents did not understand the discipline and hard work which accompanied degree attainment.

7. Nontraditional African American students who did not have parents who attended college or had a degree were more likely to drop out of their community college programs. These students felt parents/family members did not understand their collegiate experiences.

8. Nontraditional African American students felt connected to the campus through their relationships with faculty and their peers and not by their participation in campus events, activities, and organizations.

9. Nontraditional students relied on their faith in God to strengthen them when they had struggles and challenges with school. Five out of the 10 (50%) ($N = 10$) students in the interviews shared they prayed and asked the Lord to supply the strength and guidance needed to accomplish their academic goal. These students had faith Jesus would help them to be successful.

The researcher used survey and interview questions to focus on the student's community college experience and their ability to manage employment and family obligations while attending the participating North Carolina community college. The participants responded to questions about their relationship with faculty members, their engagement in campus activities, the ability to finance their education and the utilization of academic counseling and student services programs to support student success. The researcher will present the data results in six themes supported by the findings in the empirical research and the literature review. The additional emerging themes will be discussed in this study to examine their impact on the attrition of nontraditional African American students enrolled at community college.

Of those surveyed, 44.6% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students indicated they considered dropping out of community college because of their obligations to provide for family.

During the interviews, seven out of the 10 (70%) ($N = 10$) students indicated they felt stressed managing family, work and school responsibilities. The researcher reported data findings from the survey indicating 36.5% of students considered separating from the community college because of inadequate financial aid to cover tuition fees. Six of the 10 (60%) interview participants were satisfied with the amount of financial aid they received from the community college. Four (40%) students did not qualify for financial aid and experienced stress paying their tuition. In the survey, 71% of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college had positive faculty-student relationships. The interviews from the 10 nontraditional African American students revealed all the students had positive relationships with faculty.   The researcher revealed in the empirical research that student services and academic counseling programs influenced the retention and graduation of nontraditional community college students. The researcher reported findings from the survey indicating 67% of nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college did not use student services or academic counseling programs. Seven out of 10 students interviewed for the study utilized tutoring services provided through student services programs. Three of the interviewees were not aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling programs. The researcher shared data regarding student engagement and its influence on the retention and the graduation of nontraditional African American students in community college. When surveyed, 87% of nontraditional African American students indicated they did not participate in campus activities or organizations. All the nontraditional African American interviewees who attended the participating North Carolina community college did not participate in campus activities or organizations.

Nontraditional African American students who participated in the survey indicated the frequency they received family support from their family members and friends. Fifty-three percent (53%) indicated they received encouragement weekly, 26% within the last seven to 14 days, 6% last month, 6% within the last six months and 9% indicated they did not receive encouragement from family members or a friend. The 10 nontraditional African American interview participants shared they had some level of family support while attending the participating North Carolina community college. The researcher evaluated factors influencing the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college by utilizing a phenomenological research method with a survey component to collect data with surveys and interviews from the target population. From the survey and interview responses of nontraditional African American participants in this study, nine additional themes emerged. These additional themes emerged from the data which may or may not be utilized by others for continued research in this area.. The emerging themes from this research may provide the foundation for future work in this area to continue.

Discussion of the Results

The researcher's use of surveys and interviews produced data to identify factors impacting the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in a community college setting. The researcher included the emerging themes validated by the empirical research. The researcher will discuss the additional themes which emerged from the 10 interviews conducted on nontraditional African American participants currently enrolled in a participating North Carolina community college. The researcher gained insightful results from this study regarding the academic needs of nontraditional African American students and

the factors separating this target population from 2-year colleges. The researcher used the data to answer the following research questions:

RQ1 What factors affect the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students in community college?

RQ2. What can community college leaders do to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the community college?

The researcher provides a discussion of the results in this section by reporting the statistical data from the Qualtrics survey and by utilizing qualitative data from the interviews with nontraditional African American students who shared their lived experiences at the participating North Carolina community college. The researcher will present the emerging themes from the research study which were supported by the empirical research and the additional themes that emerged during the interviews with research participants.

Fulfilling obligations to provide for family. The researcher reported quantitative data indicating 44.6% ($N = 103$) of students considered dropping out of community college due to difficulty balancing family, work, and school responsibilities. Of those surveyed, 74.3% of nontraditional African American students answered they had experienced stress while managing family responsibilities and attending classes at the community college. Nontraditional African American students experienced stress during enrollment and this stress had an impact on degree completion. When students considered dropping out of college, the reason cited most often was an obligation to provide for family members. Seven out of 10 (70%) ($N = 10$) of the nontraditional students who were interviewed for this research study indicated they felt stressed managing family and school responsibilities. Participant 2 was a single parent who experienced

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difficulty providing for her child and paying tuition and fees at the community college. Participant 2 enrolled in several different community colleges and dropped out of this participating North Carolina community college twice to earn income to provide for her family. When Participant 2 was placed on academic probation due to poor academic performance, she no longer qualified for financial aid. "I tried, but I just couldn't do it! It was so hard, you know, going to school, going to work, and coming home taking care of a child on top of all that! I just had to let it all go." Participant 2's decision to drop out of college to provide for her family affected her financial aid status with the community college. When Participant 2 returned to the community college to complete the associate degree, she was placed on academic probation and could not receive any financial aid to assist with tuition, fees, and books. Balancing the need to provide for her child with the financial demands of financing an education created stress for Participant 2 which made it difficult for her to focus on her studies. However, with the help of family members who assisted with childcare and supported Participant 2 financially with living expenses, the student was able to continue with her studies at the participating North Carolina community college.

Participant 7 graduated from the participating North Carolina community college in 2018 but recalled how she considered dropping out of college. While Participant 7 was enrolled in courses pursuing an associate degree, she had a family emergency. Her 4-year-old son had a heart condition requiring surgery. Participant 7 admitted her son's health was her first priority and when faced with the wellbeing of her son, she simply forgot all about school. Although she was near the completion of her associate degree, Participant 7 considered dropping out of college to ensure her son received quality care. Participant 7 shared she could not concentrate in school and she had difficulty balancing the medical care her son needed and her educational

responsibilities at the community college. Although Participant 7 was married, her husband's career was very demanding. Participant 7's spouse did not have the flexibility needed to assist in the coordination of cardiac care for their minor child. Participant 7 had more flexibility with her employer and became focused on her young son's health. During this time, Participant 7 experienced high levels of stress with balancing family responsibilities and continuing in her degree program. With familial and institutional support, Participant 7 made the decision to finish the associate degree.

Participant 4 and Participant 8 departed from the participating North Carolina community college within the last two academic years due to their family circumstances. Participant 8 was unmarried and was a student at the community college when she got pregnant. Participant 8 shared her concern for her unborn child led to her decision to drop out of college. "I needed to work," Participant 8 stated, "I knew that I would be having a baby in nine months and I needed to get a job to take care of my baby." Participant 8 decided she needed to earn an adequate income to provide for her child. She stated her education was important but providing for her unborn child was the first priority. She did not consult with student services or with academic counseling for assistance before deciding to withdraw from the community college. Participant 8 did not seek institutional support because she felt her pregnancy was a private matter and solely her responsibility. She did not believe the community college could provide any services to assist her with her situation. Participant 8 knew she would have numerous obstetrical appointments which would interfere with her classes. Therefore, she believed it would be easier to drop out of college and have her baby so she could avoid the stress of balancing prenatal care while enrolled at the community college.

Participant 4 also departed from the participating community college to provide for her family. Participant 4 was the head of her household and experienced financial difficulty while she was enrolled in the community college. She did not consult student services or academic counseling before making the decision to depart from the community college. Participant 4 was excited about attending the community college but shared she discontinued her education to provide for her children. "It was a hard decision," Participant 4 said, "But it was what I had to do at the time." Of those surveyed, 44.6% ($N = 103$) of students considered departing from the community college due to family obligations. The theme fulfilling obligations to provide for family emerged from participant responses on the survey and during interviews to questions concerning the reasons nontraditional African American students dropped out of community college.

During the interviews additional themes emerged from the fulfilling obligations to family theme. Nontraditional African American students did not seek institutional support when their reasons to depart from the community college involved their financial obligations to their family. The two nontraditional African American students in this study made the decision to separate from the community college to earn additional income to support their families without seeking guidance from student services or academic counseling. These students were confident in their ability to make the best decision for their family without consulting institutional services or other external resources. This finding was significant because almost 50% of nontraditional African American students depart from the community college without receiving a degree (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Nearly 45% (44.6%) of students reported they considered separating from the community college due to financial obligations to their families. The ability to retain more nontraditional African American students will involve the ability of the

community college to assist students who experience this type of crisis. Although an additional emerging theme indicated nontraditional African American students were reluctant to discuss financial challenges with providing for their families with student services and academic counseling, the ability of the institution to gain the trust of students who are faced with these issues may or may not lead to retaining more of these students to graduation.

Inadequate financial aid for tuition. The lack of financial aid was cited as the second reason nontraditional African American students failed to obtain an associate degree from the community college. When asked on the survey about their satisfaction regarding the financial aid received to finance their education, 61.4% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students were unhappy with their financial aid and 36.5% of them considered dropping out of college because they did not receive sufficient aid for tuition. Six out of 10 (60%) ($N = 10$) nontraditional African American interview participants stated they were satisfied with the amount of financial aid they received from the participating North Carolina community college. Four (40%) of the interview participants were not pleased with the amount of their financial aid because they were required to pay out-of-pocket for their tuition. These students accepted they had to finance their education and paid the tuition for community college enrollment. Participant 3 and Participant 7 did not qualify for financial aid based on their income. Participant 2 was ineligible for financial aid because she was on academic probation for previous academic performance, Participant 10 did not receive financial aid but did not wish to disclose the circumstances influencing her lack of tuition assistance. Although these students shared their financial struggles during the interviews, none of them dropped out of community college for inadequate financial aid for tuition.

Participant 2 elaborated on the experiences she encountered with financing her education at the participating North Carolina community college. Participant 2 was on academic probation and had to pay out-of-pocket for tuition and fees. She was not eligible for financial aid and often juggled financial responsibilities. As she neared the completion of her degree, Participant 2 had many challenges threatening degree completion. She struggled financially to pay monthly living expenses and received assistance from family members who supported her educational endeavors. Participant 2 was motivated to obtain her associate degree and refused to drop out of community college although she could not afford to purchase any of the books she needed for her courses. This student relied on the PowerPoint presentations of her instructors and fellow classmates who electronically forwarded images of required readings and assignments to her in an email or in a text message. Participant 2 was successful in a degree program but had not purchased any of the required books because she could not afford to rent or to buy them.

Participant 2 shared she continued in her degree program because she had invested too much time, money, and effort into obtaining an associate degree. She encountered numerous challenges in her studies, but it was the support of her family, her instructors and her classmates encouraging her to persist despite the financial hardships. The support with living expenses and childcare from her parents relieved some of the stress Participant 2 encountered with degree completion. Participant 2 remained positive and expressed gratitude in having a place to live even though her small child and she moved back home with her parents. From the interview with Participant 2 an additional theme emerged. Participant 2's parents had not pursued higher education and did not understand the commitment involved in obtaining an associate degree. Participant 2's parents were supportive with childcare but did not provide the emotional support Participant 2 needed to persist to degree completion because they had not attended college. The

theme emerging from Participant 2's interview was nontraditional African American students who did not have parents who attended college or have a degree were more likely to drop out of their community college programs. These students felt their parents/family members did not understand their collegiate experiences.

Participant 2 shared her elderly parents supported her education by providing financial assistance and childcare as she needed it. The student was thankful for the family support she received but admitted she did not receive the encouragement she would have liked to receive from her family to persist in degree completion. Participant 2 shared,

> I know that they helped me all that they knew how. It's just that none of them ever went
> to college, so they really don't understand the kind of pressure and stress that I had going
> back to school with a young child.

Participant 2 shared additional insight to support the emerging theme of the parents of nontraditional African American students who did not pursue higher education may or may not provide the academic encouragement needed to persist in degree completion. Wild and Ebbers (2002) shared findings indicating students who did overcome barriers to attend community college remained at a disadvantage regarding retention and degree attainment. Because the parents of nontraditional African American students may not have pursued higher education, their inability to understand the process of degree completion may or may not have affected the retention and graduation rates of the nontraditional African American student in community college.

Participant 2 recalled how her parents questioned when she would finally receive her associate degree, why was it taking so long and whether she would be gainfully employed in a position which allowed her to be financially independent. Participant 2 stated the following:

They have been helping me out for so long. They just want to see me do good. They

expect for me to just hop into a job making good money time I get this degree. They do

not understand that I might not get a good paying job right after I graduate.

The parents of nontraditional African American students may not understand the dynamics of

degree completion and without intending to, may create additional stress for students. Parents

who have not pursued higher education may not understand the commitment involved in

obtaining an associate degree. These parents may be supportive with childcare but may not be

aware of the emotional support needed to persist to graduation. Participant 2's parents were

supportive with childcare but did not provide the emotional support to persist in the degree

program. Wilds and Ebbers (2002) reported African American students who did not have parents

who attended college or have a degree were more likely to drop out of their community college.

Nontraditional African American students felt their parents/family members did not understand

their collegiate experiences.

Parents who did not pursue higher education did not understand the challenges of degree

completion or the finances required for tuition and fees. The theme related to inadequate

financial aid for tuition emerged from participant responses to questions on the survey and

during the 10 interviews with nontraditional African American community college students.

Nontraditional African American students shared their lived experiences on the campus of the

participating North Carolina community college. Their experiences led to the emergence of

additional themes to better understand the plight of nontraditional African American students and

their challenges to persist to degree completion both inside and outside the classroom.

Positive faculty-student relationships. The researcher reported the results of the

Qualtrics survey which indicated the relationship between the faculty and the nontraditional

African American student was very important. Of those surveyed, 71% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American male and female students had a positive community college experience. Among those surveyed, 71% of nontraditional African American students also indicated on the survey they had positive interactions with their professors. A significant finding with the positive faculty-student relationships theme was students responded to questions regarding their community college experience and their interaction with their faculty and professor in the same manner. When 25% of nontraditional African American students had an acceptable community college experience, 25% of these students indicated their interaction with their professor was acceptable as well. Among those surveyed, 3% of nontraditional African American students stated they had a negative community college experience and the same percentage 3% responded they had a negative relationship with their professor and faculty. This finding was significant because nontraditional African American students associated their college experience with their positive or negative relationship with their professor and faculty. If nontraditional African American students had a positive college experience, the students indicated they also had a positive relationship with their faculty and professor.

However, when a nontraditional African American student had a negative community college experience, this same percentage of students had a negative interaction with faculty and their professor. A student's perception of his community college experience was connected to the student's perception of their relationship with their professor and faculty. From participant survey responses, 93% of nontraditional African American male and female students felt comfortable approaching their professor or faculty member with an issue and 7% of these students did not feel comfortable approaching a community college professor or faculty member. The majority of nontraditional African American students felt comfortable approaching their

faculty or professors because 86% of them received positive feedback from their instructors either weekly, within seven to 14 days, monthly or within a three-month period.

During the 10 interviews, all nontraditional African American interview participants indicated they had a positive relationship with their faculty members. These nontraditional African American students indicated faculty members and professors were concerned about their success as students at the community college. The faculty and professors were approachable and made themselves available to their nontraditional students through visits during office hours, phone calls, and emails. The 10 nontraditional African American students shared they had difficulty balancing work and school responsibilities at various stages of their educational journey. However, these students indicated they did not consider dropping out of college due to a negative experience with a faculty member or their professor. It was the encouragement of a faculty member or a professor who motivated three of the 10 nontraditional African American interviewees to persist to graduation.

Participant 7 encountered a medical emergency involving her 4-year-old son. During her enrollment at the participating North Carolina community college, her young son required heart surgery. Participant 7 also worked full-time and the stress from attending classes, working on her job, and coordinating the care for her child was overwhelming. Participant 7 admitted she entertained the idea of dropping out of college because it seemed to be the simplest solution to her problem. Participant 7 reasoned if she discontinued her classes at the community college, she would have extra time to care for her son while she worked a full-time job. Resigning from her job or reducing her hours was not an option because her income was needed to provide for her family. Therefore, dropping out of college seemed to be the best method for reducing the present stress level in her life. Participant 7 recalled a brief meeting she had with one of her professors.

She explained to her professor why she was having difficulty focusing in class and she was planning to withdraw from the college due to her son's medical needs. Her professor was extremely understanding and compassionate. Most importantly, her professor directed her to student services and academic counseling. Although her professor understood the stress Participant 7 was experiencing, the professor did not advise her to depart from the community college. Instead, the professor encouraged Participant 7 to consult with student services and academic counseling before deciding to withdraw from the community college. Participant 7 stated, "If it wasn't for my professors, I would have just gave up and dropped out. I did not see any other way to get through it." Participant 7 also shared her professors called her and sent her emails during her son's heart surgery and recovery. Her professors were genuinely concerned about her personal wellbeing as well as her academic success at the community college. "They [instructors and faculty] were willing to work with me while my son went through his surgery. They [instructors and faculty] understood what I was going through, and they were there by email or by phone call. They were there" (Participant 7).

Participant 2 paid for her tuition out-of-pocket and struggled financially with her living expenses. Maintaining employment, caring for a young child, and attending the community college was stressful. Participant 2 recounted how she considered dropping out of the participating North Carolina community college numerous times. Dropping out of the community college seemed to be the solution to end her struggle but it was her faculty and professors who encouraged her to persist to degree completion. Like Participant 2, Participant 7 shared her challenges with her faculty and professors. Participant 2 was on academic probation and was not eligible to receive financial aid. Her efforts to maintain sufficient employment to care for her child and to fund her community college education affected her academic

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performance. When Participant 2 shared her situation with one of her professors, the professor encouraged her to seek assistance from student services and academic counseling. Participant 2 learned emergency funding was available at the community college and she may have been eligible to receive the funding. Participant 2 admitted she probably would not have sought those services on her own because she did not believe the community college would assist her since she was on academic probation. "Before I would talk to student services, or academic counseling, I would talk to my professor first. I am in the class with them all the time, and I trust what they tell me to do" (Participant 2).

Participant 6 had a positive faculty-student relationship with the community college instructors but recalled one incident which affected her confidence and her motivation to complete the associate degree. Participant 6 struggled to pass Math 60 which was a degree requirement for her program. After receiving regular tutoring, Participant 6 did not pass the math course. Participant 6 failed the majority of her exams in the class but continued to work hard in the class and did well on the final exam. The math instructor commented in class Participant 6 only passed one test during the entire semester and the one test was the final exam. Participant 6 was hurt by the comment and was embarrassed before her peers. Although Participant 6 passed the final exam, she failed the course and was required to retake Math 60. Participant 6 continued to receive tutoring and registered for Math 60 again being sure not to enroll in the professor's class again who hurt her feelings. Participant 6 shared she had previously had positive experiences with her professors and decided not to drop out of the community college. "My feelings were hurt but I was not going to let him [the professor] stop me from reaching my goal" (Participant 6). Participant 6 did not allow her negative experience with the math teacher to affect her overall perception of her community college experience. Prior to this incident,

Participant 6 had a positive experience at the community college and her professors were

positive and very supportive. The nontraditional African American student re-enrolled in Math

60 and passed the course the following semester. Participant 6 shared after this incident she had a

great Math 60 teacher who was patient with the students and knew how to simplify the math

concepts. "I will never forget her," Participant 6 stated, "I would not have made it through that

class without her! She was an angel."

Additional themes emerged from the positive faculty-student relationships theme. When

nontraditional African American students had a positive relationship with their faculty and

professors, they trusted them and sought their advice on matters beyond the enrolled course with

the professor. The nontraditional African American students approached their faculty before

consulting with student services or academic counseling. Nontraditional African American

interview participants sought advice from professors regarding issues affecting their academic

performance at the community college. When the faculty and professors advised students to

consult institutional services, the students immediately followed the professor's suggestions. The

emerging theme regarding nontraditional African American students who have a positive

faculty-student relationship sought assistance from their instructors before visiting student

services and academic counseling demonstrated the trust nontraditional African American

students have for their professors. Three students admitted in the interviews if they did not have

the support of positive faculty and professors, they would have dropped out of the community

college. Of those surveyed, 30% ($N = 103$) of the nontraditional African American students who

participated in the interviews would have failed to persist to degree completion due to

unfavorable experiences with their professors during enrollment. The lived experiences of

nontraditional African American community college students revealed the importance of positive faculty-student relationships in the persistence of the target population to degree completion.

Student services/academic counseling awareness and utilization. The researcher reported findings from the survey indicating 67% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students did not use student service and academic counseling and 41% of the students were not aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling. Seven of the 10 (70%) ($N = 10$) students interviewed shared they were aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling at the institution. The students indicated information about student services and academic counseling was either sent to them in an institution-wide email, was included on their syllabus or was shared by a representative from student services or academic counseling who visited their classes to inform the students of the services provided by those departments. The seven students who were aware of student services and academic counseling utilized the tutoring services provided by the participating North Carolina community college.

Three (30%) nontraditional African American students were not aware of the services provided by student services and academic counseling. Participant 10 indicated she was not aware of the assistance student services and academic counseling provided because she did not need any help from them. Participant 10 stated that, if she did need assistance academically, she would seek academic support from the student services and academic counseling departments at the specific time. Participant 10 was not interested in learning about institutional services unless she needed the assistance for degree completion. When Participant 7 experienced a family emergency, she became aware of the assistance provided by student support and academic counseling services. Participant 7's faculty and community college instructors referred her to

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student services and academic counseling during her personal hardship. Participant 7 received the academic support she needed to persist to degree completion.

Participant 7 shared if her professors had not advised her to contact student services and academic counseling for assistance she probably would not have done so independently. Participant 7 admitted she would have probably departed from the community college without seeking a solution to continue her education during her child's medical crisis. The insight shared by these nontraditional African American students during the interviews regarding their use of student services and academic counseling allowed additional themes to emerge about the student services and academic counseling programs. These additional themes were:

1. Nontraditional African American students who have positive faculty-student relationships sought assistance from their instructors before visiting student services and academic counseling independently

2. Nontraditional African American students learned about the services provided by student services and academic counseling after they had problems with their grades or with a course

3. Nontraditional African American students did not like to receive numerous institutional emails that did not relate to them. These students only read emails from their instructors.

Participant 10 did not feel it was necessary to know about institutional services in advance if she did not currently need them to persist to degree completion. She only wanted to know about student services and academic counseling programs required for degree completion. Participant 10 did not wish to be informed about services she did not presently need and felt it was her responsibility to seek the assistance of student services and academic counseling when

she needed them. Participant 7 was not aware of the assistance student services and academic counseling provided until she was referred to these departments by her professor. The student confided in her professors regarding her family emergency and how it was affecting her academic success at the community college.

At the recommendation of her faculty, Participant 7 received assistance from student services and academic counseling which allowed her to continue at the community college and to graduate with an associate degree as outlined in her degree completion plan. Nontraditional African American students trust instructors with whom they have a positive faculty-student relationship. All interviewees stated they had positive relationships with their instructors and the students felt comfortable approaching their instructors and faculty when they had a problem. When positive relationships existed between nontraditional African American students and their professors, the students were comfortable sharing personal information with their faculty about their community college experience. Before contacting institutional services on campus, nontraditional African American students approached their faculty, shared their challenges, and followed the advice given by the faculty member or instructor. As shown by Participant 7, the relationship with faculty may be vital in determining if a student persisted to degree completion. The nontraditional African American students in this research study demonstrated positive faculty-student relationships did influence the persistence of the nontraditional African American student to degree completion.

Participant 2 was not aware of the services student services and academic counseling provided. Participant 2 was placed on academic probation and was frustrated when she followed her instructor's advice to contact financial aid and academic counseling. Participant 2 was not pleased with the computerized phone system and felt more comfortable speaking with a

representative of the community college instead of navigating the phone system and web advisor. Participant 2 preferred human contact/interaction and did not respond to the numerous institutional emails she received unless the emails were from her professor. Participant 2 shared student services and academic counseling may have reached out to her on several occasions via institutional email, but she did not read all the emails she received daily. "Many times, I do not check it [emails], unless I know it's something I need to be on the look-out for from my teachers. Most of the time, it [emails] be things I don't think pertain to me" (Participant 2). Student services and academic counseling may send information about their services to all students via institutional email. Nontraditional African American interview participants shared during the interviews their time was already in demand, therefore, they had to prioritize their activities. Participant 2 stated she may have missed vital information from the community college because she only read those emails which seemed to be important and were from her professors.

Nontraditional African American students were challenged with managing employment, family, and college responsibilities. They did not utilize their time and energy on activities (such as reading irrelevant emails) that did not pertain directly to their courses. If these students did not need the assistance of student services or academic counseling at the time the email was received, they ignored the emails from these departments. When the principal investigator networked with the faith-based community to locate research participants, Participant 2 readily volunteered for the research. When Participant 2 was told about the research, she stated,

> Oh, I saw those emails in my student email account, but I didn't read 'em! If I knew that it was you, I would have called you to let you know that I would be in your study. I didn't know that it was you because I didn't open the emails.

As a nontraditional African American student who also attended the participating community college and who is presently enrolled in the doctoral program at Concordia University–Portland, I can relate to Participant 2's approach for selecting the emails I read daily. The first emails I read were from my professors. The second emails I read were from departments such as financial aid because they pertained to my tuition and fees. Lastly, I read the emails with an interesting subject line. If I received an email without a brief description of its contents, the email was not read and was often deleted. Like the nontraditional African American students participating in this research study, I was balancing employment, family obligations and academic responsibilities. My goal was to use my time wisely to focus on important information I needed to have knowledge of as a student.

Today, I understand the importance of reviewing all emails and responding to researchers who request my participation in their data collection efforts. My excuse for neglecting to take a few minutes to participate in a survey was I did not have the time to complete the survey and other students would respond to the survey to assist the researcher in generating data for their study. I rationalized my input was not needed and would not make a difference. Like Participant 2, I did not open the emails and I determined the importance of an email by the description indicated in the subject line. Participant 2's transparency in sharing why she did not respond to three survey distributions from the community college explained why I experienced a low participation response (6.23%) ($N = 103$) on the survey. When nontraditional African American students did not perceive the institution-wide emails as important, they did not read the emails. Unfortunately, vital information regarding services to assist the nontraditional African American student are missed and students do not receive knowledge to benefit their degree completion. If nontraditional African American students were more receptive to receiving information about

institutional services before they needed them, the nontraditional African American student may be better prepared to address challenges threatening degree completion and cause students to depart from the community college prematurely.

The selectivity of nontraditional African American students in the reading of their emails may affect their knowledge of institutional resources which assist in degree completion. Also, this email practice may limit the collection of data for future researchers who study educational issues affecting the retention and graduation rates of the nontraditional African American student from the community college. Without data, the development of new policies and procedures aimed at reducing the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students from the community college may be hindered. The participation of nontraditional African American students in research studies give researchers insight on the community college experiences of the nontraditional African American student which may lead to the identification of problems affecting their degree completion. The opportunity to study issues affecting the education of nontraditional African American students in 2-year colleges may lead to new policies and procedures to decrease the dropout rate of the nontraditional African American student from community college.

Campus-connected student engagement. Among participant responses, 65% of nontraditional African American students were positive about their community college progress. Findings on the survey indicated 87% of the target population did not participate in campus activities or organizations. The interview participants elaborated on the type of organizations and activities they attended on the community college campus. All interview participants did not attend campus events or participate in organizations on the campus due to their family obligations, employment responsibilities and homework assignments. Four nontraditional

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African American students shared they did attend campus events during their enrollment but only because it was a requirement for a course. Two nontraditional African American students did participate in an organization on campus because it was affiliated with their degree program. These two nontraditional African American students stated they made the time and effort to participate in the organization because it was beneficial to be a member of an organization represented by their degree program and future career.

All interview participants stated they did not have time to participate in campus events and were not interested in attending campus events. The students explained their duties and responsibilities to their family, employer and course assignments made it difficult to participate in campus events for leisure. All interview participants felt welcomed on campus even though they were not interested in attending campus events or joining campus organizations. The 10 nontraditional African American interview participants had very little time to be involved in campus organizations. When their classes ended, nontraditional African American students maintained busy schedules which included employment, caring for their families, and completing homework assignments in a timely manner. All interview participants still felt connected to the participating community college although they did not participate in campus activities or organizations. Tinto's (Rendon et al., 1994) research indicated students persisted toward degree completion when they were able to connect to their campus which could be promoted through the involvement in organizations and campus activities. Although campus involvement promoted retention and persistence on 4-year colleges, this was not true for the community college.

Nontraditional African American students felt connected to the community college through the positive relationships of faculty and other classmates and not from their involvement

in campus activities. All interview participants did not have time to be involved in campus activities and when they did their participation was a requirement for a course. Participant 3's statement reflected the general attitude held by the 10 nontraditional African American interviewees toward the involvement in organizations and their participation in activities on campus. When asked if he attended campus activities or if he was a part of any organizations on the campus, Participant 3 stated:

> No. I got so many other activities at church and with my wife and grandkids, I didn't particularly do a lot of things there [on campus]. I felt a connection to them [community college campus] because there were things that I could do if I chose to. It's just managing time and trying to do my homework and stuff. I didn't feel where I needed to do a lot of that. I didn't feel left out or anything like that.

The 10 nontraditional African American students stated they were connected to the community college because of the caring attitude of the faculty and the staff and not because of the organizations or events they chose to participate in. All of the nontraditional African American students felt supported by the institution to succeed academically. Their nonparticipation in campus activities and organizations was a personal choice. As nontraditional African American students constantly tried to maintain a balance between family, work, and school responsibilities, they did not consider the participation in campus events and activities as a priority. All nontraditional African American interviewees felt it was not the campus activities which made them feel connected to the community college but rather the relationship they had with their faculty which made them feel valued as a student on the campus.

While the 10 nontraditional African American student interviewees were appreciative of the extracurricular activities on campus, they agreed their demanding schedules did not allow

them to participate in campus activities. However, if an interesting activity was occurring on campus the nontraditional African American student felt welcomed to attend and attended the event if it did not interfere with other obligations. Nontraditional African American students prioritized duties and responsibilities and did not participate in extracurricular campus activities. Nontraditional students lacked the time to participate in campus activities and did not connect with the campus through student engagement activities. Nontraditional students did not live on campus and did not have the time or the flexibility to attend extracurricular activities. These nontraditional African American students in this research study were employed and most of them had children.

The nontraditional African American students enrolled in the participating North Carolina 2-year college did not connect to the campus like traditional students attending a 4-year college. Traditional students connected to the campus through student engagement activities on campus, but nontraditional students connected to the campus through positive relationships with faculty and staff. Therefore, methods to connect traditional students to the campus with activities may not be successful with nontraditional African American students who connect to community college differently. The researcher concluded student engagement needs at 4-year college students were different from those of nontraditional African American community college students pursuing associate degrees. Because nontraditional African American students connect to the campus differently, additional research on student engagement may be required to support the target population to graduation.

Family support. The Qualtrics survey contained the responses of 103 nontraditional African American students who attended the participating North Carolina community college. From participant survey responses, 91% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students

indicated they received family support while enrolled at the community college. Students received various levels of family support which motivated them to persist to degree completion. The researcher did not include family support as a theme controlled or managed by the institution. However, this research did acknowledge the presence or absence of family support in the retention and graduation of students from the community college system. All nontraditional African American students in the interviews shared they received support from their families and friends. Support ranged from encouragement and motivation, to childcare and financial assistance. The nontraditional African American interviewees indicated the presence of family support during their academic pursuits encouraged them to degree completion. Family support also included being understanding when the completion of coursework and studying for exams required additional time which may have affected obligations to the family.

Although family support emerged as a theme impacting the success of the nontraditional African American student, the researcher did not examine this theme as one controlled or managed by the institution because family support was difficult to measure among students. The researcher reported the emergence of family support as a theme impacting the academic success of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges. Family support was difficult to measure because its presence can manifest in various forms and degrees among students. In this study, all nontraditional African American interviewees had family support in their academic pursuits. The interview participants stated encouragement from family and friends and financial support to pay tuition led to student persistence.

Without the support of family and friends some of the nontraditional African American students would not have persisted to degree completion. When stressed with balancing family, work, and school, the support of family and friends encouraged students to continue in their

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education. Participant 7 shared she had an excellent support system at home. Participant 7's husband understood she needed extra time to study when she came home from work or school. Her husband would take care of their son and complete a variety of tasks to make it easier for her when she arrived home. On many occasions when Participant 7 arrived home from work, her husband already prepared her study area which was very supportive. "My husband supported me 100% and made going back to school easier for me to do" (Participant 7).

  Additional emerging themes. There were nine additional emerging themes from the interviews with 10 nontraditional African American students participating in the research study. The researcher was not aware of these additional factors influencing the retention and persistence of nontraditional African American students in the community college system until after the completion of the interviews during the data analysis stage. The emergence of additional themes may be an indication of additional research is needed in this area. These additional themes were not discovered by the empirical research and may be an indication of the multiple, intricate, factors affecting the retention, persistence, and graduation of nontraditional African American students at the community college. When the researcher networked with the local faith-based community, members from various congregations volunteered to be participants in the research. Participant 1, Participant 2, Participant 3, Participant 6, and Participant 7 shared they relied on prayer and their Christian faith when they were challenged in school. These students trusted God when they struggled to pass classes, when they did not qualify for financial aid to finance their education, when they experienced personal hardships, when they could not afford their required textbooks and when medical emergencies threatened the health of family members making it difficult for these students to focus on degree completion. This research only mentions the additional themes with the primary themes which emerged from the research findings to identify

factors threatening the retention, persistence, and degree completion of nontraditional African American students. The initial research identified key factors affecting the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students in the community college setting. These factors were:

1. The need to successfully fulfill obligations to family

2. A positive relationship with faculty is conducive to student success.

3. Programs from academic support and student services must target specific student needs.

4. Additional financial aid opportunities are required to ensure the completion of degree programs.

5. Effective student engagement activities assist in connecting the student to their learning experience.

6. Supportive family members.

The researcher used this phenomenological research study to validate the initial findings on the impact of the previously mentioned factors on the retention and graduation of African American students. The results of this research included the emergence of nine additional themes which may require research to determine their impact on the graduation rates of nontraditional African American students from 2-year colleges. While this study does not examine the additional emerging themes beyond mentioning them, these themes may be a catalyst to additional research to determine methods for better supporting the nontraditional African American student to graduation.

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

Increasing the number of nontraditional African American students retained to graduation

requires a collaborative effort between faculty, student support services, and academic counseling to ensure the needs of nontraditional African American students are met to effectively support their degree completion. The academic needs of nontraditional African American students at the community college were different from traditional students pursuing higher education at 4-year colleges. Therefore, methods to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students at community college may differ from educational practices to support traditional students at 4-year colleges to graduation. Nearly 75% of students currently enrolled in colleges are nontraditional students who returned to college for various reasons. However, 50% of nontraditional African American community college students were retained to graduation (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). In this phenomenological research study, nontraditional African American students may have additional challenges which affect their ability to obtain an associate degree.

Tinto (1993) stated student engagement was vital to academic persistence and degree completion. He focused on developing a theory on the engagement of students attending a 4-year college. Tinto's research was based on students who resided on the college campus. Nontraditional community college students are diverse and may have different needs than the traditional student attending a 4-year college. Bean and Metzner's study, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014), focused on the needs of nontraditional students who were enrolled in a community college setting. Their research provided a lens into the world of the nontraditional student attending community college by addressing the challenges and needs of this specific group of students. Davis et al. (2004) provided an understanding of the perspective of African American students enrolled in a predominately white educational setting. It was through the compilation of Tinto, as cited in Rendon et al. (1994), and Bean and Metzner, as cited in Bergman et al. (2014),

that the researcher learned of various challenges nontraditional African American students encounter which affect their retention to graduation.

Wood and Ireland (2013) shared positive faculty-student relationship was vital to academic persistence. Grabowski et al. (2016) indicated financial aid for nontraditional African American students was needed for degree completion. The nontraditional African American students in this study juggled the demands of the workplace, their household, and responsibilities in the classroom. Affordability was an issue among students and the lack of financial aid for tuition made it difficult to persist to degree completion (Grabowski et al., 2016). Family support among nontraditional African American students impacted the retention of this target population to graduation (Grabowski et al., 2016). These findings were significant and the researcher confirmed the empirical research which identified these factors as contributors to the attrition of nontraditional African American male and female students. The success of the nontraditional African American student at a 2-year college may rely on the ability of community college leaders to meet the specific needs of this student population. Scholars can design a qualitative study to examine the additional themes emerging from interviews with nontraditional African American students. Their lived experiences may provide insight on factors affecting the persistence of nontraditional African American students to graduation.

Community of practice. The findings and results in this study were significant for educational practitioners who serve nontraditional African American students in community colleges and who want to understand the specific needs of this target population which may lead to improved methodology to retain more students to graduation. As supported by the research study, more than 80% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students considered separating from the community college for two specific reasons. These two reasons were

difficulty balancing family, employment, and school responsibilities (44.6%) and the lack of

financial aid or other funding for tuition and fees (35.5%). Community college practitioners can

assist nontraditional African American students by providing additional programs specifically to

meet the needs of these students. Programs to help nontraditional students manage stress and

inform them of available financial opportunities can support student success. Nontraditional

African American students manage a wide variety of responsibilities (e.g., parent, employer, and

student) which compete for both their time and attention and can be stressful to manage

simultaneously. Institutional services can intentionally address issues which may lead to the

increased retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in the

community college system.

Relationship to current literature. A review of the literature identified factors leading

to the high dropout rates for nontraditional African American students in higher education. These

factors were poor faculty-student relationships (Wood & Ireland, 2013), ineffective student

services and academic counseling programs (Purnell et al., 2004), insufficient student financial

aid (Grabowski et al., 2016) and the absence of family support (Grabowski et al., 2016). When

nontraditional African American students experienced these obstacles while pursuing higher

education at community colleges, they were less likely to persist in their degree programs.

Nontraditional students are challenged to use their time and energy efficiently to care for their

families, to maintain employment and to succeed academically in their degree programs.

Research regarding the retention of students has focused on retaining traditional and

nontraditional students at 4-year colleges. The goal of 4-year colleges is to ensure students who

live on campus are connected to their learning experience through student engagement. Studies

show the retention rate is higher for students who reside on campus in comparison to those who

reside at home (Sheehy, 2015). Most 2-year colleges do not have dorms and because students do not live on campus, community college administrators are challenged to effectively connect students to their learning experience This disconnection to the campus can affect student engagement and impact the retention rate of nontraditional African American students who attend community college.

Tinto's (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 1994) 1975 theory on retention was based on students attending a 4-year college and did not consider the needs of a diverse, nontraditional student body in the community college system. Tinto's (1993) theory focused on six components:

1. Pre-enrollment characteristics of students
2. Initial commitments to their goals and the institution
3. Academic and social systems of the institution
4. Degree of academic and social integration
5. Changes in goals and institutional commitments as a process of academic and social integration
6. The decision to drop out or persist

Tinto (Rendon, Jalomo, & Nora, 1994) used these components toward 4-year colleges and did not account for the needs of nontraditional students who did not live on the campus. While Tinto's research allowed administrators of 4-year colleges to make evidence-based decisions regarding student retention, community college leaders could not apply these findings when developing programs to better serve their nontraditional students pursuing associate degrees. The differences in students who attend 4-year colleges and those students enrolled in a community college were a flaw in Tinto's model (Webb, 1989). Today, a limited amount of research exists regarding the retention of nontraditional students in a community college setting. To improve

retention and graduation rates, the community college should consider a comprehensive assessment plan to examine the needs of their students. Factors influencing the retention of the nontraditional student have changed since Tinto's (1993) theory in 1975 and these factors should be considered when addressing the needs of these students. Also, the family unit may differ today than in 1975 which may have an impact on the duties and responsibility of a parent-student in the household (Murdock, 2017). In 1975, 11,245 children grew up in single-parent families but by 2018, this number had increased to 19.65 million children living in single-parent families (Duffin, 2019). This statistic varies by race and ethnicity. The Annie E. Casey Foundation (2018) reported 66% of African American children in 2016 lived in single-parent families. This statistic varies based on race and ethnicity. Today's nontraditional African American students face additional challenges balancing family, work, and school than nontraditional students in 1975. Tinto's theory was developed when single-parent families were less prevalent in our society than they are today, and his research did not capture the impact of single parenthood on degree completion.

The researcher used this study to validate the initial findings and the effect of these factors on retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges:

1. Difficulty balancing family, employment, and academic responsibilities
2. Positive faculty-student relationships
3. Sufficient financial aid opportunities to finance education
4. Family support

Research findings demonstrated students reported their community college experience was positive when they had positive relationships with their professor and the faculty. Likewise,

when students had a negative faculty-student relationship, students indicated their community college experience was negative. The researcher used this finding to confirm the importance of the faculty-student relationship in the persistence, retention, and graduation of the nontraditional African American community college student. All interviewees had positive relationships with their faculty and consulted their professor when they had issues affecting their academic performance. The students shared they trusted their professor's advice and contacted them before they sought assistance from student services and academic counseling. The interviewees stated when they experienced stress balancing multiple responsibilities and encountered unexpected family crises, they would have dropped out of college if their professor had not encouraged them to persist to degree completion. Four nontraditional African American interviewees did experience financial struggles when they did not receive financial aid for college tuition and fees. As highlighted by the empirical research, the lack of financial aid alternatives threatened degree completion when nontraditional African American students were forced to pay tuition fees out-of-pocket.

Although the researcher reported from the literature review that nontraditional African American students lacked the support of family and friends to persist to degree completion, data from the research study did not confirm this finding. In this phenomenological research study, the researcher indicated 81% ($N = 103$) of students received some family support and all interviewees had support from family and friends. When interviewed, nontraditional African American students attending a participating North Carolina community college reported the support of family and friends motivated them to persist to degree completion during personal hardships. Effective student services and academic counseling programs are beneficial to students but the students in this research study did not utilize these services unless they had an

academic or financial issue threatening degree completion. Based on the literature review, the researcher stressed the importance of student engagement connecting students to their learning experience. When students felt connected to the campus their retention rates were higher (Murdock, 2017). However, the researcher shared data from this study which indicated nontraditional African American students felt connected to the campus through the positive faculty relationships and not by the campus activities or participation in organizations. Through these findings, community college administrators can be informed of the retention and graduation challenges of nontraditional African American students and the factors impacting their persistence and attainment of an associate degree.

Community of scholars. The researcher examined factors influencing the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students attending community college. The 103 nontraditional African American students responded to the survey and the 10 nontraditional African American students participated in the research study shared their perspectives and insight regarding their community college experience. The participation of these students in this research provided understanding regarding factors influencing retention and graduation outcomes of nontraditional African American students enrolled in the community college. As the principal investigator, I utilized a phenomenological research approach with a survey component and collected quantitative and qualitative data through a Qualtrics survey and interviews. A total of 103 nontraditional African American students enrolled in the participating North Carolina community college participated in the survey and 10 nontraditional African American students were interviewed for the research study. Data collection occurred over a three-month period and strict confidentiality measures were implemented to protect the identity and information of research participants. The researcher used validity measures to verify data results through

member checking and maintaining a reflexivity and bracketing journal to avoid bias. Quantitative and qualitative data were collected using interviews and a survey which strengthened the validity of the results reported in this research study.

Limitations

The research site electronically contacted 1,600 nontraditional African American students to invite them to participate in the research study and distributed the survey to these students on three separate occasions. Due to a low response and participation rate, the principal investigator utilized social media to obtain survey and interview participants for the research study. The researcher visited local libraries, and networked with the local faith-based community to increase research participation. Despite the $40 incentive, participation in the survey remained low (6.23%) ($N = 103$) and interested respondents did not commit to scheduled interview times. Data collection methodology may have produced more data if multiple community colleges were used instead of the one participating North Carolina community college campus which served as the sole research site for this study. Researchers once considered getting ½ of a 1% response rate as a good outcome for a survey. However, the response percentage to surveys continue to decline today, and the response to on-survey are lower than those administered in a classroom setting (Kusnetzky, 2010).

Direct access to research participants may have generated greater response on the survey and interest in interview participation. During the interviews, nontraditional African American students admitted to ignoring emails that did not come directly from their professor because they felt the emails did not pertain to them. Today's students may be overwhelmed by the numerous emails and text messages they receive on a daily basis. Therefore, an invitation to participate in an on-line survey may simply be viewed by the target population as one more email requesting

their already limited amount of time, energy, and focus. It is possible the nontraditional African American students in this research study experienced survey burn-out which had a direct impact on the amount of data generated for this study.

Implications of the Results for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Studies by Tinto (Rendon et al., 1994) and Davis et al. (2004) who shared findings from *A Fly in the Buttermilk,* reported results based on their research at 4-year colleges. While their findings were significant and provided a lens from which to view this research problem, their results cannot be properly applied to a nontraditional student attending a community college who may have different demographics from those students attending 4-year colleges. According to Tinto, involvement in the campus was essential to the emersion of the campus culture and this theory was also highlighted in *A Fly in the Buttermilk* study. Although the involvement in campus activities may have promoted a sense of belongingness and connectivity to students attending a 4-year college, the same was not true for nontraditional African American students who were enrolled at the community college.

The nontraditional African American students attending the participating North Carolina community college felt connected to the campus based on the relationship they had with their professors and peers. During the survey and in the interviews, when nontraditional African American students indicated they had a positive community college experience, they also stated they had a positive faculty-student relationship. Also, when students indicated they had a negative college experience, they stated they had a negative relationship with their faculty. Nontraditional African American students equated their community college experience to the positive or negative relationship they had with their faculty. The nontraditional African American student had duties and responsibilities at home and with an employer which made

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participation in extracurricular activities difficult. These students were involved in events through their church and other community organizations of interest. For the students participating in this research study, the nontraditional African American student connected to the community college through the relationship with faculty and peers. Therefore, if the community college system continues to pattern their programs after Tinto's (Rendon et al., 1994) research, resources will be utilized failing to produce desired results.

Raisman, as cited by Blum and Jarrat (2013)*,* stated "the churn and burn of continually bringing new students through the front door, and then just watching them go out the back door, is killing college enrollments and individual and institutional futures" (p. 72). Today, 75% of students enrolled in higher education are nontraditional students (Complete College America, 2011). However, almost 50% of nontraditional African American students fail to graduate with associate degrees (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). These statistics revealed our institutions of higher learning are admitting nontraditional students into their programs of study, but students are failing to persist to degree completion.

The community college is diverse and enrolls a high percentage of nontraditional students from various racial and ethnic backgrounds including African American. However, 50% of nontraditional African American adult learners graduate with associate degrees. In 2016, the participating North Carolina community college reported the graduation rate for African American students was 9.93% which was less than half the rate for White students who had a graduation rate of 27.06% (Univstats, 2019). Based on this statistic nontraditional African American students may encounter additional challenges on the community college campus which may impede their retention, persistence, and degree completion.

Presently, community colleges are admitting students through the front door and observing these students as they exit through the back door which symbolized students separating from the community college (Blum & Jarrat, 2013). To improve retention and graduation rates, community college leaders should review their current practices and make adjustments according to the needs of nontraditional students who are currently the majority population on college campuses throughout the United States. Unless the research results on the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students are used to guide decision making at 2-year colleges, improvements among this target population may be hindered or possibly nonexistent. Most student retention studies have focused on 4-year colleges with little attention given to the needs of nontraditional students enrolled in the community college system. Understanding the unique needs of these students is a start to the implementation of institutional services to meet their academic needs, improve retention and support persistence to graduation. After analyzing the results of the research study, I offer the following recommendations for practice:

1. Community college leaders should define student retention as it relates to their community college.

2. Visit classes to survey nontraditional African American students to learn of their specific needs to persist to degree completion.

3. Design or redesign programs and services specifically to meet the needs of nontraditional African American students.

4. Financial aid and academic counseling services should build positive relationships with nontraditional African American students by visiting classrooms to inform students of their programs instead of sending institutional emails.

5. An early warning system can be developed informing faculty, advisors and counselors of those nontraditional African American students who are having difficulty in a course for intervention before separation.

Community college administrators can design or redesign programs and services to motivate nontraditional African American students without creating excessive emails for the students to read. Interviewees reported they do not read the numerous institutional emails they receive from the community college. These students shared due to limited time to read and to respond to emails they only read emails from their professor. According to survey and interview results, nontraditional African American students had positive relationships with their faculty and consulted them first on matters requiring the assistance of student services and academic counseling. Nontraditional African American students in this study trusted their professor and often received motivation from them to persist in their degree programs during hardships. Financial aid and academic counseling services could build positive relationships with nontraditional African American students by implementing programs to inform students of their services and build positive relationships with them. The collaborative efforts of an institutional team committed to meeting the needs of the nontraditional African American student will support them to graduation. Equipped with new skills, these nontraditional African American students are ready to enter an educated workforce which is instrumental in establishing a strong, healthy American economy.

Recommendations for Further Research

Additional research should continue to focus on solutions to increase the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in the community college system. With the limited amount of research on the persistence of nontraditional students in

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community college, additional research is needed to identify the specific needs of these students. When conducting research for this study, I did not locate any articles which focused solely on the issues of nontraditional African American students enrolled in a 2-year college. If very little information is available on nontraditional students in community college, less if any research is available on issues addressing the persistence, retention, and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students in community college. The ability to interact with nontraditional African American students at the participating North Carolina community college may have increased the response rate on the survey and interviews. Due to the various challenges in collecting data at the participating North Carolina community college, the researcher may have had greater participation if multiple community colleges in North Carolina were involved in the study. A greater response rate on the survey and interviewing more participants may have generated additional data on factors contributing to the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges.

With a phenomenological research approach that included a survey component, the researcher collected data on factors influencing the dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college system. The researcher used this approach to have different perspectives on the lived experiences of nontraditional African American students enrolled at community college. During the interview process, some nontraditional African American students indicated their faith in God motivated them to persist to degree completion. When the response rate at the participating North Carolina community college was low, the researcher networked with the faith-based community to gain participants for the research study. These students had a strong faith in God and believed with God everything was possible. Future research could consider faith as a factor influencing the retention and graduation rates of

nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college. The study could have been enhanced further if professors were able to share their lived experiences teaching nontraditional African American students. Further research could seek insight from family members who provide support to nontraditional African American students attending community college. Interviews with family members could provide insight on the type of support they provide to nontraditional African American students at the community college. As community college leaders move forward to understand the retention issues affecting nontraditional African American students, they must define student retention as it relates to their community college. Also, community college leaders should ensure theoretical models are implemented to address the needs of their nontraditional community college students. In the past, theoretical models such as Tinto's (1993), have focused on the needs of students attending 4-year colleges. Models guide decision-making in community colleges and should be developed to meet the specific needs of nontraditional African American students enrolled in a community college.

Conclusion

The goal of this phenomenological research study with a survey component was to identify factors affecting the persistence and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community college. A survey and interviews were utilized as data collection tools. While some of the empirical findings were validated in the research, some were not. Positive faculty-student relationships, difficulty balancing family responsibilities and insufficient financial aid did affect the degree completion of the target population. However, the researcher's analysis of the data did not validate student services and academic counseling services as having a vital role in degree completion. The literature was presented in Chapter 2. The methodology and plan for data collection was outlined in Chapter 3. Techniques of gathering data, analysis

and synthesis were outlined in Chapter 4. Lastly, the recommendations and suggestions for future research were outlined in Chapter 5. The research questions for this phenomenological research study were:

RQ1. What factors contribute to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students enrolled in community colleges?

RQ2. What can community college leaders do to improve the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students before they depart from the community college?

This research examined factors impacting the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students enrolled in a community college setting. The researcher gained insightful results from this research regarding the academic needs of nontraditional African American students and the factors separating this target population from 2-year colleges. The researcher examined the institutional services provided by student services and academic counseling to support the target population to graduation. This study can used to inform policy and practice and to guide the design or redesign of programs to support the retention and graduation of nontraditional African American students from community college.

Key points and significance. Retention practices leading to the graduation of students from higher education were primarily on traditional students attending 4-year colleges. While these practices have guided the implementation of methods to retain students pursuing undergraduate degrees, nontraditional community college students have different retention needs which may not be met by these same practices. The limited research on the needs of nontraditional African American students attending community college is an indication for additional research to be done on this issue to better serve this target population. Presently, 75%

of students enrolled in higher education are nontraditional students who maintain employment to provide for their families while pursuing an associate degree. These nontraditional students are 25 years old and older and experience different needs from traditional students (Complete College America, 2011). Therefore, to improve the retention rates of nontraditional African American students, methods should be implemented addressing the specific needs of these students to support them to graduation.

The researcher reported that the empirical research indicated faculty-student relationships were essential to the retention of the nontraditional African American student in community college. The researcher presented data from the surveys and the interviews which validated positive faculty relationships were instrumental in motivating students to persist to degree completion. Students defined their community college experience as positive or negative based on the relationship with their faculty or professor. When 71.3% ($N = 103$) of nontraditional African American students indicated on the survey they had a positive relationship with their faculty, 71.3% of nontraditional students reported they had a positive community college experience. When 3% of nontraditional African American students indicated on the survey they had a negative relationship with their faculty, 3% of nontraditional students reported they had a negative community college experience. This finding was significant because it demonstrated how important students perceive their relationship with their faculty.

Nontraditional African American students defined their community college experience by the relationship they had with their professor. During crisis situations, participants in this study shared they would have dropped out of their degree programs if they did not have supportive professors at the community college. Nontraditional African American students also relied on their relationship with faculty to direct them on matters involving student services and academic

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counseling. Students shared they consulted their professor for advice before contacting student services or academic counseling departments. This finding was significant and revealed student services and academic counseling may need to diligently work to build positive relationships with nontraditional African American students to inform them of their programs before students separate from the community college. The lack of financial aid was the second reason students dropped out of the community college. Nontraditional African American students failed to seek assistance from student services, academic counseling, or the financial aid office when they could not finance their education. In the interviews, three nontraditional African American students made the decision to drop out of the community college without consulting student services and academic counseling for solutions in persisting to degree completion. The researcher reported these findings which can provide the framework for community college leaders to view factors influencing the retention and graduation rates of nontraditional African American students and to develop programs to improve their retention to graduation.

New knowledge and innovation. Presently, there is not an abundance of literature addressing the issues of nontraditional African American students in the community college system. Tinto's (Rendon et al., 1994) theoretical model of retention did outline concepts affecting the retention of students in 4-year colleges. Tinto's 1975 findings were beneficial for implementing change in 4-year colleges, but his theories did not address the unique environment of the community college or the nontraditional students it serves. This issue welcomes additional research to identify measures to retain and graduate more nontraditional African American students from the community college with associate degrees in their chosen fields of study. There is room for institutional services such as academic counseling and student services to improve their relationship with nontraditional African American adult learners. Students

preferred direct contact with community college personnel and were opposed to reading numerous emails and navigating through computer phone systems and web advisor. Creative methods can be developed to connect with students while motivating and informing them of the services provided by the institution to support academic success. Also, an early warning system informing faculty, advisors and counselors of those nontraditional African American students who are having difficulty in classes will allow students to receive the assistance they need before their issues become unmanageable and lead to separation from the community college (Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Faculty, financial aid, student services and academic counseling are key components at 2-year colleges to support the community college student to degree completion. It is a collaborative effort between multiple institutional services working to ensure the success of the student. When nontraditional African American students trust their faculty, they confide in them regrading considerations of departing from the community college before obtaining their associate degree. During the interviews, two participants considered dropping out of the participating North Carolina community college. However, it was the encouragement of a faculty member who convinced the students to seek assistance from student services and academic counseling to persist to degree completion. Participant 7 had a family crisis involving her son and she graduated with an associate degree in 2018. Participant 2 who experienced financial hardships and navigated her entire community college degree without books, recently graduated from the participating North Carolina community college in May 2019 with an associate degree.

While both nontraditional African American community college students persisted to degree completion despite their hardships, institutional services can implement programs to better serve the needs of this target population to increase their retention and graduation rates.

These students persisted due to their positive relationships with their faculty. While it is the goal of the community college to employ faculty who are committed to the success of their students, if a student does not have a positive relationship with their faculty, the student should still feel supported by the institution to persist to degree completion. A thorough examination of the needs of the target population is the beginning stages of discovering solutions to this problem. Understanding the needs of the nontraditional African American students in community college equips educational leaders with data essential for the implementation of new programs and services to promote the academic success of nontraditional African American students. To ensure effectiveness, services and programs must be tailored to the needs of nontraditional African American community college students and not based on research to improve the retention of students attending a 4-year college. With little research available on this issue, great opportunities exist for interested scholars to offer their expertise and research skills to add to the knowledge of how these students can be supported to graduation. As a former community college instructor and a previous nontraditional African American community college student, I understand the importance of this research and I welcome the discovery of new information to better serve these students. This is a great opportunity for educational practitioners at the community college level to unite in this challenge. I support their efforts to ensure future nontraditional African American students have the institutional support needed to persist confidently to degree completion.

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A Phenomenological Study of Factors Affecting the High Dropout Rate of Nontraditional

African American Students in Community College

(To Be Read To Students)

Dear "[redacted]" Student:

My name is Vernorda and I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland in

the department of Education. I am conducting research on the dropout rate of nontraditional

African American students between 25 and 40 years of age in the community college system.

The researcher defines a nontraditional student as an adult learner between twenty-five and forty

(25–40) years of age who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may

care for a family while attending the community college.

Your participation in a face-to-face interview will provide data on the challenges that

nontraditional African American students face at community colleges. The interview consists of

16 questions that focus on your experiences as a student at [redacted]. Your participation in this

research study is voluntary, and you may withdraw from the study at any time without penalty.

You may also refuse to respond to any questions that you do not wish to answer.

The face-to-face research interviews will consist of five nontraditional African American

students (male or female) who are currently enrolled in at least one developmental courses and

five selected nontraditional African American students (male or female) who are presently

enrolled in any degree program and are not currently taking a developmental course. There will

be a total of 10 interviews. The interview should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Your responses will remain confidential. The data gathered from your responses during

the face-to-face interview will be secured for three years in a locked file cabinet that is accessible

only to the principal investigator. After three years, this data will be destroyed utilizing a

shredder, and all recordings of interviews will be deleted.

      Research participants who complete their face-to-face interview will receive a $40 gift

card at the completion of the doctoral study. If you are interested in participating, please contact

the researcher immediately by email at [redacted].

Thank you

Vernordra Haynie, Principal Investigator

Appendix B: Introduction Letter for Survey

A Phenomenological Study of Factors Affecting the High Dropout Rate of Nontraditional

African American Students in Community College

(Shared Electronically with Survey Link)

Dear [redacted] Student:

My name is Vernordra and I am a doctoral student at Concordia University–Portland in the department of Education. I am conducting research on the dropout rate of nontraditional African American male and female students between 25 and 40 years of age in the community college system. The researcher defines a nontraditional student as an adult learner between twenty-five and forty (25–40) years of age who may be employed (full-time or part-time), single or married, and may care for a family while attending the community college.

Your participation in this electronic survey will provide data on the challenges that nontraditional African American students face at community colleges. The survey consists of 26 questions that focus on a student's experiences at [redacted]. Your participation in this research study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the survey at any time without penalty. You may also refuse to respond to any questions that you do not wish to answer. The electronic survey should take approximately 10-15 minutes to complete.

Your responses will remain confidential. The data gathered from your responses during the electronic survey will be secured for three years in a locked file cabinet that is accessible only to the principal investigator. After three years, this data will be destroyed utilizing a shredder.

If you are interested in participating in the electronic survey, please take the survey at the link at the following link: [redacted]

Thank you

Vernordra

Principal Investigator

Appendix C: Interview Questions (Protocol)

Topic: Factors Affecting the High Attrition Rate of Nontraditional African American Students

Date:_____

Time:_____

Place:_____

Interviewer:_____

Interviewee:_____

Research Description

The purpose of this phenomenological research study with a survey component is to identify factors contributing to the high attrition rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college system. The focus will be on the areas of a student's life influencing their faculty relationships, their engagement with student services and academic counseling may impact student persistence and degree completion. Your participation in this is interview is voluntary and will provide data to improve the outcomes of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges. The researcher greatly appreciates your participation in this research study.

1. How would you describe your community college experience?

2. How would you describe your interaction with professor/instructor and faculty?

3. Do you feel comfortable approaching a faculty member with a question or a concern? If no, then why?

4. Do you feel stressed managing your employment, family obligations, and attending classes at the community college? If so, how do you handle it?

5. Do you participate in activities or organizations on campus? Why or why not?

6. Do you utilize student services programs and academic counseling? If yes, what issues or concerns were specifically addressed in your session or sessions with them?

7. Are you aware of the services academic counseling and student services provide?

8. Are you satisfied with the amount of financial aid you receive to assist with tuition fees?

9. If you have children, how old are they? Do you utilize campus daycare? Why or why not?

10. How you ever considered dropping out of college? What happened and why did you change your mind?

11. Do you feel supported to succeed on the campus? At home?

12. When is the last time you received positive feedback from your professor? Encouragement from family members?

13. How do you feel about your progress at the community college so far?

14. If you could change anything about your experience at the community college what would it be and why?

15. If you could make any changes on the campus what would you change?

16. Do you have any additional information you would like to share regarding your community college experience?

Appendix D: Survey Questions (Protocol)

Research Description

The purpose of this phenomenological research study with a survey component is to identify factors contributing to the high attrition rate of nontraditional African American students in the community college system. The areas of focus will be on the student's experiences which may influence their faculty relationships, their engagement with student services and academic counseling. These factors may impact student persistence and degree completion.

Your participation in this electronic survey is voluntary and will provide data to improve the outcomes of nontraditional African American students at 2-year colleges. The researcher greatly appreciates your participation in this research study. The survey can be accessed at the following link: [redacted]

Survey Questions

1. I consent, begin this survey

   I do not consent, I do not wish to participate

2. What is your age?

   a. 18 to 24

   b. 25 to 40

   c. Over 40

3. What is your gender?

   a. Male

   b. Female

   c. Other

4. What is your race?

A. African American

B. American Indian

C. White

D. Latin American

E. Asian

F. Multiple Races

G. Other

5. Are you currently enrolled in at least one developmental course?

   a. Yes

   b. No

6. Are you employed?

   a. Part-time

   b. Full-time

   c. Retired

   d. Not employed

7. Are you married?

   a. Yes

   b. No

8. Do you have children?

   a. Yes

   b. No

9. How would you describe your community college experience?

   a. Positive

b. Negative

c. Ok

d. No comment

10. How would you describe your interaction with your professor/instructor and faculty?

    a. Positive

    b. Negative

    c. Ok

    d. No comment

11. Do you feel comfortable approaching a faculty member with a question or a concern?

    a. Yes

    b. No

12. Do you feel stressed managing your employment, family obligations, and attending classes at the community college?

    A. Yes

    B. No

13. Do you participate in activities or organizations on campus?

    A. Yes

    B. No

14. Do you utilize student services programs and academic counseling?

    A. Yes

    B. No

15. Are you aware of the services academic counseling and student services provide?

    A. Yes

B. No

16. Are you satisfied with the amount of financial aid you receive to assist with tuition fees?

   A. Yes

   B. No

17. Do you utilize campus daycare?

   A. Yes

   B. No

18. How you ever considered dropping out of college?

   A. Yes

   B. No

19. Why did you consider dropping out of college?

   A. No financial aid to pay for tuition

   B. Difficulty working and balancing school requirements

   C. Did not feel like I belonged on the campus.

   D. No support from professor, faculty, or student services

   E. No family support

   F. Other reason

20. If your response was "Other Reason" please explain why you considered dropping out of college.

21. When is the last time you received positive feedback from your professor?

   A. This week

   B. Within 7 to 14 days

   C. Last month

D. Never

22. When is the last time you received encouragement from family members?

    A. This week

    B. Within 7 to 14 days

    C. Last month

    D. Never

23. How do you feel about your progress at the community college so far?

    A. Positive

    B. Negative

    C. Ok

24. If you could change anything about your experience at the community college what would it be and why?

25. If you could make any changes on the campus what would you change?

26. Please include any additional information that you would like to share about your community college experience.

Thank You

Appendix E: Data Collection (Survey Results)

Q1 - Welcome to the research study! We are interested in understanding [the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college]. You will be presented with information relevant to [factors that may lead to the high dropout rate of nontraditional African American students in community college] and asked to answer some questions about it. Please be assured that your responses will be kept completely confidential. The study should take you around [10-15 minutes] to complete. Your participation in this research is voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any point during the study, for any reason, and without any prejudice. If you would like to contact the Principal Investigator in the study to discuss this research, please e-mail "[redacted]". By clicking the button below, you acknowledge that your participation in the study is voluntary, you are 18 years of age, and that you are aware that you may choose to terminate your participation in the study at any time and for any reason. Please note that this survey will be best displayed on a laptop or desktop computer. Some features may be less compatible for use on a mobile device.

#	Answer	%	Count
1	I consent, begin the study	100.00%	94
2	I do not consent, I do not wish to participate	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	94

Q2 - What is your age?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	18 to 24	1.98%	2
2	25 to 40	83.17%	84
3	Over 40	14.85%	15
	Total	100%	101

Q3 - What is your gender?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Male	28.00%	28
2	Female	72.00%	72
3	Other	0.00%	0
	Total	100%	100

Q4 - What is your race?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	African American	97.03%	98
2	American Indian	0.00%	0
3	White	0.00%	0
4	Latin American	0.00%	0
5	Asian	0.00%	0
6	Multiple Races	1.98%	2
7	Other	0.99%	1
	Total	100%	101

Q5 - Are you currently enrolled in at least one developmental course?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	60.40%	61
2	No	39.60%	40
	Total	100%	101

Q6 - Are you employed?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Full-time	57.43%	58
2	Part-time	25.74%	26
3	Retired	0.99%	1
4	Not employed	15.84%	16
	Total	100%	101

Q7 - Are you married?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	54.00%	54
2	No	46.00%	46
	Total	100%	100

Q8 - Do you have children?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	79.00%	79
2	No	21.00%	21
	Total	100%	100

Q9 - How would you describe your community college experience?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Positive	71.29%	72
2	Negative	2.97%	3
3	Ok	24.75%	25
4	No Comment	0.99%	1
	Total	100%	101

Q10 - How would you describe your interaction with your professor/instructor and faculty?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Positive	71.29%	72
2	Negative	2.97%	3
3	Ok	24.75%	25
4	No Comment	0.99%	1
	Total	100%	101

Q11 - Do you feel comfortable approaching a faculty member with a question or a concern?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	93.07%	94
2	No	6.93%	7
	Total	100%	101

Q12 - Do you feel stressed managing your employment, family obligations, and attending classes at the community college?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	74.26%	75
2	No	25.74%	26
	Total	100%	101

Q13 - Do you participate in activities or organizations on campus?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	12.87%	13
2	No	87.13%	88
	Total	100%	101

Q14 - Do you utilize student services programs and academic counseling?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	32.67%	33
2	No	67.33%	68
	Total	100%	101

Q15 - Are you aware of the services that academic counseling and student services provide?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	58.42%	59
2	No	41.58%	42
	Total	100%	101

Q16 - Are you satisfied with the amount of financial aid that you receive to assist with tuition fees?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	38.61%	39
2	No	61.39%	62
	Total	100%	101

Q17 - Do you utilize campus daycare?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	1.98%	2
2	No	98.02%	99
	Total	100%	101

Q18 - Have you ever considered dropping out of college?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Yes	67.33%	68
2	No	32.67%	33
	Total	100%	101

Q19 - Why did you consider dropping out of college?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	No financial aid to pay for tuition	36.49%	27
2	Difficulty working and balancing school requirements	44.59%	33
3	Did not feel like I belonged on the campus	1.35%	1
4	No support from professor, faculty or student services	2.70%	2
5	No family support	1.35%	1
6	Other reason	13.51%	10
	Total	100%	74

Q20 - If your response was "Other Reason" please explain why you considered dropping out of college.

If your response was "Other Reason" please explain why you considered dropping out of college.

Sometimes my efforts seem vain. No real support for students who have never attended high school and has received a GED

Mental health & Co-Parenting issues, searching employment

I do not need to have a degree. I am just in school out of boredom.

Na

I am a college graduate. I hold a master's degree and thought I wanted to attempt medical school. I have change my mind and I am 'dropping out' of FAYTECHCC and pursuing a doctoral degree.

Opportunity cost of time spent in class and on school work

I really never considered dropping out of college.

Balancing work from multiple classes can sometimes be overwhelming and difficult

Domestic violence between same sex partners.

General education requirements only supplement institutional revenue and do not teach anything practical.

N/A

Q21 - When is the last time that you received positive feedback from your professor?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	This week	26.26%	26
2	Within 7 to 14 days	41.41%	41
3	Last month	15.15%	15
4	Within the last 3 months	4.04%	4
5	Never	13.13%	13
	Total	100%	99

Q22 - When is the last time that you received encouragement from family members?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	This week	53.00%	53
2	Within 7 to 14 days	26.00%	26
3	Last month	6.00%	6
4	Within the last 3 months	6.00%	6
5	Never	9.00%	9
	Total	100%	100

Q23 - How do you feel about your progress at the community college so far?

#	Answer	%	Count
1	Positive	65.00%	65
2	Negative	6.00%	6
3	Ok	29.00%	29
	Total	100%	100

Q24 - If you could change anything about your experience at the community college what would it be and why?

If you could change anything about your experience at the community college what would it be and why?

Help paying for books

None

would like to get more help with the books. they cost a lot

ftcc is a good school, would like to see more stuff for older students on campus to get involved in

None

no comments

?

Want more money for classes it has been a struggle

Need more help paying for books after I pay for classes it is hard to get books

More money for classes

Nothing

No comment

Nothing

More grants for older students

It is so hard to understand what happens when you do on academic probation. Getting back in school was hard

My grades. Need to get better grades

Would like to have more financial aid in the form of grants and scholarships for older people going back to school

More money or scholarships for older adults

None

Nothing

wish i would have done this when i first got of school. it is hard to find time to do the work

I can't think of nothing right now

I would like to see more financial aid opportunities for older adults like me.

get more help to pay for classes

Be more involved, but I'm an Adult with a lot of assets. But FTCC is a great school, I got what I gave!

More activities

The over lap of courses. Completed 3 English that transferred but yet I have to take the same courses again. Major setback!

N/a

I wish I were able to go on campus but transportation will not all me to do so

figuring out what I wanted to do earlier

That the teachers that teach like what they teach and that I get what I paid for and not annyoed teachers.

Nothing, all was well

Getting more information about important information that usually gets left out when dealing with finances or school in general.

For online classes professors need to be in touch more with the students. They are supposed to respond back to emails within 24 hours except weekends, however they respond in about 4 days when it's too late. Several of my professors do this.

More flexibility for parents and working parents . . . community college still seems more focused on younger students who just graduated from high school who don't have children and who may or may not have to work

Refocus every month.

Wish i would have decided what i wanted to do a long time ago

no.

Take the advance of all the programs that the school offerred.

My experience at my community was very positive. I enjoyed going to school.

Having more night classes and hybrid online classes.

Did it when I was younger

To recieve my loans all together in one pay out. And to do annually therapy evaluation on some instructers.

Nothing

Nothing. Community college offers a lot of flexibility for a fraction of the cost of universities.

Professors should not prioritize campus classes over online classes

Wished I had done it sooner

General education requirements only support institutional revenue

I wish there were more places to hang out on campus than the tony rand building.

more interaction from academic advisor

n/a

Nothing

8 weeks class. Because its very stressful to combine it with work and family

Friendlier counselors

N/A

Receiving more financial aid because classes, textbooks, and other school materials are costly

My environment.

Credentialism; streamline program requisites to reduce the amount of time to finish

The way the teacher talk to use we are adults. Also like i got marked absent for three hour for being five mins late for class three times. When i am single full time mom of 4

N/A

Less workload at once

The amount of assignments, more teaching than deadlines.

Nothing. I knew what to expect and it has been fine.

I would like to be more involved in activities, but they are always in the morning when I am at work.

The 3 tardies equals an absence rule and it affecting your grade

More time

The amount of tuition that I received to assist with college and other expenses related to school.

Q25 - If you could make any changes on the campus what would you change?

If you could make any changes on the campus what would you change?

want campus activities for older students maybe some things that were family friendly that kids could come to

None

None

no comments

?

Need to be able to rent books at a cheaper prize

More help for older adults who do not qualify for extra help with tuition

Nothing

Not a thing

No comment

Nothing

Want to talk to a real person when I call

No

More lights in some places on campus

Nine

Nothing

more money for classes

None

Nothing. The campus is nice.

Nothing

Took my classes online.

Provide more vigorous tutoring for older adults.

More lighting

Consistency I was in the Digital Media program & had to take Graphic Design classes because the Digital Media classes were out of order or they didn't have them at all

I would revamp the entire department! the building location would change, the class schedule would change, the teacher selection would change, the space and supplies needed would change and students would have a voice!

Nothing

Not sure

It perfect to me

Distance

No

Provide housing for the students that don't live within the community.

No Changes need to be made on the campus.

Having some of the medical programs at night. Some people have day jobs and can't be in programs because they are only offered in the mornings.

Student support groups

Nothing

I was a 100% distance learner.

More flexibility

Nothing

N/A

Have more events especially in the summer time.

n/a

n/a

Don't know

Nothing

None

N/A

There really isn't much I would change things on campus are made very accessible to students

Medical/dental insurance for students, more info.

This question is ambiguous. Are you referring to the facility or administrative changes?

The instructors

N/A

No changes.

I would like to make some activities more available in the evening.

Nothing

The grants and scholarships that are available to older students who wish to return to college after their first career.

Q26 - Please include any additional information that you would like to share about your community college experience.

None

None

no comments

?

Nothing else

Good school just have a hard time paying for it

Like the school but struggling to pay for the classes and get my books

Wish I had more help with paying for my classes

No comment

Nothing

None

Don't have any

No

Good school

None

Nothing

Nothing right now.

Nothing

FTCC is great, I am enrolled in to 3 colleges. FTCC helped me get classes I needed to finish my Bachelors degree and obtain another Associate degree. Very thankful. Only challenge I had was math classes online are a challenge but I would base that on how people learn.

Community college has been great my teachers were amazing and are great support systems

I am active duty Army. Some of these questions cannot pertain to me. Due to my work and family, I am only able to do online classes. Fayetteville Technical CC is great with the flex classes because I am away from computer and web access a lot, so turning in homework on an exact due date is not possible sometimes.

I'm a veteran as well and I have been using those resources to help

I have had good and bad! i feel like you work twice as hard and are misunderstood! Many teachers don't know how to communicate and assist students, they are RUDE and lack proper communications.

Things were great

I LOVE FTCC

The classes were smaller and more one on one with the students.

None.

I was t

Recommend enrolling with a instructor that is honored and approved by previous, and other students.

Professors should treat all students the same, online or campus. Professor Campbell should not prioritize on campus students over online students, and she should follow the instructions she set for herself on the instructor information section.

n/a

Overall my experience was very positive, I've had multiple professors that have impacted me and helped me along my journey

....

Like i have anxiety bad and ptsd. And teacher have not being will to work with me. Because i could provide paperwork when they asked. But only reason i had to wait to get the paper from my doctor is because the hurricane in september my doctors rescheduled. So if you look at my old grades from my old college when i was on medicine and had all my paper work there is a complete different. Now what am i to do

Less discussion boards

N/a

I am looking forward to graduation!!!

None

It was positive, but I would like to see more activities related to older students to make us feel more welcomed on the campus.

Appendix F: Receipt of Incentive

This documentation serves as verification that the research participant has received a $40 incentive for their participation in the research conducted by Vernordra for fulfillment of the doctoral degree from Concordia University–Portland in Portland, Oregon.

I, _____, verify that I participated in this research, and that I received the $40 participation incentive from "[redacted]", the Principal Investigator, as indicated in the guidelines of the research study. My receipt of the $40 incentive is confirmed by the date of my signature below.

Principal Investigator   Signature_____   Date:_____

Received By Participant: Signature_____   Date:_____

Thank You!

Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does "fraudulent" mean?

"Fraudulent" work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one's own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate's final work without full and complete documentation.

What is "unauthorized" assistance?

"Unauthorized assistance" refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another's work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (Continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–
   Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this
   dissertation.

2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production
   of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been
   properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or
   materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the
   Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association

Vernordra Haynie

Digital Signature

Vernordra Haynie

Name (Typed)

August 3, 2019

Date