

2020

Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Erica Beatrice Wattley
Walden University

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Walden University

College of Education

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Erica B. Wattley

has been found to be complete and satisfactory in all respects,
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Review Committee

Dr. Timothy Lafferty, Committee Chairperson, Education Faculty

Dr. Mary Lou Morton, Committee Member, Education Faculty

Dr. Karen Hunt, University Reviewer, Education Faculty

Chief Academic Officer and Provost

Sue Subocz, Ph.D.

Walden University

2020

Abstract

Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

by

Erica B. Wattley

MS, Walden University, 2009

BS, Iowa State University, 1996

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Walden University

June 2020

Abstract

Nontraditional undergraduate students have had a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program at a for-profit northeastern university. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. The conceptual framework was guided by Tinto's model of student persistence. The research questions focused on nontraditional undergraduate student perceptions and experiences of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved goals. A basic qualitative study design was used to capture the insights of 10 nontraditional undergraduate students who left the university before graduating; a purposeful sampling process was used to select the participants. Emergent themes were identified through open coding, and the findings were developed and checked for trustworthiness through member checking and rich descriptions. The findings revealed that nontraditional undergraduate students need support, training, and guided practice with managing time, social connections, and goals. A professional development project was created to provide undergraduate instructors with strategies and approaches to improve learning conditions, academic performance, and retention of nontraditional undergraduate students. This study has implications for positive social change by creating a structure to provide undergraduate university instructors with strategies and approaches for improving support and instruction for nontraditional undergraduate students.

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Dedication

I would like to dedicate this study to all nontraditional students. Being the first is not easy. Accomplishing the same achievements as others, without the same support, opportunity, finances, experiences, or examples is difficult but not impossible. As a doctoral candidate, I realized I also was a nontraditional student. I am a married woman with six homeschooled children who worked two online jobs, led praise and worship at church, and coached cheerleading all while completing my doctorate. I dedicate this study to my family, friends, and role models. To all nontraditional people who have tasks that seem insurmountable, I say you can do it! Best wishes to you all and thank you for your support.

Even if your circumstances are nontraditional, they do not control your destiny. You can be the first. You can do it! You are able if you are willing. I would like to encourage everyone to keep your eye on the prize and call those things that be not as though they were. Press toward the mark and you will get there. I dedicate this to my children, my godchildren, and one day my grandchildren to be your very best selves. Achieve something greater than you can see. Expect great things from yourself and others. Be grateful for all of your blessings. Try to leave everyone better than when you met them. Be a stepping stool and not a stumbling block in the lives of others. Education gives you a choice and a voice.

Acknowledgments

How can I say thank you? Dr. Patricia Thurmond, thank you for honoring my request and your support during transitions. Dr. Karen Hunt, I appreciate your contributions to the improvement of my study with such a positive attitude. Dr. Mary Lou Morton, thank you for your prompt responses and detailed guidance without which I could not have made it this far. Dr. Timothy Lafferty, I am unable to really put into words my gratitude; you provided your time in weekly meetings, pushes when I needed them, frankness, and understanding when some of life's challenges became overwhelming. Thank you all for your encouragement, support, examples, and dedication to helping me achieve my academic and professional goals.

To my husband who was also completing his doctorate at the same time, I love and appreciate you. Kids, Mommy loves you all, and I thank you for understanding the times when I had to study and work. To my parents, thank you for the way you raised me and have continued to care for me. I would not be here without you. To my friends who encouraged me and told me that I would make it despite the challenges that I faced, thank you. Last but not least, I would like to acknowledge God. His strength is made perfect in weakness and I experienced that. Thank you Lord for the gift of salvation through your son Jesus Christ and how you held me up in times of tribulation. I kept looking at the framed scripture hanging above my computer, from Isaiah 40:10 that said, "Fear thou not, for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

A for-profit university located in the northeastern United States has focused its mission on providing university services for nontraditional undergraduate students. Pelletier (2010) identified *nontraditional undergraduate students* as students who meet one or more of the following criteria: (a) they may work full time, (b) they may be older than most other undergraduate students in their classes, (c) they may attend college part-time, (d) they may be financially independent, (e) they may have dependents other than a spouse, (f) they may be a single parent, or (g) they may not have a high school diploma (p. 2). Nontraditional undergraduate students may have work, family, social, or health issues that could become obstacles to accessing a college education (Metzner & Bean, 1987). Prior to the expansion of the for-profit education sector, nontraditional undergraduate students had few options for obtaining an advanced degree. To mitigate this problem for nontraditional undergraduate students, for-profit universities focused on making concessions to nontraditional undergraduate students' needs such as relaxed admission standards and convenience of online, ground, or hybrid programs (Black, 2017). This focus improved the number of nontraditional student enrollments in university programs (McMullen, Henderson, & Ison, 2017). For this study, the local university of study is identified with the pseudonym, Northern University. According to Northern University, the enrollment numbers increased by 18%; however, attrition rates increased to 55% as of 2018.

The problem at Northern University is that nontraditional undergraduate students had a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program. The challenges that nontraditional undergraduate students face in university systems are numerous. Locally at Northern University, attrition rates have increased from 9% to 16% since 2008, whereas nationwide attrition rates have decreased (National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). These dropout-rate statistics were shared with full-time faculty during the annual conference at Northern University, where one department leader stated that student persistence is the responsibility of everyone. Another department leader stated, “We want students to successfully persist at Northern University, but these statistics are discouraging”. Another member of the committee added, “Our goal is for students to be connected and love the university.” After the third course, Northern University reported in 2017 that persistence rates improved to 80%, and this encouraged them to explore the postenrollment needs of nontraditional students.

Even though students had to meet admission requirements for the Northern University program, attrition rates remain unsatisfactory. The continued rise in attrition demonstrates a need for further study. There is a gap in practice at Northern University between the university efforts to provide specific support programs and the increase in the number of nontraditional undergraduate students who dropout. Attrition affects all students but has a greater impact on nontraditional undergraduate students because statistically, they were already beginning their education at a deficit by being unable to meet traditional admission requirements for public universities (Cotton, Nash, & Kneale, 2017). Further, nontraditional undergraduate students may be unaware that poor

academic performance may affect their grade point average, which may in turn reduce the likelihood that they can transfer to a traditional institution (Austin & Lockmiller, 2016). It is important to understand attrition from the perspective of undergraduate students because the consequences can affect many areas of students' lives.

The rise in attrition rates among nontraditional undergraduate students is a problem in other locations. While enrollment has increased, the attrition rates have also increased, resulting in zero student growth at Northern University, according to the enrollment director. The largest numbers of students who are enrolling in college are nontraditional (McBride, 2017). Nontraditional students have been defined as students who are 25 years or older, who attend school part-time, who work full-time, who may be a veteran, who may have children, who have a General Education Diploma instead of a high school diploma, who may be a first-generation student, who may be enrolled in nondegree programs, or who may have reentered a college program (MacDonald, 2018). According to Gilardi and Guglielmetti (2011), nontraditional students struggle with the amount of time and energy devoted exclusively to academics. Family issues or financial strain greatly affect nontraditional undergraduate students' persistence (He, 2017).

The study of nontraditional undergraduate students affects almost all students because approximately 74% of all students have at least one nontraditional undergraduate student risk factor (Smale & Regalado, 2017). Nontraditional undergraduate students begin with challenges related to family, finances, and academic preparation that make their educational journeys more difficult (Chung, Turnbull, & Chur-Hansen, 2017). Nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts may have had negative prior educational

experiences that affected their ability to develop positive relationships with faculty, staff, and other students (Furner, 2017). Mukherjee, McKinney, Hagedorn, Purnamasari, and Martinez (2017) noted that helping students be more effective money managers was one way to affect change for nontraditional students. Some universities are developing study skills courses because this population struggles with these skills (Paulsen & Sayeski, 2013). Additionally, student support programs for nontraditional undergraduate students include increased contact with faculty and staff as well as student mentors (Jilg & Southgate, 2017).

Rationale

Attrition affects all students, but nontraditional undergraduate students are affected the most because statistically, they began their education at a deficit by being unable to meet traditional admission requirements for public universities (Cotton et al., 2017). For-profit universities have tried to create support programs to address their needs, but despite this, some academic counselors are bombarded with nontraditional student problems that lead to decreased student persistence explained the lead academic counselor. This problem choice is justified by the continued problem with nontraditional undergraduate student attrition despite the student support programs that were designed to meet their needs, a shared student support team member. The fact that nontraditional student persistence continues to be a problem despite many attempts at providing interventions rationalizes the need for further study.

Nontraditional undergraduate student attrition is a problem for students, staff, and stakeholders. One student stated that they thought college was going to make their life

better, but now they worry because they owe a huge student loan payment, described a financial aid representative. One instructor claimed that the students have too many outside problems; if they could just fix them, they could complete their work. An admissions representative complained that no matter how many times she explains the technology requirements, students inevitably come back to complain that instructors will not accept their work when it is not submitted in the correct format.

The staff is greatly affected by nontraditional undergraduate student attrition because classes are canceled due to low enrollment, and academic counselors or support staff are terminated or reassigned. Adjunct instructors have collectively complained about not receiving course offerings and are not comforted when told that it is based on student enrollment. One instructor did not understand why a student did not submit an assignment on time. When he was encouraged to work with a student who had a death in the family, the instructor said that the student knew that he had this assignment coming up weeks ago. Another adjunct instructor protested that her job is complicated by having to try to teach students the difference between scholarly writing and texting language. Stakeholders are also affected by nontraditional undergraduate student attrition because they do not see the return on their investments. Even the parent of one nontraditional student who had been hospitalized questioned how to put her son's classes on hold because the family had collectively come together to ensure he could pay for school. His potential failure would hurt the family, commented an admissions officer.

Nontraditional undergraduate students have a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program at a for-profit northeastern university. The purpose of this study was to

investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. Additional information that provides evidentiary support to this research will appear in the next section.

Definition of Terms

Special terms associated with the problem are defined and cited here.

For-profit institutions: Run by companies that operate under the demands of investors and stockholders. These institutions are privately run and exist, at least in part, to earn money for their owners. Nevertheless, for-profit colleges can receive up to 90% of their revenue from federal student aid (National Association for College Admission Counseling, 2016).

Hybrid classes: Classes that are offered in a combination of online and on-ground formats (Roseth, Akcaoglu, & Zellner, 2013).

Nontraditional undergraduate students: Students who need special modifications to schedules, format, or delivery of university level courses. Nontraditional undergraduate students usually meet one or more of the following characteristics: (a) enrolled in postsecondary education later than most undergraduate students, (b) attend college part-time, (c) work full time, (d) may be financially independent, (e) have dependents, or (f) do not have a high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010).

Proximate structures: The social frameworks to which students relate, with which they identify, and that they join that contribute to or detract from academic success (Stryker, Serpe & Hunt, 2005).

The next section includes the explanation of the significance of this study as it relates to the problem that is caused when nontraditional undergraduate students drop out.

Significance of the Study

Student persistence is a national concern because it requires the effective use of financial, human, and physical resources in order to satisfy the need for well-educated citizens (Woods, 2016). As educational access has expanded to include previously excluded individuals, it has led to an increase in cost and retention pressures (Campbell & Mislavy, 2013). College costs expanded while including those who were previously excluded, so more services are now offered at institutions, and the technology requirements are increasingly extensive (King & Thompson, 2016). Moreover, when students drop out, they incur debt without the benefit of having attained a degree; these high debt loads can be unpaid, impacting students' personal futures and the national economy (Goldrick-Rab, 2016). By identifying factors that contribute to high-attrition levels, Northern University could decrease nontraditional student attrition rates.

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. The local educational setting could benefit from the study results that might be useful to improve student persistence. Other educational

organizations could garner a greater understanding about nontraditional undergraduate attrition and about strategies to increase student success. Investigating nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating may have larger implications about how to properly meet their needs in other educational contexts from Kindergarten to 12th grade preparation to postenrollment nontraditional undergraduate student support.

Research Questions

Nontraditional undergraduate students have a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program at a for-profit northeastern university. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating.

Nontraditional undergraduate student attrition has been a problem, and dropout rates have increased beginning in 2008 at Northern University. The problem with high attrition rates at the Northern University could be improved by an exploration of nontraditional students' perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating. The research questions for this study are as follows:

Research Question (RQ)1: What were the perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating?

RQ2: What were the academic, social, and/or unresolved goal experiences of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts that led them to decide to leave the university before graduating?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that grounded this study was based upon Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence and retention. Tinto (2017) concluded that attrition is not the goal of students, but persistence is. Tinto (1975) proposed his model of persistence and retention; it was built on three major concepts: academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals. According to Tinto (1975), when students faced academic difficulties such as grade performance, lack of enthusiasm for the subject, lack of interest in studying the subject, and lack of responsibility as a student, they were likely to drop out of the class. Institutional departure also happened when students did not get involved in social life like peer-to-peer interactions, faculty student interactions, and enjoyment of student life (Little, Gaier, & Spoutz, 2018). Academic difficulty and a lack of social life can lead to unresolved goals and the loss of the persistence needed for graduation (Tinto, 1975).

With this theory, Tinto (1975) suggested that students' retention depends on their social and academic integration into the college. He also mentioned that the more students understand their academic and social realms of college, the more likely it is that they complete their degree (Tinto, 1975, 1987). Continuing to explore retention and persistence, Tinto (1987) established the "paradox of institutional commitment" (p.11).

According to the paradox, students' retention in college is related to students' academic and social involvement in college. Tinto's theory can give insights into why nontraditional students drop out. Tinto (1975) proposed his model of persistence and retention; it was built on three major concepts: academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals. According to Tinto (1975), when students faced academic difficulties such as grade performance, lack of enthusiasm for the subject, lack of interest in studying the subject, and lack of responsibility as a student, they were likely to drop out of the class. Institutional departure also happened when students did not get involved in social life like peer-to-peer interactions, faculty student interactions, and enjoyment of student life. Academic difficulty and a lack of social life lead to unresolved goals and the loss of the persistence needed for graduation (Tinto, 1975).

These key elements logically connect to the problem of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Although attrition affects all students, it has a greater impact on nontraditional undergraduate students because statistically, they were already beginning their education at a deficit by being unable to meet traditional admission requirements for public universities (Cotton et al., 2017). Tinto's social integration framework and model of student persistence relate to instrument development, data analysis, and the key research question: What are the perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts in the areas of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals? Nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perception and experiences relate to Tinto's model of student retention and persistence and share the

same categories of interest such as academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals (Tinto, 2017).

Review of the Broader Problem

The literature review for the problem with nontraditional undergraduate dropouts was organized by defining nontraditional undergraduate characteristics, challenges, and curricular needs. The keywords and search terms used to explore this topic were *undergraduate attrition rates, college tuition rates, undergraduate student needs, at-risk students, student persistence or retention, nontraditional undergraduate students, and student support*. Databases for these keywords and search terms included but were not limited to ERIC, SAGE Journals, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Central. In the next section, I present the conceptual framework for the study, define the target group, and outline the significance of the study.

Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Characteristics

The for-profit online university was created to answer the need of convenience for students who were unable to attend college in a traditional manner (Sperling, 2017). The creation of the online program was designed to provide an opportunity for students to attend school in an asynchronous way (Swift, 2018). The concept would provide instruction under the accreditation and curriculum standards of the traditional brick and mortar setting with an added benefit of convenience via technology (Robinson, 2017). This distance learning technology created an opportunity; however, there are some unmet needs that students discovered to be insurmountable and therefore caused their attrition (Miller, Topper, & Richardson, 2017). The modified support programs may mirror

similar programs that were created to help with the transition from middle school to high school (Faulkner, 2017). With these improvements, it could possibly increase graduation rates, like the ones created for incoming high school freshman success (Frost & Dreher, 2017). Colleges and universities can use this program to better support undergraduate students and improve graduation rates and societal contributions (Sutter & Paulson, 2017).

Nontraditional students may have difficulty with one or more admission standards, requirements, or indicators such as being older than 24, not living on campus, and studying less than full time in a traditional academic-admission environment (Davidson & Wilson, 2016). Areas with which nontraditional undergraduate students have struggled created a need to modify requirements to allow certain students the opportunity to attend college (Boliver, 2016). For example, for-profit schools do not ascribe to a competitive admission environment such that students with noncompetitive Scholastic Aptitude Test scores can attend college (Hurwitz, Mbekeani, Nipson, & Page, 2016). With the modified admission requirements, the administrators designed an orientation, remediation, support, and tutoring program to address needs specific to nontraditional undergraduate students (Ko & Rossen, 2017). As part of this program, students attend an orientation course to learn about the academic process and procedures related to degree attainment (Webster, 2016). Further, in the orientation program, students are trained to identify and locate the resources they will need throughout their tenure in a program (Ovink, 2017).

Students who experience difficulties meeting admission requirements may have a sense, even after being accepted into the program, that they do not belong (Ribera, Miller, & Dumford, 2017). Student needs may develop at the university level, but more often, they carry over from previous learning experiences (Estonanto, 2017). For example, a student may have trouble in elementary, middle, or high school that can negatively impact their perceptions, performance, and attendance (Sutton, Langenkamp, Muller, & Schiller, 2018). Their previous school experiences may predetermine their levels of anxiety, and these negative perceptions can create anxiety, whether they are real or imagined (Bhowmick, Young, Clark, & Bhowmick, 2017). Anxiety perpetuates learning difficulties, diminishes student effort, and complicates faculty-student relationships because instructors may find developing a rapport with students who have higher anxiety levels difficult (McBride et al., 2016).

Once students meet requirements for admission, they must complete a financial-aid application and register for classes that specialize in helping nontraditional undergraduate students attend college (University of Northern Iowa Alumni Association, 2017). The specific issue of enrolling students is not the problem, and some universities cater to the needs of nontraditional undergraduate students (Pitman et al., 2017). The issue is the attrition rate of nontraditional undergraduate students whose needs were the catalyst for the inception of this for-profit university (Davis, 2017). When students discontinue their education prior to graduation, it creates the problem of attrition for students, staff, and stakeholders (Black, 2017).

Nontraditional Undergraduate Student Challenges

Ehlert, Finger, Rusconi, and Solga (2017) examined the results of guarantees to college admission on economic and college-application behavior. Despite many strides in racial equality, researchers saw no changes in application behavior because admissions of minority-students from poor backgrounds have not increased (Hilton & Gray, 2017). Improving college-attendance rates has become a priority for university officials (Feldman, 2017). Unmet nontraditional students' needs require university officials to continue to improve enrollment strategies to target minority students living below the poverty level (Herman, 2017). It is important to examine the entire enrollment process, beginning with the application, to see if modifications need to be made to ethically support minority students living below the poverty level (Robinson, 2017).

The educational experience forms a foundation that can either support or destroy students' future educational expectations (Sadovnik, Cookson, Semel, & Coughlan, 2017). Those prior need experiences can create attitudes that influence perceptions, behaviors, and ultimately, outcomes (Prasad, Showler, Ryan, Schmitt, & Nye, 2017). It is critical for instructors to nurture a positive experience, and students must also be aware of the impact that their experiences can have on their efforts related to work and interacting with faculty (Angus & Hughes, 2017). Positive prior experiences are not the only experiences that transfer and affect student performance (Bryant & Veroff, 2017). Negative experiences can impact a student's entire educational future (Giannakos, Pappas, Jaccheri, & Sampson, 2017). Early experiences related to unmet needs affect the attitude a student develops and forms a basis of comparison or a standard that students

can maintain for years to come (Grant & Ray, 2018). For example, Shapiro et al., (2017) stated that students' negative attitudes can persist throughout their academic career in elementary, middle, high school, and college. Thus, addressing needs and causes for anxiety in the educational lives of students is crucial to their future academic success (Heller & Cassady, 2017).

Students' prior experiences can affect the way they view their new educational experiences because they may assume that they will struggle with coursework and faculty relationships as they have in the past (Bickerstaff, Barragan, & Rucks-Ahidiana, 2017). These student perceptions can affect student behavior and expectations. Anxiety is a fear that students develop, based on their perceptions of threats; these feelings can interfere with many academic and personal situations (Zapata, 2017). A fear of mathematics, for example, can manifest as a fear of statistics, which affects students' abilities in quantitative studies and ultimately their success as marketing majors (Skaalvik, Federici, Wigfield, & Tangen, 2017). This manifestation creates stress, poor performance, and negative attitudes toward the subject matter and possibly the instructors in the course (Harris, Campbell Casey, Westbury, & Florida-James, 2016).

Despite support programs to address difficulties in reaching successful completion of a degree, graduation gaps continue to widen among affected groups. Syam (2017) examined the results that some public universities have had in buoying graduation rates for undergraduate students. Whites graduate at twice the rate of Blacks and almost three times the rates of those from Hispanic backgrounds (Bankston & Caldas, 2017). Smith and Persson (2016) suggested that some reasons for these gaps were underfunded

schools and a lack of materials for minority high school students. Some public institutions in the Smith and Persson (2016) study entitled “Teacher satisfaction in high poverty schools” managed to eliminate the graduation gap based on race or significantly reduce them by efforts to specifically support those groups (Baker, Klasik, & Reardon, 2018). Cohen-Vogel, Little, and Fierro (2017) outlined pertinent information on subgroup rates of graduation and which factors were most instrumental in supporting these groups. High school counselors informed and often hosted college fairs to expose students to the opportunities that await them after high school (Huber, 2017). Students were informed of course requirements, testing requirements, and financial obligations related to college (Mukherjee et al., 2017).

College-aged students with disabilities transitioning may need additional support (Milsom & Sackett, 2018). Sometimes a student may miss the opportunity to receive special services by just a few points on a measured scale during the identification or eligibility phase (Gregg et al., 2016). The cut off may exclude certain students who need extra support. The idea of individualized education programs is that all students are identified as needing additional resources to facilitate learning and have special needs (Smith, 1990). The philosophy of individualized education programs is that students have different strengths and weaknesses (Asimow, Kennedy, & Lees, 2016). These strengths can be reinforced, and the weaknesses may be diminished by making accommodations to support student successes and ultimately modify the overall curriculum to best suit student needs (Young, Bonanno-Sotiropoulos, & Smolinski, 2018). It may be quite

beneficial to include the needs of all students in order to improve conditions for all students (Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 2017).

Esteem issues could be carried over from prior need experiences; however, esteem can change and improve based on interactions in one's new environment (Weisskirch, 2016). These differences could have been attributed to students' experiences meeting their needs prior to college enrollment (Lile, Ottusch, Jones, & Richards, 2018). If students experienced success in certain areas of study, they may have developed a deeper interest and confidence which facilitates learning in postsecondary institutions (Shernoff, Csikszentmihalyi, Schneider, & Shernoff, 2014). Once students have interest and confidence, their concerns about how to pay for the education still exists. Waschull's (2013) study examined factors affecting student performance, preparation, and persistence of courses and found that although online students were more apt to fail the course, performance and evaluation methods were the same. It is still imperative to further explore online courses, even though online students performed lower on final examinations and course tests (Perna et al., 2014).

Family or scholarship support may change if the rates of degree attainment are made accessible (Hansen, 2014). Kelly and Schneider (2011) pointed out that institutions of higher learning must be accountable for the tuition rates they receive and must be responsible to students. Discussing the allocations of tuition and fees charged by universities begins the evaluation; however, a more complete picture of how these allocations affect students' financial lives is needed (Boatman & Long, 2016). According to the Consumer Price Index between 2004 and 2007 tuition and fees increased

dramatically by 10% (Reindl, 2007). Even with increases in tuition and fees, attendance rates increased by 19%. Of public and private universities, 85% said their fees per year were more than \$50,000. The ever-increasing tuition and fees for schools have not stopped college enrollment; however, they have not helped improve rates of degree attainment because the increased tuition will affect student success due to lower lifetime limits for financial aid (Schneider, 2009).

Another area requiring investigation is discerning instructors' specific expectations (Verdinelli & Kutner, 2016). Students may reject help from educational coaches and resent aid if they view it as a perceived intrusion into their newly attained independence (Mattanah, 2016). Students may have been self-sufficient toward the end of their other educational needs and experiences; however, the idea of campus life without the safeguards that may have been in place may cause distractions for some. Students also must contend with differences in transportation needs (Shumaker & Wood, 2016). Students' collective recommendations could help to improve the quality of life (Stephens, Hamedani, & Destin, 2014). Tips were created to help facilitate student improvement by considering class choice, support options, leisure activities, and connecting with others on campus (Fosnacht, McCormick, & Lerma, 2018). These reviews offer first-hand knowledge from researchers about what is needed to improve conditions for incoming students. Despite the support features offered, students may require more to improve their commitment to education (Quaye & Shaun, 2014).

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students' Approaches to Learning

Nontraditional students are characterized in part, by being twenty-five years or older. This difference in age denotes a change in educational requirements and approaches to learning. Nontraditional students have specific needs. "Knowles' andragogic theory is based on four assumptions which differ from those of pedagogy: (1) changes in self-concept, (2) the role of experience, (3) readiness to learn, and (4) orientation to learning" (Knowles, 1973). Brookfield (1986) further explained that nontraditional undergraduate students are self-directed, prefer experience-based activities, search for a life-application, and expect to be able to use the information in their current circumstance. Rogers, Lyon, and Tausch, (2013) argued that teaching another person is impossible so educators should strive to facilitate the learning process for others. Knowles (1973) and Rogers et al., (2013) tended to agree that adult learners were motivated by their ability to see a connection to how information would directly and positively affect them in their present circumstance.

Nontraditional students appreciate being a partner in the planning and evaluation of their instruction (Dillard, 2017). This can be accomplished by providing choices in academic activities as well as choices in the evaluation instrument (Sharifi, Soleimani, & Jafarigohar, 2017). Allowing adults to make choices in how they show what they know and how it will be scored is important (Roberts, 2017). Respecting nontraditional students and adult learners for their accumulated knowledge is another example. Navarre, Cleary, and Breathnach, (2017) suggested providing ways in which they can demonstrate prior knowledge skills and be rewarded by receiving credit for this knowledge also facilitates

learning. Students must develop certain study skills and be able to transition the use of these skills into content areas in secondary-education settings and beyond (Paulsen & Sayeski, 2013). The number of activities in which students participate can facilitate the development of these skills and relate directly to their abilities upon college entrance (Warnet, 2019). These skills play an invaluable role in their success and persistence in their chosen field of study. Tarasi, Wilson, Puri, and Divine, (2012) reiterated the importance of using Bloom's taxonomy when developing courses. The revised version includes (a) remember, (b) understand, (c) apply, (d) analyze, (e) evaluate, and (f) create (Fonseca Amorim, Balestrassi, Sawhney, de Oliveira-Abans, & Ferreira da Silva, 2018). The use of these skills can enhance the preparation of students for the college experience. As students receive more specific instructions as to what the expectations are, they can check to see if they are putting forth a significant effort in that area or if they need to improve.

Adult learners value the skills they gained through both positive and negative experiences (Cleary et al., 2017). They can critically reflect and evaluate themselves based upon experiential knowledge (Hooper & Scharf, 2017). Using experiential knowledge to help others to learn in a group setting or collaborative manner further validates them and increases motivation through self-esteem increases (Utley, Kristina Henry, & Smith, 2017). When exercises for students included opportunities to use these types of skills, they were enhanced with practice (Thomas, 2018). Practicing skills of remembering, understanding, applying, analyzing, evaluating, and creating make the process of working independently in a college setting more familiar (Bungard, 2017).

Unprepared students may incur academic repercussions that must be mediated to reduce long-term effects (Newton, 2016). Using these multilevel models helps institutions better identify and support student needs (Lane, Robertson, Kalberg, and Menzies, et al., 2011). These purposes are the same for universities whose goal is to educate the student population and those that prepare students for their career fields after graduation in an environment where needs are assessed and addressed (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2014). Educators can facilitate this model more easily when the class meets together in person. The instructor may even pair students in groups to include a range of student abilities. The difficulty presents when students must create these groups themselves, because they may be unaware of their strengths and weaknesses and be uncomfortable asking for this type of support from other students (Johnson, Johnson, & Smith, 2014). Researchers examined the idea of creating short instructional podcasts to give information, explanation, or remediation (Kennedy et al., 2016). Podcasts can be quite helpful in that they introduce the student to a new level of responsibility for their own education and remind students of their obligation to control themselves (Mello, 2016).

Students who relied on the constant direction of parents and teachers found it more difficult to create the support structures and boundaries necessary for college success without that type of constant directive support. Because the government has revised the financial aid guidelines, making significant regulatory changes like financial demands, time limits, and academic performance minimums, (Cappelli & Won, 2016), the impact on students at for-profit universities is greater because they tend to have a considerably higher tuition rate (Ho, 2016). Further, the time allotted for funding degree

completion has been limited to 6.5 years for a 4-year degree and financial aid amount limits have also changed, creating difficulties for some students (Dynarski & Scott-Clayton, 2013).

Nontraditional students may also have different family, social, career, or financial obligations (Hood, 2017). These added responsibilities create specific areas of interest. Learning is most effective when the student can see that the learning outcomes directly affect them in their current situation (Ovenden-Hope & Blandford, 2017). It is important that they understand the rationale for learning the information. Their internal motivation is directly affected by their ability to link the curriculum to their current personal and professional life (Cordie, Witte, & Witte, 2018). A screening process for at-risk students may provide insights into how to support students in all settings, especially with the advent of distance learning (Heddy, Sinatra, Seli, Taasoobshirazi, & Mukhopadhyay, 2016). Online courses may appeal to nontraditional undergraduate students because of their outside obligations that put them at risk for higher levels of attrition (Flynn, 2016). These factors can affect their academic performance and compete for their time, attention, and resources (Todd, Ravi, Akoh, & Gray, (2017). At-risk students demonstrated certain risk factors in the areas of achievement, grade retention, misbehavior, financial disadvantages, overcrowding, and poor attendance (Slavin, Karweit, & Madden, 1989).

Nontraditional learners are less interested in content and more interested in problem solving and performance (Saleh, Mujiyanto, & Shofwan, 2017). They seek to be able to demonstrate their acquired knowledge. Learning activities like discussions,

projects, presentations, or demonstrations, are more interesting and engaging (Arnold, Randall, & Lyon, 2017). They are more likely to be engaged in areas that will result in their being able to do something. Knowles et al. (2014) contended that adult learners are not content-oriented. Each student must work on becoming an effective independent learner by improving their proficiency skills, which will help them, improve and meet the new set of challenges in college academics (Stoll, 2016). Boller (2008) asserted that students at various intervals are expected to continue to improve their skills as independent learners. The necessity for these skills of independent study, critical thinking, study skills, and self-management only increased as they enter college (Elufiede, Flynn, & Olson, 2017).

Implications

After collecting and analyzing the perceptions of former students, I identified trends or patterns based on Tinto's (1975) model of persistence. I incorporated the ideas of nontraditional students into the final project. The problem of first semester nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts was explored with the purpose of investigating the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. This problem was addressed by creating a professional development training course to share information about nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences related to leaving before graduating. I decided to go in the genre of a professional development and the topics that were included nontraditional undergraduate

student characteristics, nontraditional undergraduate student challenges, and nontraditional undergraduate students' approaches to learning.

Summary

For-profit universities structure programs to serve nontraditional undergraduate students and to provide a response to their needs. Nontraditional undergraduate students classified as at-risk have shown improvements after the successful completion of the first semester, however attrition continues despite increased enrollment. To decrease attrition rates, exploring possible causes of attrition can provide a more complete picture of the problem. Universities have created programs to universally support college students and have seen success after the first semester. Nontraditional undergraduate student attrition rates are highest. In Section 2, I provide a detailed description of the research design including participant roles and contributions. The methods of data collection and analysis are explained.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

This basic qualitative study design was logically the most appropriate to comprehensively answer the overarching research question: What were nontraditional undergraduate dropout students' perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating? Assessing nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences in their own words was the most appropriate because conclusions could be drawn from participants' accounts that could not have been ascertained with the same depth using other methods. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) described using a basic qualitative design when researchers want to understand the perceptions and world view of the population being studied. In general, a basic qualitative study design includes detailed data from participants' perceptions (Ritchie, Lewis, Nicholls, & Ormston, 2013) and was the most appropriate method to use for this specific inquiry because the findings were not in a bounded system. A qualitative approach provided an in-depth look at students' perceptions, ideas, and attitudes about obstructions to graduation. To explore the perceptions and experiences with nontraditional undergraduate student attrition, it was important to select the most appropriate research design. J. W. Creswell and J. D. Creswell (2017) referred to qualitative, quantitative, and mixed method approaches.

Officials at Northern University have primarily conducted quantitative research about nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. Creswell (2013) provided definitions and explanations of types of research methodology like mixed methods, qualitative, and quantitative. Exit surveys from Northern University provided numerical data from one

perspective, used to create quantitative reports allowing researchers to draw conclusions. Results obtained from quantitative data did not serve the purpose of this study because my aim was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. However, I sought a method to investigate nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences in a qualitative manner. Because my goal of this study was to investigate nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences related to leaving the university before graduating, the interview aspect of a basic qualitative study design best fit the criteria. Using this basic qualitative research design allowed me to identify recurrent themes without having a bounded system or developing any theories (see Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

I chose a basic qualitative study design after I considered using other qualitative designs, such as case studies, grounded theory, ethnographic, narrative, and phenomenological designs that were identified as qualitative designs, but I determined that they would be less effective (see Creswell & Creswell, 2017). Narrative research is beneficial when focusing on one success story; however, in this study, the participant pool size was 10 and did not allow the specific depth necessary to have fully explored multiple student need experiences. In addition, narrative research focuses on success, and the participants in this study were students who failed to succeed. A phenomenology study does not answer the question of why, but rather requires participants to provide information to determine how they feel about a phenomenon or to have focused on a

specific experience. This was not an effective way to answer the guiding research question. An ethnographic study would have required extensive observation, but because these students have dropped out, it was not possible to observe them, whereas interviews were the goal of this study. Creswell and Creswell (2017) noted that to understand the central phenomenon, researchers employ the qualitative tradition. Exploring this specific central phenomenon required investigating nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating. According to Yin (2003), a case study design should be considered when (a) the focus of the study is to answer how and why questions, (b) you cannot manipulate the behavior of those involved in the study, (c) you want to cover contextual conditions because you believe they are relevant to the phenomenon under study, or (d) the boundaries are not clear between the phenomenon and context (as cited in Baxter, & Jack, 2008, p. 545). None of the types of qualitative study designs would allow for the most effective exploration of nontraditional undergraduate student experiences.

For this reason, I chose to use a basic qualitative design. According to Creswell (2009), qualitative researchers should choose a basic qualitative design when they are interested in “(a) how people interpret their experiences, (b) how they construct their worlds, and (c) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” when “the overall purpose is to understand how people make sense of their lives and their experiences” (p. 23).

Because my focus was to understand the problem of nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences and not develop a theory about

nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts, grounded theory would have been not be an appropriate design for this study (see Sutrisna & Setiawan, 2016). I chose to carry out a basic qualitative study design because it was best suited for an inquiry to understand student experiences from their perspective and descriptions. My goal was to collect rich data about the student dropouts' experiences and perceptions (see Stake, 2005). To understand why and how nontraditional undergraduate students dropped out, participants must be examined from a myriad of perspectives (see Thomas, 2015). Creswell (2009) identified the characteristics of the basic qualitative design as (a) focusing on meaning, understanding, and process; (b) using a purposeful sampling process; (c) conducting interviews, observations, or document collection; (d) using inductive and comparative data analysis approaches; and (e) identifying themes and categories. Thus, a basic qualitative study design was the most adequate way to explore the questions about nontraditional undergraduate student attrition and to better understand nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating.

Participants

Convenience samples have been used for decades in research (Leiner, 2014). I considered using convenience sampling because I was looking for dropout student participants who volunteered and were available, but they needed to have met the criteria. However, I used purposeful sampling because I needed to select students whose characteristics were consistent with the study. I planned to have 10 participants who were former nontraditional university students who met specific criteria. Participants must

have been enrolled in the focus college Northern University, discontinued their education without completing a program, not have been a former student of mine, and not have reenrolled in another college. Participants were informed that

This study is voluntary. You are free to accept or turn down the invitation. No one at Northern University will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to be in the study now, you can still change your mind later.

You may stop at any time. The researcher will follow up with all volunteers to let them know whether or not they were selected for the study.

According to Creswell, Vidal-Martinez, and Crichton (1995), using eight to 12 was justified because this number of participants in qualitative research allowed me to reach saturation and balance it with the depth of inquiry.

Students indicated if they could be contacted prior, during, or after leaving the university via an exit survey. I contacted Northern University officials in writing and obtained permission from an administrator before I invited former students to the study. A list of former students who indicated that they could be contacted was obtained from the cooperating university in accordance with their policies. To analyze and conduct in-depth investigative interviews, former nontraditional undergraduate students who indicated on their exit survey that they could be contacted were informed about the study. If they responded and indicated a desire to participate, they were emailed an informed consent letter that provided information about the study, including the purpose, procedures, privacy, protection of participants, and importance. Once students indicated

an interest in participating in the study by responding to me, the following process was used while obtaining each participant's informed consent:

1. Potential participants were contacted via email if they consented to being contacted on their exit survey. I attached a copy of the informed consent agreement and participant invitation.
2. Potential participants responded to the informational email and acknowledged agreement to participate by emailing the words, "I consent."
3. The research process was explained to each participant on the informed consent and participant invitation form email.
4. Rights and protections were explained to each participant on the informed consent form and participant invitation email.

To establish an effective researcher-participant relationship, I explained the process, rationale, and safety precautions at the onset (see Wright, Wahoush, Ballantyne, Gabel, & Jack, 2016). I clearly and succinctly explained the entire process to each participant using a guided script. The researcher-participant relationship was professional, and all meetings took place in a professional setting using a public library conference room previously agreed upon by the participant and me. To guard the privacy of any participants who were my former students, they were deselected. In an effort to place each participant at ease, I practiced maintaining a professional, calm, and interested demeanor as well as by posing questions in a nonthreatening manner (see Dempsey, Dowling, Larkin, & Murphy, 2016). Participants were assured that I would make no judgments regarding their comments. I explained that I was exploring this topic to garner

an in-depth understanding of students' perceptions of the process of degree attainment from their specific perspective.

Ethics and participant protection were important to the integrity of the study. Prior to the interview, each participant was introduced to their rights so that they knew what to expect throughout the process. Participants' rights were outlined on the Informed Consent Agreement, which I provided to all potential participants with the invitation letter. I provided all potential participants with my contact information so they could contact me if they had any questions. I was careful to ensure participants' safety, wellbeing, and comfort. I informed participants that I would not use any identifying information when recording data to protect their privacy. I maintained a separate list of code names for participants in a locked file. The computer, files, and even the physical home office will all be maintained, and rendered inaccessible to others. Participants had an opportunity to ask any questions and had the right to terminate their interviews at any time and for any reason.

Data Collection

In this section, I detail the process and procedures for this nontraditional undergraduate student dropout investigation of their perceptions and experiences related to leaving college before graduating. The data sources were approximately 45 to 60-minute one-on-one semistructured face-to-face interviews with 10 Northern University nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts. These former students' perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating were collected during one interview over a 4-week time period. Janetzko (2016) stated that data collection is the

method by which information is gathered in a nonreactive manner. In this basic qualitative study design, data were collected during interviews by asking questions, recording responses, and taking notes. By using in-depth interviews, nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts shared their perceptions and experiences related to leaving the university before graduating. Merriam and Tisdell (2015) contended that, ultimately, the interviewer must be skilled at asking good questions. Ample time was allotted for participants to respond to questions in the interview. As interviewees answered, further probing questions were asked to provide depth and ensure completeness of student-experience details (Henderson & Mathew-Byrne, 2016). I recorded the interviews using a microphone and simultaneously used a speech recognition software called Dragon Professional Individual, v15 Speak to transcribe, as Creswell and Creswell (2017) described as a data collection instrument. Dragon Professional Individual, v15 software simultaneously recorded, transcribed, and saved each interview. I maintained a researcher produced journal to document thoughts, ideas, observations, or questions. Using the results from interviews guided by the participant interview guide (see Appendix B) provided strength to my study. Participants informed me of any discrepancies after reviewing the initial draft findings. I documented all questions, comments, or observations made by participants.

I had 15 years of experience in secondary education, which provided opportunities to observe the process students follow to apply for admission and financial aid to enter institutions of higher education. Later, as a university professor in the college of undergraduate studies, I was afforded another opportunity to observe students as they

adjusted to college life and their performance in some initial courses. These observations included individual stories of triumph and of disappointment. To truly understand participants' perceptions, I empathized and identified with them (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2015). My role as the researcher was to create a warm environment in which participants could openly share their responses to the interview questions. I did not have any supervisory role over the participants. Experience as a teacher in developing rapport with students contributed to an ease in creating a comfortable researcher-participant relationship.

Data Analysis

I used Dragon Speak speech recognition software to record and create transcriptions. I edited the transcriptions to ensure accuracy. I began generating initial codes (Braun & Clarke, 2013) by reading the transcripts and identifying repeating words or phrases. I organized the data relating to repeated words, ideas, or phrases. "The open codes, created by the first pass through the data that focuses on identifying, labeling, and classifying, may be combined into one overarching concept" (Suter, 2011, p.355). I extracted repeating concepts and related words to create *in vivo* codes, which were codes based upon the language that participants used (Khandkar, 2009). "Different respondents to the same question, naturally, will respond differently by using words or phrases that do not match yet are still conceptually related" (Suter, 2011, p.355). I organized them into categories of repeating words, which were grouped into themes, units, and categories.

I grouped information into thematic units related to the research questions. I used open coding to identify categories or main concepts in the written transcripts of

nontraditional undergraduate student dropout perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating (Sorenson, 2006). I identified the emerging ideas and used thematic hand analysis to identify categories or concepts (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Concepts were color coded and organized to confirm the emerging themes and categories.

Braun and Clarke (2013) listed the six phases of thematic analysis as the following: “(a) familiarization with data, (b) generating initial codes, (c) searching for themes among codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining and naming themes, and (f) producing a final report” (Braun & Clarke, 2013, p.93). According to Frechtling and Sharp (1997), data analysis should include some form of a six-step process such as the Braun and Clark plan listed above. I maintained a research journal to help track my ideas and thoughts about trends, patterns, or potential anomalies that emerged during my analysis. This research journal was used to compare the participants’ responses with emerging factors. My initial phase of data analysis included creating memos by adding any outstanding details or observations to my research journal. “These memos support all activities of qualitative data analysis” which Miles and Huberman (1994) defined as data reduction, data display, and drawing conclusions.

I reviewed the transcripts and the memos I noted in my researcher’s journal before I began the first round of open coding. I used open coding which, according to Khandkar (2009), was a way of grouping words by identifying, describing, and developing themes and concepts based on specific criteria. “Open coding includes labeling concepts and defining and developing categories based on their properties and

dimensions" (Khandkar, 2009, p.2). Based on Tinto's Model (1975) and the research questions, I highlighted themes related to academic difficulties, in yellow, themes related social life in blue, and themes related to the unresolved educational and occupational goals in green. I began to organize the data by color codes to locate connected ideas. "Qualitative researchers may use organizational systems called networks that reveal connections with a process that occurs over time" (Suter, 2011, p.358). Connections of ideas related terms between participants became more evident as I continued to review the transcripts.

After waiting for one week I reread the transcripts. I employed a data reduction technique to help separate meaningful data from data not related to the focus of the study and this process was repeated so that meaningful data became clearer as I continued to review the transcripts (Morse, 1994) I used open coding and the code-recode strategy so that "codes and categories may become more refined" (Saldaña, 2015, p.10). As I studied the transcripts I identified and defined any patterns that emerged (Wolcott, 1994). To ensure effective coding, I employed the code-recode technique which was a data analyzing protocol that identified commonalities in concepts and categories of emerging themes (Creswell, 2009). By waiting a week in between coding and recoding, I could more effectively certify that I had identified themes within the data (Saldaña, 2014).

In order to develop an understanding of any possible data relationships, between themes, I converted themes into a textual display by separating them into the categories of (a) academic difficulties, (b) social life, and (c) unresolved educational and occupational goals. Tinto's model of student persistence suggested in part that students'

tendency was to persist and so student failure was against this tendency. Tinto's model of student persistence noted that students may struggle because of (a) academic difficulties, (b) social life, and (c) unresolved educational and occupational goals.

This was a tool I used to track nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts' perceptions and experiences related to leaving the university before graduating. I created three initial categories based upon Tinto's model of student persistence categories; (a) academic difficulties, (b) social life, and (c) unresolved educational and occupational goals, in order to investigate nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts and to share their perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating. Based on the review of literature, some general areas of concern were common to this target population. The ideas listed are possible themes that may have emerged, based on the current body of knowledge, but I also recorded emerging ideas that may have been different in my research journal. Having a visual aid allowed me to further analyze the color-coded themes and to see if any relationships exist that I did not see before. I began to identify themes from the data by using thematic hand analysis which according to Braun and Clarke (2013) was used in qualitative research to identify themes throughout data. Themes and common themes were developed from the category results that were derived from commonalities in research (Saldaña, 2009).

Before producing the final report, I reviewed, defined, and named themes (Braun & Clarke, 2013). I actively searched for any data that may have opposed my findings. Discrepant data or negative data was defined as data results that challenge and even contradicted the other findings. I also considered how the discrepant data may have

affected the findings. The search for discrepant data took place throughout the data analysis process (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Patton (2014) suggested that discrepant data helped to confirm, challenge, or question data. As I analyzed, organized, and coded-recoded the data. I documented discrepant data for further analysis. All discrepant data were disclosed and any relationships to findings, both positive and negative, were explored. The analysis of the data collected was shared in a final written report with nontraditional undergraduate student interview participants. This report will also be shared with faculty members, university officials, and stakeholders.

Evidence of Quality

Transferability, dependability, confirmability, and credibility were all important to establish trustworthiness in data collection (Creswell, 2009). To validate findings the researcher must ensure accuracy throughout the process of data collection and analysis (Chowdhury, 2015). Since qualitative data analysis is interpretive, “the researcher should be self-reflective about his or her role in the research, how he or she is interpreting the findings, and his or her personal and political history that shapes his or her interpretation” (Creswell, 2009. p.259), and I was careful to report the data while excluding my interpretations “Transferability refers to evidence supporting the generalization of findings to other contexts—across different participants, groups, situations, and so forth” (Suter, 2011, p.363). This will be accomplished in my study because the population of nontraditional undergraduate students constituted a large portion of student populations and their experiences and perceptions about leaving college before graduating could be

applied and generalized. To determine transferability, I included rich descriptions and specific details about the context of the participants' responses.

Dependability was when “the qualitative researcher gathers evidence to support the claim that similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated” (Suter, 2011, p.363). By using the code-recode strategy and including rich descriptive documentation, I demonstrated that the data were dependable (J. Creswell, 2009). “Confirmability refers to objectivity (neutrality) and the control of researcher bias” (Suter, 2011, p.363). I was aware of potential bias and openly declared that they come in the form of a sympathetic perspective over to the student success. I maintained this perspective to ensure objectivity in the presentation of information so as not to seek excuses, but simply to report accurate findings. I kept a research journal to record my observations, thoughts, questions and insights, and I also used the bracketing technique which required me to set aside any preconceived notions as I examined the data (Ahern, 1999).

“Credibility refers to the believability of the findings and is enhanced by evidence such as confirming evaluation of conclusions by research participants, convergence of multiple sources of evidence, control of unwanted influences, and theoretical fit” (Suter, 2011, p.363). Participants enhanced the credibility of this study by reviewing the findings and thus confirming that the findings were accurate. I used a member checking process to share my preliminary findings with the participants (Creswell, 1994). Merriam and Tisdell (2015) stated that member checking was when participants review initial findings and provide feedback related to my interpretation of their own data and to the viability of

the results in this setting. This member checking process added to the credibility to my data by allowing participants the opportunity to confirm or challenge the initial draft findings (Birt, Scott, Cavers, Campbell, & Walter, 2016). I will share, once this study is completed and approved, the research results in a 1-2-page summary with the participants and university officials.

To determine transferability, I used specific details about the context of participants' responses including rich descriptions of my observations during the interviews. I implemented the code-recode strategy as reviewed the transcripts several times to gather evidence that supported "the claim that similar findings would be obtained if the study were repeated" (Suter, 2011, p.358). I established that the data were dependable by using this strategy (Creswell, 2009). In addition, I used the bracketing technique and set aside any preconceived notions as I examined the data (Ahern, 1999). Credibility and believability of findings were enhanced as the research participants confirmed the themes and by my use of multiple sources of evidence, and controlling unwanted influences (Suter, 2011). Although qualitative research is nontransferable, similar institutions that experience similar challenges may find my information helpful and relatable.

Discrepant Cases

There were no discrepant cases in this study. The data aligned with the categories and themes emerged consistently across research findings. As I reviewed the data from the interview transcripts, initial draft findings, and analysis I found no evidence of

discrepant cases in this study. The themes were not discrepant nor were they disputed by any findings as defined by Merriam and Tisdell (2015).

Data Analysis Process

This section includes a discussion of the analysis of data collected during interviews and observations with 10 former nontraditional undergraduate college students. The analysis goals for this study were to discover themes that emerged from interview transcripts to explore answers to the research questions. Nontraditional undergraduate student attrition has been a problem, and dropout rates have increased beginning in 2008 at Northern University. The administrators and faculty of Northern University, where high attrition rates have been a problem, may benefit by an exploration of nontraditional students' perceptions about leaving the university before graduating.

The codes that supported the emergent theme of issues with time included various phrases that related to issues with time. Information about nontraditional undergraduate college student issues in the areas of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals that influenced their decision to discontinue their education was sought to answer research questions one and two. The patterns expressed during the interviews of academic difficulties with timing, social relationships and ambiguous goals formed relationships between the ideas expressed by each participant in the results. These patterns developed into codes which yielded emergent themes. The resulting themes aligned with the research questions in various ways related to the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate college students. The research questions for this study were:

RQ1: What were the perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating? RQ2: What were the academic, social and/or unresolved goal experiences of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts that led them to decide to leave the university before graduating?

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. The basic qualitative design included semistructured interviews as the data collection tool; the semistructured interviews were used to gather information from 10 former nontraditional undergraduate students. The interviews were recorded and transcribed using speech recognition software for analysis. In RQ1, the perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating aligned with the themes of timing, social relationships within a school environment, and ambiguous academic goals. In RQ2, the experiences of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating also aligned with the themes of timing, social relationships within a school environment, and ambiguous academic goals.

Once I reviewed the data transcriptions from the 10 semistructured interviews with former nontraditional undergraduate students, I completed several cycles of thematic

hand analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2013) during which I used the code-recode strategy (Saldaña, 2015). I highlighted recurrent patterns and emerging themes and began to extract the codes (Wolcott, 1994). I properly aligned the codes with the research questions (Creswell, 2009). I looked for repeating codes that indicated the emergence of new themes and anomalies in these alignments (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). As suggested by Morse (1994), I searched for codes that aligned with the emerging themes and that related to these two research questions about the perceptions and experiences of the issues that nontraditional undergraduate college students faced in the areas of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved occupational or educational goals. As I reviewed the codes, three major categories developed nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges that affected their decision to discontinue their education: (a) issues with timing, (b) issues with social connections within the university environment, and (c) issues with goal setting.

The first theme I identified is that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic issues related to time. The codes that supported the emergent theme of academic issues related to issues supported this theme. RQ1 and RQ2 included the perceptions and experiences about their issues in the areas of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals that influenced their decision to discontinue their education. The patterns that emerged included different ways of expressing similar ideas about issues with time, social relationships within a school environment and ambiguous academic goals. During the interviews, participants described academic difficulties by using phrases such as the following: *ran out of time*,

late, not enough time, missed the deadline, work schedule changes affected the time, and lost points on assignment because it was late. Additionally, participants also expressed that issues with time affected their ability to speak with instructors, attend study groups, seek help from university support programs, receive guidance from academic counselors, and ask for clarification from instructors. The problems noted about academic difficulties related to and described challenges associated with issues of time including the difficulties they described with their outside responsibilities. The difficulties were most apparent in phrases such as the following: *feeling guilty for not spending enough time with children, running late to pick up children, missing important family events, and showing signs of distractions while working.* These phrases supported issues with time as a major theme for nontraditional undergraduate college students

The second theme that nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced was the issue of social connections within a school environment. The phrases that these former nontraditional undergraduate college students used to express issues with social connections within a school environment with others included: *did not fit in, differences in age, too many outside responsibilities, work schedule did not allow time for social activities, did not have anything in common, did not understand each other, could not relate to one another, and did not feel welcome.* Throughout the interviews, participants expressed a desire to connect with others, and simultaneously, they used verbiage that demonstrated issues about obstacles in achieving those desired connections with other students. Furthermore, nontraditional undergraduate college students also described issues with social connections within a school environment with faculty and staff

members by using repeated phrases: *already had favorite students, did not understand me, did not respect my prior knowledge, considered me obsolete, treated me like a child, was upset by questions, and appeared inaccessible*. The responses that these former nontraditional college students gave expressed issues with their social life and academic difficulties and created a basis for explanations of their experiences related to RQ1 and RQ2.

Former nontraditional undergraduate students all expressed a desire to connect with faculty, staff, and other students however they described the perceptions and experiences about their issues with social connections within a school environment that influenced their decision to discontinue their education. The phrases that these former nontraditional undergraduate college students used to express issues with social connections within a school environment with others included: did not fit in, differences in age, too many outside responsibilities, work schedule did not allow time for social activities, didn't have anything in common, did not understand each other, could not relate to one another, and did not feel welcome. Throughout the interviews, participants expressed a desire to connect with others and simultaneously used verbiage that demonstrated issues through their perceptions and experiences about obstacles in achieving those desired connections with other students. Furthermore, nontraditional undergraduate college students also described issues with social connections within a school environment with faculty and staff members by using phrases that included: *already had favorite students, did not understand me, did not respect my prior knowledge, considered me obsolete, treated me like a child, was upset by questions, and appeared*

inaccessible. The responses that these former nontraditional college students gave expressed issues with their social life and academic difficulties and created a basis for explanations of their experiences related to RQ1 and RQ2.

The third theme that former nontraditional undergraduate students experienced difficulties with was ambiguous academic goals. In all the interviews, participants describe their goals and the difficulties they had in achieving those goals and not knowing how to plan daily activities, goals, or needed resources. They expressed the issues that they had with ambiguous academic goals and planning by including phrases like: I am not sure, I would do that later, I did not have a specific time, was unsure of the actual place, would like to achieve something like, not sure of career path, not sure why, and did not know the schedule. The plans and goals of former nontraditional undergraduate college students were similarly nonspecific, nonexistent, not realistic and the planning for goal achievement was incomplete, nonexistent, or inconsistent. During the coding process for this particular theme RQ1 and RQ2 were addressed and aligned with unresolved educational or occupational goals, in that even participants that felt they were skilled in planning and goal setting, admitted to being inconsistent in the implementation or action required for plan completion or goal achievement, thus making their unresolved occupational and educational goals out of reach for these students. Former nontraditional undergraduate college student participants' perceptions were that their college experience was not what they expected. Their expectations were for additional support, a plan with clearly defined action items for academic success and an

understanding of the difficulties that nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced that differed from their traditional counterparts.

Findings

Nontraditional undergraduate student attrition has been a problem at Northern University, and dropout rates have increased since 2008. This problem may benefit by an exploration of nontraditional students' perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating.

In this basic qualitative study, I developed three themes from the data collected during the 10 interviews with nontraditional undergraduate students. Nontraditional undergraduate students shared their perceptions and experiences regarding the factors that influence their decisions to discontinue their education prior to graduation. Three major themes emerged from the thematic hand analysis data and were confirmed using the code-recode strategy. Former nontraditional undergraduate students provided response that led to the identification of three major themes that affected their perceptions and experiences related to discontinuing their education. The three themes that I developed from the data analysis of interviews included: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school

environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

Theme 1: Challenges Related to Issues of Time

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with time. Challenges related to issues of time caused significant difficulty for nontraditional undergraduate students. The data that resulted from the interviews produced several categories related to issues with time. There were three categories from the data that support the first theme of difficulties with time that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to job responsibilities. Participant 3 shared that financial burdens required many nontraditional undergraduate college students to experience issues with time since “they had to work” to fulfill their financial obligations. Participant 2 explained, “Having so many bills” made my job responsibilities seem “more important than school sometimes.” Participant 8 shared that instructors “did not understand” that I needed to work “to take care of my kids.” “It was frustrating” described Participant 9 when I had to “bring work home from the job” because they could not see how they could do work from their jobs and work for school at home. Participant 5 stated that their boss “agreed to work with their schedule”, but as issues arose at work, he did not fulfill his promise. The supervisor “was jealous of me” when he found out that I went back to college,” shared Participant 10, “My supervisor started “writing me up to try to get me fired,” so “I suddenly had to equally

important things work and school.” And “I wanted to go to school but needed to work to pay my bills,” explained Participant 8. This negatively influenced the time they had to study, prepare, and dedicate to their studies. Participant 8 was promoted on the job and “was happy about making extra money” but it came with “the extra responsibility of covering shifts” I was called into work “when others did not show up.” Similarly, Participants 4 and 7 stated that due to other employees not reporting for duty, they “had to work additional shifts.” As a result, they missed classes, tutoring sessions, and study groups. Participants 6, 9, and 10 complained that “most of the help sessions” were scheduled without regard for “people who had to work” and “did not have that much free time”. Participant 3 and 5 shared similar experiences. Participant 7 added that they “never got off on time” because their coworkers arrived late to work, and this caused them to miss academic activities. These interruptions created “more pressure” to try to accomplish the same amount of work in a very limited amount of time and sometimes “it was just too hard” complained Participant 1. “I was under so much pressure” explained Participant 4 and just “never felt like I could finish” studying after leaving work. “I needed money and had to work” noted Participant 2 and unlike the traditional students, this participant listed many issues with time, but they did not acknowledge that issues with time were important challenges.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to scheduling activities. Nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced issues with time that were affected by scheduling challenges. Balancing personal and professional responsibilities into a schedule was a great source of stress, as reported by

all participants. The participants were clear about the challenges of attending classes, participating in study sessions, completing assignments, and meeting with instructors. “I do not know how they [referring to instructors] expect us to do all of this each week” questioned Participant 8. For nontraditional undergraduate students, these school-related activities were fit into full schedules of work requirements and family responsibilities. “I got kids,” claimed Participant 3, and “I do not have any help”. All participants, except participant 4, described frustration with university officials who often did not meet their expectations of specific considerations to help with time issues. Seven participants cited their grades were low because they could not find the time in their schedules to “get everything done” as summarized by Participant 6. “I decided to do this program because they said this program was for working adults,” noted Participant 9, and “I thought they were going to make schoolwork with my schedule”. Most participants, eight out of 10, cited family responsibilities as another challenge that created an issue with time while the other two participants disagreed and expressed that family responsibilities served only to support their academic pursuits. Participant 6 spoke about the difficulties in “scheduling time to read, study, and prepare while balancing that against being a spouse, parent and a full-time employee.” Participant 1 was glad that “my spouse was supportive” but still unconsciously interrupted them when they tried to “schedule time to study.” Since “I wear so many hats” I constantly felt that “my schedule was not my own” shared Participant 10. Another (Participant 6) shared that when they were experiencing success following their schedules however “something would come along and hijack their plans.” All participants commented about the differences in scheduling time to work on

assignments being easier than projects. “When do they expect me to do all of this work” for these projects when “my kids have projects due” questioned Participant 4. Although issues with time were also challenging for participant 10, they did not have parental or spousal responsibilities that impeded their progress. Half of the participants openly condemned rules or restrictions placed upon them and blamed others for any setbacks that they experienced in finding time to finish their work in their schedules. Participant 2 recalled, “I could not access my textbook online and I told them” and they “still did not give me extra time.” If the instructors would have, “responded to my questions quicker I would have had time to finish,” noted Participant 6. A few participants 4, 9, and 10 blamed the instructors and the staff for “interfering in their creative process” by placing “demands on their time” to turn in assignments and complete required paperwork. Participant 8 stated that college should provide them “time to focus on creative pursuits” not required them to do “busywork that had nothing to do with their major”.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to inconsistent effort. Good academic work habits such as planning, studying, reading, and submitting work in advance were generally not maintained by nontraditional undergraduate students and issues with time were cited as the cause. Their academic habits related to the required reading, studying, and preparing needed to successfully complete a class were affected by their behaviors. “It had been so long since I was a student” I needed a refresher course on study skills stated Participant 5.

All students must take the orientation class which focuses on balancing personal and professional responsibilities and a review of study skills. Students are asked to create

a study schedule. Participant 3 shared that they were able to see the benefit of some classes, like the orientation course, because the orientation course was helpful in explaining “how to balance your life, your school work, family responsibilities and working,” and it included a section on “budgeting your money.” However, participants 2 and 5 thought that the orientation classes were well received since they struggled with “preparing for projects, discussions, and papers”. Most participants confessed that they had difficulty understanding how long it would take to complete assignments, create projects, and prepare for examinations. “Spending a little bit of time reading or writing outside of class was helpful” but was insufficient, according to Participant 5. This situation created a sensation for Participant 7 of feeling “nervous and anxious” which was a different feeling after experiencing “4 years of success in the military” and “feeling so accomplished”. Participants expressed that they lacked the ability to self-advocate and “to speak with faculty” regarding their concerns and often “did not participate” in university-sponsored support programs due to issues with time. Not using the programs did not “help the situation” confessed Participant 1 since they “began to procrastinate and avoid the work”. Most participants (1-5 and 7, 8 and 10) conceded that they lacked enough time and “did not seek extra help or tutoring” nor did they heed academic counselor guidance on “which class combinations were the best”. Only Participant 9 differed from other nontraditional undergraduate college students by strictly adhering to academic counsel. Participant 3 needed to “finish school in a timely manner” and decided to pursue a “very aggressive goal in order to be able to finish” without regard to the recommendations of school officials. According to participant 2, “I did try to learn but I still got bad grades.”

Participant 6 stated that “sometimes I did not read all of the work” because I did not have enough time or “I tried but I did not understand.” “One instructor said he did not take late work” so when I was behind “I did not even want to try, shared Participant 3. Most participants expressed feelings of isolation and “felt like they needed to pull themselves up by their own bootstraps” as expressed by Participant 8. Participant 7 did comment on the “unfairness” of grading procedures because they felt that if they “asked too many questions that it resulted in lower grades for them” and also “less popularity with classmates”, while Participants 4, 6, and 9 acknowledged some gaps in their preparations as the reason for lower grade receipt and they could have done more or worked harder. Some nontraditional undergraduate students had success at the beginning of a semester, but later had difficulty maintaining the same consistency throughout the semester. Participant 6 “struggled” to develop a “regular routine.”

Participants also agreed that they experienced issues with how to find time, to organize work, and give a consistent sustained effort especially when they became frustrated or discouraged. One example Participants 3, 7, 8, and 9 expressed was that they participated at the beginning of class but failed to maintain the same consistency of effort which caused them to suffer academically because of their lack of consistency. The majority admitted that they had trouble with procrastination and turning in assignments late (all participants except 4 and 9). Participant 10 reported that they “had a habit of taking the easy way out. At the same time in contrast, Participant 7 did think that they could “take a shortcut” and just “ask other coworkers for the answers to the questions” within their courses “without actually having to do the reading.” Participant 8 found very

quickly that “I had to make the decision to do the work even though they were stressed about insufficient time.” It was only one instance where Participant 3, indicated that they were convinced that they would not be successful by “merit nor hard work” but success was decided by “who you knew.” As a result of the data collected for this study on nontraditional undergraduate students’ perceptions and experiences that affected their decision to discontinue their education supported issues with time as a major theme. Nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced issues with time that were affected by work, family, financial burdens, scheduling challenges, and inconsistent effort.

Theme 2: Issues With Social Connections Within the School Environment

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within the school environment. Challenges related to issues with social connections within the school environment have resulted in cogent difficulties for nontraditional undergraduate students. Nontraditional undergraduate students shared their perceptions and experiences about their issues with social connections within a school environment that influenced their decision to discontinue their education. Several categories related to issues with social connections within the school environment and were produced following the interview data analysis. There were three categories from the data that supported the second theme including the following: (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced difficulty socializing with other students. Although the university officials attempted to create an inviting environment for nontraditional students, they still struggled to identify with the student population. “I was looking to meet other people like me” shared Participant 2. All participants reported that they felt that they had nothing in common with those around them. Since the university had advertised a program that would facilitate the education of nontraditional undergraduate students by considering their specific needs, all participants expected additional support and programming that would make participation and inclusion possible. Participant 3 began by saying that “they were surprised at how different they felt.” Despite differences in ages, roles, and responsibilities, Participants 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, and 10 agreed that they expected to make connections on the campus that would facilitate college life. Participant 3, in contrast, reported that they found it difficult to fit in with their peers and find a social group but did very well with instructors due to the discipline and respect that they were taught in the military.

Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 10, found it difficult to fit in with the younger 18-year-old crowd that still lived at home with parents and who seemed immature. Older commuter students seemed to be distracted by “all their responsibilities,” noted Participant 2. In the interviews, participants 1, 3, 5, 8, and 9 confessed that the different roles and responsibilities nontraditional students had, made it difficult for them to relate to the larger student population. Participant 2 noted that the way “college is depicted on television and in movies” as some sort of “giant party” still shapes nontraditional undergraduate students' expectations. Unlike other respondents Participant 1 called actual

college life “a drudgery that distracted from their creative music journey” and “far from what they expected.” Participant 3 stated that even though there were many social offerings “they felt unwelcome” because “they could not find someone who could identify with them.” “I could not believe how alone I felt on a campus that big” shared Participant 7 when describing the difficulty identifying with others.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction. Those who were able to identify with others struggled with issues related to prioritization. During the interviews, I noted that when they were invited to social activities, they had difficulty in choosing when it was appropriate to participate in these social activities and in balancing their academic responsibilities. Participant 2 described “being so happy” about being invited to participate that they “didn’t prioritize their schoolwork” and instead chose to attend social engagements. Participant 4 “felt forced to attend some social activities” but couldn’t explain why they felt that way. Additionally, I observed and noted that they experienced difficulties in choosing which activities should take precedence over other activities related to social engagement. “I went to the study group” but the members were “busy having fun” and did not focus on the studying complained Participant 10. Attending the social function “almost costed me my job” because I was late to work explained Participant 3. Their issues with social connections within a school environment impacted study time and relationships with faculty members. Only one participant disclosed feeling that they did not want to participate; the other nine participants wanted to participate but cited outside responsibilities that prohibited social connections at school. All participants

acknowledged that there were opportunities to connect but described situations that did not allow them to connect in the way in which they had hoped. Three out of 10 Participants 2, 5, and 7 stated that although they did meet other nontraditional undergraduate students who shared similar responsibilities such as having to work and having family obligations, these shared characteristics were also a shared barrier to social connections with the traditional school population. When study groups were held and they had family or work responsibilities that impeded their participation, this created anxiety and feelings of isolation for Participants 1, 3, and 9. Only Participant 2 stated that their “boss had promised to work with their class schedule” but soon “refused to honor” his promise. Other Participants 4, 5, 8 and 10 were called into work additional shifts and during times that they were to attend tutorial and study group sessions. These changes in schedule created many difficulties for them according to Participant 9. Only a few participants had an unrealistic view of how college life would be, Participant 5 expected that their social life would be more important than their schoolwork.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues assimilating into the social group. All participants in the study described a desire to connect with other students, the campus, and the faculty but admitted to facing many challenges. Because of the constant struggle to balance the personal, professional, and academic responsibilities, nontraditional undergraduate students experienced additional stress related to social integration. Some nontraditional undergraduate students did identify with other students and learned to prioritize but failed to assimilate into the groups fully. Participant 6 shared that even when things “were going well,” they just could not fully “become a part of” the

group. The unique set of “circumstances” kept them from really “belonging” shared Participant 8. No participants reported feeling connected to campus life in the way that they had anticipated. Participants 4, 5, and 6 however used the phrasing that they ultimately just did not fit in. Participants 1 and 7 stated that the instructor did not like them because they were different from the instructor. Although they had never been to college their perception and expectations were that their social life would include many connections, friendships, social engagements, and even overnight trips noted Participant 5. Participants 4, 8, and 9 were convinced that their memberships in different clubs and organizations would be certain.

During the interviews, they shared that even when nontraditional students met other nontraditional students, they still encountered issues surrounding available time to work with and related to other nontraditional undergraduate students since they shared similar responsibilities. Instead of the shared similar responsibilities creating an environment of collaboration and understanding, it simply rationalized why the limited time blocked their ability to identify, prioritize and assimilate into the student population. Some nontraditional undergraduate students did experience the ability to identify with larger student population noted Participant 1. Some nontraditional undergraduate students tended to “look to peers to get information” instead of going directly to faculty members described Participant 2. Nontraditional undergraduate students struggled with assimilation. They experienced difficulties with social connections within a school environment and integrating their social life with the new social life that they had on campus. Many of the students did not feel connected to campus life.

Participants also agreed that they saw their issues with social connections within a school environment as a hindrance to their coursework, university attendance, and class completion. The data collected for this study supported nontraditional students' issues with social connections within a school environment. Nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced issues that were affected by their roles, responsibilities, financial burdens, feelings of isolation, and non-acceptance.

Theme 3: Issues With Ambiguous Academic Goals

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with ambiguous academic goals. Attending college with nonexistent or ambiguous goals created difficulties with sustained motivation and effort. A lack of motivation created difficulty for nontraditional undergraduate students to maintain sustained effort and therefore made it near impossible to reach any educational or occupational goals. As a result of the data collected, three categories that supported theme three indicated that nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were: (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues with ambiguous academic goals that were nonspecific or nonexistent. The majority, seven out of 10, agreed that their goals were nonspecific. Only Participants 4 and 9 acknowledged that although they had goals, they were inconsistent in implementing any action items that would have helped them to reach those goals. All participants admitted that their ambiguous goals could be improved, and it would provide additional support for their

academic achievement. All participants also agreed that they did not provide equal or consistent effort to goal attainment during any given semester. For example, Participants 2, 3, 5, and 8 began academically strong in a course, and later they started to submit substandard or late work due to conflicts in their schedules. In contrast, Participants 1, 4, 6, and 9 were slower to start working in the course and reported giving better effort towards the end of the courses. Only Participant 7 felt that their effort towards goal attainment was consistent.

All participants shared their perceptions and experiences which included difficulties with ambiguous goals because their goals were nonspecific or nonexistent, and it influenced their decision to discontinue their education. Nonspecific or nonexistent goals made working consistently on those plans difficult. Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues with ambiguous academic goals that were affected by inconsistent actions. All participants discussed issues with ambiguous goals and planning. “I did not really know what I wanted to major in,” expressed Participant 6. “I felt lost,” shared Participant 4, but “I tried my best.” “I asked for help, but they did not help me,” stated Participant 5. Half of the participants described trying hard at first and not working that hard at other times and this may indicate a need for testing or assistance in life planning.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues with difficult financial situations and unsuccessful or unfulfilling careers. During the interviews, most participants, nine out of 10, also shared that their ambiguous goals were based upon financial gain, potential respect, authority, or power. Some of the participants also shared

that their already ambiguous goals were based solely on progress they had seen others attain. In general, the skill of college degree attainment came after they experienced some personal and professional disappointments and financial hardship that they felt could have been alleviated by degree attainment. Only Participants 4 and 5 had specific professional goals; the others saw degree attainment as a means to happiness and ease of life.

Many nontraditional undergraduate students with minimal paying jobs “began college out of frustration,” shared Participant 9. Participants 3 and 7 noted that they had “difficulty providing for families” and all participants indicated some degree of dissatisfaction with their careers. When asked to define their educational and occupational goals, they struggled; Participant 4 identified the reason as they “did not have a specific plan.” Most were nonspecific about their career goals and stated that they only wanted to “make enough money” to improve their quality of life noted Participant 5. Participants 2, 5, 6, and 9 also agreed that they saw university degree attainment as a means to avoid certain pitfalls of professional life and as an avenue to achieve satisfaction and enjoyment of life. Participants 1, 3, and 7 stated that they were negatively influenced by others on their jobs who did not see the value in a college education while Participants 2 and 4 were not influenced by others’ opinions.

Most participants, eight out of 10, agreed that they were only convinced to go to school after working what they described as boring jobs that oftentimes did not give them enough money to support their lifestyle. Participant 8 commented, “I just knew that people who had a college degree seem to make a lot of money and people who did not

have a college degree seem to not make any money or be able to go on vacation or drive a nice car.” Most participants had goals that were definitely motivating to them and they wanted to attain such as money (nine out of 10), vacations (eight out of 10), time with family (seven out of 10), and purchasing a home and car (10 out of 10). In the interviews many comments shared by nontraditional undergraduate students were related to the fact that college degree attainment would provide them the opportunity to get a good job. Participant 6 noted, “a good job would provide me with a good life.” Their educational goals were tied directly to making increased income agreed Participants 5, 7, and 9. Only Participant 10 concluded, “I just wanted to make good money even though I was confused about what career I actually wanted.”

Nontraditional undergraduate students were affected by the opinions of their peers. Some nontraditional undergraduate students had previously decided against the necessity of college degree attainment. “My parents did not go to college,” shared participant 2. Participants 1, 4, 7, 8, and 9 seemed unsure if attaining a four-year degree would help them in their ultimate occupational goal. “My uncle started off and just worked his way up” in the company and “he did not go to college” expressed Participant 6. Once in the workplace they discovered that those coworkers who had attained their degrees experienced increased financial gain and “authority” or “respect in the workplace” they decided to attend college explained Participant 3. “They always give the good jobs” to the people they like said Participant 8. Only one of “my friends went to college right after high school” shared Participant 9. On my job it seems like “anybody with some power” went to college noted Participant 5. Those in my peer group felt the

same way that “college was not necessary if you could just get a good job”, described Participant 2. Participants 1, 5, 6, 7, and 10 outlined their work history and how they changed jobs a lot always trying to get a better job.

Nontraditional undergraduate students who dropped out of school described their perceptions and experiences about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on their decisions to leave the university. The results of analyzing the transcripts included some specific commonalities. Three major themes were identified. Nontraditional undergraduate college students experienced challenges including: (a) issues with managing time, (b) issues with managing social connections with faculty members and peers and (c) issues with managing and setting goals.

Discussion of the Findings

Nontraditional undergraduate students usually meet one or more of the following characteristics: (a) older than most students at time of enrollment in postsecondary education; (b) part-time student; (c) work full time; (d) financially independent; (e) have dependents; or (f) no high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010, p. 1). This section will include a discussion of the three themes identified from the data on nontraditional undergraduate college students’ perceptions and experiences that influenced their decision to discontinue their education prior to graduation. The three themes that were identified are the following: (a) academic difficulties related to issues of time, (b) issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) issues with ambiguous academic goals.

Theme 1. The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time. There were three categories from the data that support the first theme of difficulties with time that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort. According to Ellis (2019), nontraditional students struggle with the amount of time and energy devoted exclusively to academics. Nontraditional undergraduate students are students who need special modifications to schedules, format, or delivery of university level courses (Pelletier, 2010). Nontraditional undergraduate students may have work, family, social, or health issues that could become obstacles to accessing a college education (Rubin and Wright, 2017). Participants experienced academic difficulties related to job responsibilities and looked for assistance from the university.

Since the university marketed programs designed for nontraditional undergraduate students, the participants expected programs which would (a) allow them extra time, (b) have assignments with flexible options, and (c) have instructor office hours or tutoring sessions at alternative times. University administrators should recognize and reward faculty members who facilitate learning for working students by adapting their instructional practices (Levin, 2018). This is important for all students since the rates of students who had job responsibilities increased from 56% during the first year to 76% during their last years indicating that this issue is most likely common to most students (Dundes & Marx, 2006).

Participants experienced challenges related to scheduling activities and expressed difficulty creating a schedule or plan of action. Burrus, Jackson, Holtzman, and Roberts (2017) concluded that students need to be able to schedule time to meet deadlines by completing assignments, and studying, while also participating in extracurricular activities. Students can experience impaired psychological health when they struggle to manage conflicts between work and school (Gabriel et al., 2019). Participants described experiencing challenges demonstrating inconsistent effort and shared that even when they had a plan of action, they struggled to maintain consistent effort. They described working hard during certain times but not performing during other times thus they participated in academic activities in an inconsistent manner. For students to be self-disciplined and maintain a consistent effort through self-regulatory activities they needed to remain motivated and self-assured (Köseoglu, 2015). Meetings with a counselor on a regular basis could provide students the needed support and encouragement.

Theme 2. The second theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students have issues with social connections within a school environment. There were three categories from the data that supported the second theme including the following: (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group. Participants struggled to identify socially with other students, and this did not facilitate their involvement in campus activities. This lack of involvement and participation hinders attachment and makes identifying with other students difficult and departure likely. Institutional departure often occurs when students are not involved in social life at school, such as peer to peer

interactions, faculty student interactions, and enjoyment of student life (Little et al., 2018). Tinto (1975) suggested that students' retention depends on their social and academic integration into the college. Participants struggled to prioritize schoolwork over social interaction, and this caused a false sense of sufficient academic participation when they considered social interaction on campus a part of their studies. He also stated that when students understand and participate in the academic and social elements of college life, it is more probable that they will complete their degree (Tinto, 1975, 1987). If students participated in study groups with their peers, they might be able to feel more socially integrated and connected while improving their academic performance and their confidence when communicating with faculty members.

Continuing to explore retention and persistence, Tinto (1987) established the "paradox of institutional commitment" (p.11) which explained that students' retention in college is related to students' academic and social involvement in college. Since the university established a program targeting nontraditional students their institutional commitment should be to serve that group of students, but when it fails to do so, it creates a paradox or contradiction. Participants' challenges prevented them from assimilating into social groups even if they were able to identify with others. They expected to be able to form relationships to feel connection and support their academic performance.

Proximate structures are the social frameworks to which students relate, with which they identify, and that they join that contribute to or detract from academic success (Stryker, et al., 2005).

Theme 3. The third theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students often expressed that they had ambiguous academic goals. The three categories that supported theme three indicated that nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were: (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers. Knowles (1973) along with Rogers et al., (2013) tended to agree that adult learners were motivated by their ability to see a connection to how information would directly and positively affect them in their present circumstance having ambiguous academic goals makes it difficult to identify connections. Nontraditional students appreciate being a partner in the planning and evaluation of their instruction (Dillard, 2017). As students receive more specific instructions as to what the expectations are, they can check to see if they are putting forth a significant effort in that area or if they need to improve.

Nontraditional students may also have different family, social, career, or financial obligations, and these added responsibilities create specific areas of interest and different goals (Hood, 2017). Learning is most effective when the student can see that the learning outcomes directly affect them in their current situation (Ovenden-Hope & Blandford, 2017). Each student must work on becoming an effective independent learner by improving their proficiency skills which will help them improve and meet the new set of challenges in college academics (Stoll, 2016). Boller (2008) asserted that students at various intervals are expected to continue to improve their skills as independent learners.

The necessity for these skills of independent study, critical thinking, study skills, and self-management only increased as they enter college (Elufiede et al., 2017).

Conceptual framework The conceptual framework that grounds this study is based upon Tinto's (1975) model of student persistence and retention which was built on three major concepts: academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals. The first concept of academic difficulties was recorded through these nontraditional undergraduate students' perceptions and experiences. The participants decided to discontinue their education prior to graduation after experiencing academic difficulties. They struggled with issues of time. They were ineffective time managers, project managers, and resource managers. The second concept of social life contributed largely to the issues with social connections within a school environment. Former nontraditional college students experienced feelings of isolation, difficulties connecting with others and an inability to integrate their social lives and create successful connections with those that would help facilitate college success. The third concept of ambiguous academic goals affected nontraditional undergraduate student success because these students' lack of clearly defined goals meant that students were unable to create effective action items, to have a vision to provide direction for them, or to understand the relationship among their goals, their efforts, their actions, and their achievements. Tinto explained that persistence is a college student's goal, not attrition.

The themes that emerged in this study support Tinto's (1975) model. Tinto acknowledged when students face academic difficulties such as grade performance, lack of enthusiasm for the subject, lack of interest in studying the subject, and lack of

responsibility as a student, they may drop out of the class. Additionally, institutional departures happen when students do not participate in social life (Little et al., 2018). Their academic difficulty and a lack of social life did appear to lead to unresolved goals and the loss of the persistence needed for graduation (Tinto, 1975).

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. The results of the data revealed three themes: (a) nontraditional undergraduate college students had challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate college students had issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate college students had issues with ambiguous academic goals. Nontraditional undergraduate college students expected more support, needed to form connections and required guidance through goals in order to be more successful. They looked for help from others and had unclear goals.

RQ1: What were the perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating?

Nontraditional undergraduate students expressed how their perceptions about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals influenced their decision to discontinue their education. Their perceptions were that the university would provide support based upon their needs as

nontraditional undergraduate students, that their coursework would relate directly to their career goals, and that they would find comradery amongst their peers and instructors. The participants expressed perceptions that suggest that the university administrators should address expectations. Some participants identified that they had very different expectations about participation, assignments, and office hours. It was clear to me that these items should be addressed by university personnel early in the program.

RQ2: What were the academic, social and/or unresolved goal experiences of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts that led them to decide to leave the university before graduating?

The data collected demonstrated the experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students about issues with time, social connections within the school environment, and ambiguous goals. Participants showed that their inability to manage their time, social life and goals negatively affected their ability to achieve their goals. They felt a lack of support from faculty, staff, peers and programs.

Nontraditional undergraduate students were a part of a population of students who were previously disenfranchised. In response, students' feelings of being disenfranchised and to their shared the unique challenging characteristics of nontraditional undergraduate college students, the university officials created programs to recruit and support nontraditional undergraduate students. University officials were mindful of the characteristics and challenges that nontraditional undergraduate students face that were unique to this population. By understanding the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students, conditions for these students could be improved

since students struggled with time management, social connection management and goal management. The outcomes related to issues with time, social connections within a school environment, and ambiguous academic goals could relate to the nontraditional student population and possibly result in programming that would improve student persistence, performance, and participation in university programs. Nontraditional undergraduate college students reported struggles related to (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort. These three categories from the data support time management instruction throughout their enrollment. Skills related to scheduling and life planning could be incorporated across content areas and reviewed at the beginning of each course when the syllabus and class calendars are presented.

Nontraditional undergraduate college students shared that they struggled with social integration and spoke to how this also affected their ability to communicate their needs to faculty and staff. Three categories of data that supported the second theme of issues with social management included the following: (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group. Although the university provides clubs and campus activities, nontraditional undergraduate college students expressed the need for inclusion, but they expressed greater flexibility with scheduling was needed. Currently the responsibility to become involved still rest with students. Instructors could offer more opportunities for students to partner even if it is online with other students. Content faculty members might include an assignment that encourage classmates to engage more.

Goal management was described by participants as an area of concern for nontraditional undergraduate college students who described struggling with direction, motivation, and achievement. Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were: (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers. University officials during the admission and enrollment process might begin asking students to share some of their goals. They could provide students individual or group counseling to provide step-by-step instructions on how to set, maintain, and achieve their goals. Instructors might also model the importance of goal setting by reviewing the goals of the course and encourage students throughout the course to reflect on their goals and measure their progress.

Project Deliverable

As a result of these findings I created a 3-day professional development for faculty and staff that would help to use the perceptions and experiences about academic difficulties, social life challenges, and unresolved educational and occupational goals of former nontraditional undergraduate students that influenced their decision to discontinue their education to improve persistence of nontraditional undergraduate students. Since student success is important to the entire education community, I present a 3-day professional development to: (a) identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges, (b) discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and (c) offer strategies that may change conditions for students. The goals

can help university officials, faculty members, and support staff to lower the attrition rates of nontraditional undergraduate students by

1. Incorporating time management strategies into each content area,
2. Developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, and
3. Demonstrating the importance of effective goal setting.

Those who provide support for nontraditional undergraduate students include but are not limited to, administrators, counselors, instructors, families, and staff. The project deliverable will include a discussion of nontraditional undergraduate college students' experiences and perceptions and the implications for those who support them to improve persistence of nontraditional undergraduate students. The 3-day professional development would focus on strategies to improve support for these students to minimize academic difficulties, social life isolation, and unresolved occupational or educational goals and provide strategies to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students. The project deliverable would focus on strategies that may be implemented by faculty and staff members improve college experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. During face-to-face interviews, data were collected about the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students and how those perceptions and experiences affected their persistence. The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. These themes demonstrated that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced issues related to time, social connection within a school environment, and ambiguous goals. Following is a description of a 3-day professional development where I will (a) identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges, (b) discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and (c) offer strategies that may change conditions for students. The goals of this professional development are to focus on strategies to improve support for students; to minimize academic difficulties, social life isolation, and unresolved occupational or educational goals; and to provide strategies to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students.

This section includes a description of the professional development project, the rationale, a review of literature that supports the project, a plan to evaluate the project, and a discussion of its implications. The themes that emerged and the categories that supported each theme create the framework of exploration for the review of literature.

Project Description and Goals

During this 3-day professional development series, instructors, support staff, and university officials will participate in activities designed to increase their understanding of the experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students and how to better support their success. There were three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included and that formed the basis for this professional development. As an introduction, participants will be presented with information on how student success is negatively influenced by the experiences and perceptions, which include (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. The goals for this professional development on nontraditional undergraduate students are to help faculty to

1. Identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
2. Discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions,
3. Create strategies that may change conditions for students,
4. Incorporate time management strategies into each content area,

5. Develop effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, and
6. Demonstrate the importance of effective goal setting.

This professional development includes goals designed to explore strategies to improve support for students in order to minimize academic difficulties, social life isolation, and unresolved occupational or educational goals. Ultimately, the goal of all the activities included in this 3-day professional development is to improve conditions, academic performance, retention, and social connections for nontraditional undergraduate students. Those who provide support for nontraditional undergraduate students include counselors and instructors. This professional development was designed to provide counselors and instructors with the following information: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and (c) strategies that may change conditions for students. The goal of this project is to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students and provide increased support.

Workshop for Day 1

The first day of professional development will begin with introductions, schedule of the day, and objectives to (a) identify nontraditional undergraduate students' time challenges, (b) discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions related to time, and (c) offer strategies that may change conditions for students related to issues with time. Each participant will introduce themselves and describe their role in the organization. I will present the objectives and give an overview

of the agenda for the day. How the issues with time affect nontraditional undergraduate student success will be discussed. I will give an overview and provide a presentation describing nontraditional undergraduate students' characteristics and specific needs, including time issues associated with their (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) consistency of effort. The importance of understanding the experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students will be discussed. The days' activities will conclude by recapping and reflecting in groups about how the information presented directly affects the roles and responsibilities.

Workshop for Day 2

The second day of professional development will begin with introductions, schedule of the day, and objectives to (a) identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges, (b) discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and (c) offer strategies that may change conditions for students related to issues with social connections within a school environment. Each participant will reintroduce themselves and describe something they learned on Day 1. I will present the objectives and recap Day 1 information about issues with time. How issues with social connection affect nontraditional undergraduate student success will be discussed. I will give the social connections within a school environment presentation, describing nontraditional undergraduate students' characteristics and specific needs including issues related to (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group. The importance of understanding the experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students

related to social connections will be discussed. I will conclude Day 2 activities by engaging workshop participants in recapping and reflecting on the information presented and how it directly affects the roles and responsibilities of faculty members within their courses.

Workshop for Day 3

The third day of professional development will begin with introductions, schedule of the day, and objectives to (a) identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges, (b) discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and (c) offer strategies that may change conditions for students related to issues with ambiguous goals. Each participant will reintroduce themselves and describe something they learned on Day 2. I will present the objectives and recap Day 2 information about issues with social connections within a school environment. How issues with ambiguous goals affect nontraditional undergraduate student success will be discussed. Each participant will work with others to produce ideas on how to address challenges that they see. I will present the issues with ambiguous goals by describing nontraditional undergraduate students' characteristics and specific needs including issues with goals that are (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers. I will lead a discussion of the importance of understanding the experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students related to ambiguous goals. I will conclude the day's activities by recapping issues from the entire professional development, and I will engage participant groups in reflecting about how to create real change for nontraditional

undergraduate students. I will recap and discuss the major take-away points from this 3-day workshop prior to the question-answer session and end with an evaluation of the professional development where participants can offer suggestions for improvement.

Rationale

The problem at Northern University is that nontraditional undergraduate students have a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program. Although nontraditional undergraduate students experience unique challenges and barriers to college education attainment, university officials have created support programs to improve conditions for nontraditional students. Despite the good efforts of university officials, graduation gaps continue to widen for nontraditional undergraduate students; this gap in completion rates for nontraditional students requires university personnel to find solutions to support the students. The use of a professional development will allow participants to learn about nontraditional undergraduate student needs, learn what instructors can do to improve conditions for these students by anticipating their needs, and learn strategies for collaborating with colleagues to provide support that meets the needs as reflected in the students' experiences and perceptions.

Review of the Literature

In order to explore favorable conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students and instructional approaches, I completed a review of literature based upon the findings of this study. The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included that nontraditional undergraduate students (a) recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school

environment, and (c) demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. I completed an exhaustive search using key search terms such as *time, scheduling, poor time management, benefits of time management, planning, college workload, goal setting, social connection, academic performance, persistence, and student support*. Databases for these keywords and search terms included ERIC, SAGE Journals, PsycINFO, and ProQuest Central.

In this literature review, I discuss the connection between the findings in the local setting and the current body of research. I also show how the project is justified in the literature review. After a critical analysis of the literature, I provide alternative perspectives. Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges that affected their performance academically, their participation socially, and their ability to set and reach academic, personal, and professional goals. The success and persistence of nontraditional undergraduate students were affected by their inability to manage these areas effectively. The current body of literature revealed that nontraditional undergraduate students had a tendency towards persistence and not towards discontinuing their education. Tinto (1993) did, however, state that students needed to be socially connected and the lack of social integration would negatively impact their performance and persistence. The focus of this literature review was time management, social connection management, and goal management.

Time Management

Nontraditional undergraduate students need to improve their ability to manage time (Carless & Boud, 2018). With increased responsibilities, decreased support, and

outside obligations associated with being nontraditional undergraduate students, time management is of great significance to student success (Bell, 2018). Time management is a complex skill set that influences student success (Reagle, 2019). Time related issues include job responsibilities, scheduling activities, and maintaining consistent effort. Learning to manage time in these areas is a part of improving self-efficacy, academic performance, and reducing stress (Meneghel, Martínez, Salanova, & de Witte, 2019).

When nontraditional undergraduate students practiced effective time-management, they were more successful academically, professionally, and personally. Students can achieve many important tasks in a short amount of time if they are effective time managers (Drucker, 2018). Effective time management provides many benefits including increased productivity, heightened self-esteem (Foster, 2019), decreased stress (Seaward, 2019), added leisure time, improved social relationships, enhanced nutrition, increased rest (Hoeger, Hoeger, Hoeger, & Fawson, 2018), and improved academic performance. According to Aliotta (201), the academic demands of undergraduate work for nontraditional students can be overwhelming when combined with competing obligations, especially if students lack the skills to organize and manage them.

Without an effective system of organization, students can experience higher levels of stress and become discouraged with their progress both in and out of the classroom (Dillon, 2019). They may experience sleep interruptions and other health problems when confronted with their inability to complete tasks in a timely manner (Beattie, Laliberté, Michaud-Leclerc, & Oreopoulos, 2019). Having a system or an example of a system is ineffective if that system is never implemented. According to Hensley, Wolters, Won,

and Brady (2018), the implementation of a personalized developed system of organization takes practice, thoughtful consideration of one's needs, and diligent adherence. Since nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, they should improve their skills associated with time management.

Time management is crucial to achieving academic, professional and personal success (Baker, Evans, Li, & Cung, 2019). Everyone uses some form of management tool to organize the activities that they need to accomplish each day. There is not one specific time management tool that works for everyone. The effectiveness of a time management application may be tailored to the individual, the priorities at hand, and the technology available. Basic time management tactics include making lists, scheduling activities, finding available wasted time, preparing materials in advance, creating reminders, and using a unified calendar for all activities (Rodriguez et al., 2019). A list is very important so that the individual student will know exactly what must be done so that time is not wasted on tasks that will not help the student achieve their goals or complete assignments.

Making lists is not enough; each item must be prioritized so that the most important tasks are accomplished (Neroni, Meijs, Gijsselaers, Kirschner, & de Groot, 2019). Students should assign due dates and prioritize items from their list based upon the due dates (Priode, 2019). Time should also be scheduled on the calendar and blocked off as if it were an actual appointment or meeting that could not be missed (Simplicio, 2019). This assigns importance to the task, ensures that the student will have the time to focus solely on completing the task, and avoid turning in assignments late (Garner, 2019). The

schedule that is created should be a unified schedule including academic, professional, and personal activities in one place (Dixon, 2019). Students should consider using any available waiting times to complete portion of items on their list, such as return phone calls, schedule appointments, or contact instructors regarding questions (Chernobilsky & Hayes, 2019). It may be surprising to discover how much can be accomplished when students take advantage of any unexpected wait or travel times.

In order to take advantage of resources, Devlin and Bushey (2019) stated that students will need to do their work in advance to submit assignments to the writing center. Students can receive feedback, make corrections before turning in their final assignment, and improve academic performance. Scheduling due dates when planning provides recovery time in case emergencies arise. Students must begin and end each day by reviewing their prioritized list, schedules, upcoming projects or events (Russell, 2019). Students should start by blocking off their work schedules and including preparation and travel time. Students should schedule time to ask questions, complete rough drafts, and submit for review. (Huang, Fernandez, Rhoden, & Joseph, 2019). Students can block off time for studying and preparing for each class in which they are enrolled. Once students create their schedule, it is important to become more specific by creating action items for each assignment so that each assignment will have steps outlined. As each step is completed, the student moves closer to completing assignment.

Once the plan is complete, students must be diligent to adhere to the times, avoid interruptions, and manage distractions (Deacon, Walji, Jawitz, Small, & Jaffer, 2019). Interruptions are inevitable but using a list will remind students what needs to be done so

they can quickly return to the list of activities created once the interruption is managed (Berry & Hughes, 2020). Distractions come in many forms and affect students in many ways. If students identify common distractions, they can create counter measures to protect themselves against the consequences unmanaged distractions create. Sometimes distractions can be rescheduled as activities, such as phone calls, social visits, or resolving debts, on the calendar for a later date (Powers, Trauntvein, Barcelona, & Hartman, 2019).

It is important for students to realize that they are in control of their schedules and can adjust as necessary. Schedules are flexible and show students how much time they must use at their discretion. Having a calendar and scheduled events should empower the student to see how much free time they have available for leisure activities (Sleiman, Chung & Shin, & Haddad, 2019). Creating a schedule relieves stress by organizing assignments, work schedules, goals, and leisure activities so students can have time for social connection. Incorporating time management strategies into each content area can be achieved if instructors teach students how to make lists, use a unified calendar, schedule work time as appointments, use the time blocking method, identify the top three action items each day, use reminders, and integrate technology.

Social Skills Management

In a recent study, Strayhorn (2018) noted that social connections within the school environment are very beneficial to student success. Nontraditional undergraduate students may find achieving this type of connection difficult; however, it is worth the effort to because of the benefits provided (Gillen-O'Neel, 2019). Social integration and

connection were an important issue for nontraditional undergraduate students. Learning to manage social connections with faculty and staff members increased self-confidence and self-advocacy (Porcari, 2019). Nontraditional undergraduate students needed to learn how to prioritize social connections, without allowing them to interfere with their academic performance or their need to connect with faculty for academic help (Woods, Gomez, & Arnold, 2019).

Managing social connections for nontraditional undergraduate students included being able to prioritize coursework over social interaction, while identifying and assimilating into social groups. Pechac and Slantcheva-Durst (2019) noted that students who participated in university extracurricular activities, established strong connections with mentors and coaches during their educational experience. Coaching in secondary extracurricular activities such as sports, debate team, or other clubs provided one on one feedback and evaluation. Garner (2019) stated that as the relationships developed between students and coaches their ability to receive feedback and make changes. Appropriate responses to criticism improved student performance and prepared them for faculty and staff interactions as undergraduate students. Nontraditional undergraduate students may have participated in extracurricular activities and may have practiced these skills of receiving feedback, making corrections, self-evaluation, and working together with peers and staff (Banks, 2019). If, however, noted Munz and Colvin (2019) a lot of time had passed since their last interactions, these practices and skills may need to be reviewed and practiced again in order to be successful.

Social connections, according to Wong and Chiu (2019a), offer students additional sources of valuable information, experience, and practice. As they create positive relationships with their peers, students become more confident when communicating with faculty. According to Oh, Ho, Shaw, and Chan (2018), nontraditional undergraduate students may feel more comfortable asking a peer for help, if they are intimidated by the instructor. Chelladurai and Kerwin (2018), found that when nontraditional undergraduate students created these relationships with their peers it also connected them to sports, leisure, and wellness activities. Networking activities among students promoted a sense of connectedness for students (Jamison & Bolliger, 2019). Lippincott (2019) identified that successful interaction with peers can facilitate positive interactions with faculty and staff. These successful interactions promote self-advocacy and esteem for students (Montero-Hernandez & Cerven, 2018). The more connected students are to the peers, faculty, and community the more likely they are to persist (Dell, 2019).

Since nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, they should improve their skills associated with social connection. Having appropriate social skills has always been an important part of the communication process (Munz & Colvin, 2019). Students begin practicing social skills in early childhood and continue to develop throughout their lifetime. Practicing appropriate social and communication skills can positively affect the relationships that nontraditional undergraduate students have faculty, staff, and other students (McNatt, 2019). These skills are important with faculty because students need to

be able to develop a rapport with their instructors and ask questions to improve their academic performance (Kendricks, Arment, Nedunuri, & Lowell, 2019).

Kendricks et al., (2019) identified that nontraditional undergraduate students described challenges related to communicating with authority figures such as instructors, academic counselors, tutors, and financial aid advisors. These authority figures within the academic system provide vital information that students need to access, understand, and apply, in order to achieve success within their courses (Hittepole, 2019). One important social skill is verbal communication. Tiferes et al. (2019) demonstrated that 70% of our communication is nonverbal including facial expressions, gestures, body language, and posture. These gestures can also be affected by culture and tradition. Nontraditional undergraduate students must become familiar with appropriate effective means of verbal communication, while being careful to include positive nonverbal cues when interacting with faculty and staff (Hall, Horgan, & Murphy, 2019).

Another way in which social connection takes place is through written communications (Kowalewski & Halasz, 2019). Written communication takes on many forms especially with the advent of social media; there are formal and informal means of written communication (Nix, 2019). Since nontraditional undergraduate students are likely to be familiar with the informal written communication methods, they may have difficulty translating these thoughts into formal written expression that is expected on assignments at the college level (Elliott et al., 2019). If written communication is not effective, misunderstandings can hinder the attainment of necessary information for students. Misunderstandings can also impede rapport development with faculty and staff

especially if students are using informal language on assignments (Gunter & Gunter, 2019). When faculty members redirect students for using informal language within the classroom, nontraditional undergraduate students may consider this as negative interaction and avoid pursuing further social connection (Tamir & Taylor, 2019). Most college curriculums include at least one public speaking or communication course where these skills are introduced, reviewed, practiced, and developed (Prentiss & Walton, 2019). Westwick, Hunter, and Kleinjan (2019) concluded that students are expected to be able to communicate effectively in written and verbal forms and to distinguish between scholarly work and informal electronic communication types.

Becoming an effective listener is also an important communication skill necessary for social connection (Adams, 2019). Socially speaking, identifying with others and creating social ties is enhanced by having good listening skills (Thomas, 2019). Students should make eye contact in face-to-face communication situations and avoid using electronic devices or completing other tasks during a conversation (Fulcher, 2019). Students should avoid interrupting others while they speak and should ask questions for clarity at appropriate times (Kabat-Zinn, 2019). Using good listening skills can help students to identify and assimilate into social groups and improve their social connections to the university despite any differences they may have in their challenges as nontraditional undergraduate college students (Hutchings, 2019). There are many face-to-face and online collaborative learning techniques that can be used to facilitate interactions among students. Instructors could ask students to summarize what a classmate has just shared showing their active listening skills stated Le (2019). This technique of

paraphrasing can be done online in a discussion board and during face-to-face activities. Wang and Liu (2019) stated that active listening communication is improved through sharing similar experiences and this can be done in the student lounge section of online courses or faculty led discussions about their content and how students relate to it personally. During discussions according to Eddy, Hao, Markiewicz, and Iverson, (2019) when students quote other students' work or recall what was shared, this is another strategy to improve communication and connection of students to peers and faculty members. Zydney, Warner, and Angelone, (2020) added that during verbal exchanges faculty members can model and encourage students to ask probing or clarifying questions to improve their communication. When nontraditional undergraduate students feel confident in their ability to communicate, in written and verbal forms, they may be more eager to attend university sponsored programs designed to increase student engagement and social connections (Stewart, McConnell, Stallings, & Roscoe, 2019).

When these skills are underdeveloped, nontraditional undergraduate students can feel a sense of isolation and neglect their part in becoming socially integrated within campus life. This isolation causes nontraditional undergraduate students to forfeit the benefits of social connection within the university. Developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, can be achieved if instructors build students' capacities for active listening, engaged dialoguing, and networking. Group interactions and groupwork can effectively be incorporated into classes to support greater assimilation.

Goal Management

Nontraditional undergraduate students had not always necessarily planned on attending college; thus, they may have opted out of program participation that would have enabled them to better manage the challenges faced by college students (Turner, 2019). According to Guilmette, Mulvihill, Villemaire-Krajden, and Barker, (2019) many extracurricular activities on the secondary level support the academic and organizational skills necessary for positive performance and academic success on the college level. The findings in this research study that focused on the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students discovered that they had issues managing time, social connections, and goals. The current body of literature supports these findings. Goal management requires multi-level skill implementation and requires simultaneous distraction prevention (Alias, Noor, Bhkari, & Ariffin, 2019). Secondary education students who participated in activities that cultivated this type of time management, developed the ability students have to avoid activities, people, and even emotions that may hinder their achievement of individuals', groups' or the teams' related goals (Brown & Pehrson, 2019). Team and group participation require both individual goal setting and team goal setting. These goals are often set together in the group and in a one-on-one setting with the coach or mentor of the program.

The goals themselves must contain specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely actionable items (Hackmann, Malin, & Ahn, 2019). According to Dalton (2019) there is frequent feedback and critique regarding performance and adherence to action items included in predetermined set of goals and necessary action items. Nontraditional

undergraduate students discussed a lack of rapport or connection with faculty and staff members. This disconnect could contribute to their inability to set goals, create schedules, create plans, ask questions, or receive and respond positively to feedback given in the absence of developed relationships (Hong, Hong, Lewis, & Williams, 2019).

Nontraditional students who did not have these opportunities to practice balancing personal, professional, and academic obligations suffered challenges as undergraduates that they were unprepared to face, due to the lack of practice and exposure. Specific goals provide structure for students (Kaftan, Freund, Diener, Oishi, & Tay, 2018) and help students to maintain motivation by providing steps to measure their progress (Hart, 2018). Without clear academic goals, students can become distracted or spend too much time on activities that will not yield the results they seek (Hart & Park, 2019). Ambiguous academic goals make it difficult to achieve or even measure success (Garner, 2019). Students may become frustrated and question the reason for their work without clear goals (Kwok, 2018). Osorio (2019) noted that students perform best when they develop goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely (S.M.A.R.T.). Goals must be clear and concise with specific action items noted Duncan (2018), and larger goals should be divided into smaller goals.

According to Morrison, Ross, Morrison, and Kalman (2019), setting goals, creating action items, scheduling time to work on action items, following through on the plans, and evaluating goal progress are parts of the goal setting process that require practice. Often nontraditional undergraduate students do not have opportunities or are unsuccessful at practicing these techniques (Wong & Chiu, 2019b). Cassells (2018)

added that creating goals, action items, schedules, and evaluation are not enough. Goal setting and managing the action items required to achieve these goals also created an area of challenge for nontraditional undergraduate students because their goals tended to be non-specific. Managing the action items required to achieve these goals also created an area of challenge for nontraditional undergraduate students as their goals tended to be nonspecific, affected by job responsibilities, and easily influenced by the opinions of their peers. Cassells (2018) also stated an early identification of students who need intervention systems must be established.

Hyatt (2018) indicated and Nelson (2019) agreed that students must be adept at protecting their goal from distraction, disappointment, and discouragement. In Kaftan et al., (2018) noted that many seemingly benign activities can disrupt a student's goal attainment. Thus, according to O'Donnell and Blankenship (2018) being able to discriminate between activities that help versus those that hinder goal achievement is of equal importance. Since nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, they should improve their skills associated with goal setting. Goal management is an important part of goal attainment (Creed, Sawitri, Hood, & Hu, 2020). Students need clearly defined goals. According to Myers (2019), goals should be S.M.A.R.T or Specific Measurable Achievable Realistic and Timely. Williams (2019) noted that having goals that are specific common measurable, achievable, realistic, and timely well create a framework for a student's life choices behaviors and actions. Once students create goals their goals should be divided into smaller goals (Burns, Martin, & Collie, 2019). Wyner (2019)

stated that students should assign an action items beneath each one that will create steps to help this student achieve their goal.

Tamir and Taylor noted that nontraditional undergraduate students struggled to create goals. When students have goals it gives them direction, motivation, and guidance for daily living (Wayment & Cavolo, 2019). When students clearly define the goals they wish to reach within a specific time they can use technology to create reminders, include an accountability partner that will ask them how they are progressing, or they may consider seeking a mentor or a coach that has already been successful in achieving a similar goal (Lakshminarayanan, Best, & Poulakidas, 2019). After goals have been set and smaller goals created and action items identified, Alias et al., (2019) found that students must perform frequent checks to ensure that they are completing the plan to reach their goals they have set. Roberts (2019) asserted that as they perform frequent evaluations, they can adjust schedules, effort and the amount of time being spent, in order to improve the likelihood that they will achieve their goals in the time allotted. Goals can always be modified but they should exist and provide specific motivation for students and remind them of why they chose to continue their education as undergraduate students according to Turner (2019).

Cho (2019) found that nontraditional undergraduate students should be careful when sharing their goals with others to ensure that they are encouraged to reach their goals and not discouraged by the reaction of others. Everyone is not always supportive of others' goals (Kundu, 2019). For this reason, it is important to create social connections with faculty and peers that are positive and encourage nontraditional undergraduate

students to reach their full potential by accomplishing their goals associated with the plans they have created (Oreopoulos & Petronijevic, 2019). Ferradás, Freire, Núñez, and Regueiro, (2019) stated that goals should also be prioritized based upon daily obligations. It is also a good idea to place action items that help students achieve their ultimate goals on the schedule and the unified calendar. Zyromski, Martin, and Mariani, (2019) noted that it is important for students to frequently review their goals and the steps required to achieve them. When students read their goals out loud, they are using multiple methods of getting information increased retention; they are seeing it, reading it and hearing it.

Min (2019) stated that practice improves issues with time management, social interaction, and goal setting. Nontraditional undergraduate students have a specific set of experiences and perceptions that create a set of challenges that are that are unique to this group of students (Kamer & Ishitani, 2019). In order to understand the problem that nontraditional undergraduate students face, it was important to see the problem from their perspective. Managing time, social connections, and goal setting were shared challenges that nontraditional undergraduate student participants in the study shared. The needs of this group created a need to modify or improve the support given during admission, enrollment, orientation, and created a need to modify or improve the support given during admission, enrollment, orientation, and coaching or monitoring to provide early intervention when at risk factors. Demonstrating the importance of effective goal setting can be achieved by instructors when they introduce students to; SMART goals that are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timely, provide examples, create smaller

goals, create action items, reflect frequently, and manage distractions. University officials could also include more information about career selection as they relate to college program selection. The data indicates that students would benefit from a better understanding of careers, particularly ones with which are unfamiliar.

Project Description

Nontraditional undergraduate students depend on faculty members to provide them orientation, direction, guidance, feedback and instruction (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). The purpose of this 3-day professional development is to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate college students in order to improve retention, decrease attrition, increase performance, and improve student satisfaction. Preparing nontraditional college students for the challenges they will face as undergraduates is the purpose of this project. Faculty and staff interactions with students are critical to this necessary orientation, preparation, and intervention. The development of underdeveloped skills such as scheduling, time management, creating goals, an appropriate social interaction with students and faculty requires information, practice, evaluation, and continued exposure to best practices. After considering multiple options examining the problem of high attrition rates and strategies to improve conditions for students, based on the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students, I decided to use a 3-day professional development session as the most effective way to disseminate this new information (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). In order to increase retention and success for nontraditional undergraduate students, faculty members can improve teaching by using appropriate strategies related to challenges students face.

University officials, faculty members, and support staff can lower the attrition rates of nontraditional undergraduate students by

1. Incorporating time management strategies into each content area,
2. Developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, and
3. Demonstrating the importance of effective goal setting.

Instructors are accustomed to participating in these types of sessions. They are required to attain a certain number of credit hours associated with their participation in activities like this. This professional development can help them to continue to develop professionally in areas that will positively impact student performance and persistence (Harding et al., 2019). Faculty members will be able to not only understand the findings that nontraditional undergraduate students shared within the study, but they will also learn strategies of how to improve conditions and reduce attrition rates for these students. During the professional development sessions, faculty will participate in small group discussions where their ideas, strategies, and experience will enhance the use of the new strategies presented to address the problem of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. While this study focused on the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students, the purpose was to use these findings to increase their success rates. It is important to capitalize on the experiences and tacit knowledge of faculty members during this professional development session (Liou & Canrinus, 2020). Collaboration will add to the body of knowledge, ask important questions for clarity, and nurture a sense of community among the faculty. According to Breivik and McDermand

(2019) faculty members can improve their relationships with other faculty members and continue to collaborate and work towards improving conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students following the cessation of the professional development. Faculty members can gather valuable information from collaborating with other faculty members (Berry, 2019). They can also share information regarding underutilized resources that already exist (Dickfos, 2019). By including faculty in the local setting in a 3-day professional development session, faculty members may also be able to make suggestions on how to modify existing programs to better suit the needs of faculty members the needs of nontraditional undergraduate students. Faculty members can also be made aware of any of the orientation process that may need to be periodically parts of the orientation process that may need to be periodically reviewed for incoming students to use. Sometimes faculty members, academic counselors, and admissions officers may not have reviewed the orientation process, procedures or materials. recently reviewed the orientation process, procedures or materials. Also, faculty members who have been teaching specific courses for some time may be unaware of curriculum changes that have been made. Participants may feel that the information is clear and concise but as they take time to review these course directions, they may see areas where improvements can be made.

Potential Resources and Existing Supports

There are several resources needed in order to provide this presentation for stakeholders regarding the experiences and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate college students. Some needed resources include time, administrative support,

technology, and financial support. Although, the professional development series Meeting of the Minds takes place each year, I will need administrative support to be selected in order to present this information to the faculty. The administrators must see the relevance, importance, and timeliness of the issue of nontraditional undergraduate student support improvement to increase student retention and success. I will need a room with movable tables and chairs for small group and large group activities as well as a whiteboard with markers and erasers. I will need technology that will include the ability to present the Power Point slides on a large whiteboard and large white note pads that instructors can use when doing group work and as they collaborate on best practices and strategies to be used in the future.

The faculty members and university officials practice continuous improvement. Each instructor's evaluation is based on student performance as well as feedback from students. Students provide feedback related to rapport with instructors. Internal unpublished studies revealed that instructors who contacted students often and who made the first positive interaction with students tended to continue to have positive relationships with the students. The university officials instituted a policy for instructors to make verbal contact with each student within the first 3 days. All instructors and staff participated in a professional development series highlighting the connection between positive instructor student interactions and overall student success.

Annually, there is a professional development conference where instructors participate in sessions designed to improve teacher efficacy and student success. Using a professional development series to discuss the issues faced by nontraditional

undergraduate students will reduce the learning curve by presenting the new information and strategies in a familiar format. The existing program offerings can be developed and modified to include additional supports for nontraditional undergraduate students related to (a) managing time, (b) managing social connections, and (c) managing goals.

Additionally, since everyone participates in this annual conference, all the decision makers would be present to help expedite any changes that could be quickly and effectively implemented to benefit nontraditional undergraduate students.

During this professional development, I will introduce the nontraditional undergraduate student issues that interfere with or challenge academic success and persistence. Each of the major findings will be discussed, and I will offer strategies to combat these challenges. Also, instructors, university officials, and academic counselors will be able to collaborate and create strategies for success.

Potential Barriers

There are some potential barriers that exist to the project. Some faculty members who would be key participants may be on vacation or on sabbatical during the time of the presentation. The budget for the conference may only allow for a specific number of presentation rooms to be used during each session. Some stakeholders may require substitutes to be paid to be in their place while they participate in the professional development. Scheduling constraints between competing professional developments that would occur at the same time or the same days may also create a barrier. Potential barriers include the following: (a) scheduling issues, (b) limited human resources, and (c) financial budget constraints. Each faculty member regularly participates in committees

that work on important areas of improvement for the university, so asking them to take on additional projects may be too cumbersome. The budget to create programs, use leased online connectivity applications, or pay faculty and staff to supervise students must compete with other university priorities and necessities.

Proposal for Implementation and Timetable

I plan to use the following timetable to implement my project. This professional development will require implementation plans prior to the annual professional development conference held in October. I will invite domain leads, department heads, and program chairs to help with the planning and distribution of information related to the training so that instructors will see the value and bring ideas to share in the conference.

Table 1

Proposed Timeline

| Date | Task | Person | Deliverable |
|-----------|---|--|---|
| April | Meet with domain leaders, department heads, academic counselors, and program chairs | Domain leaders, department heads, academic counselors, instructors, and program chairs | Professional development PowerPoint slideshow |
| May | Identify meeting times | Domain leaders, department heads, academic counselors, instructors and program chairs | Professional development program proposal and information |
| June | Identify potential contributors of information or resources | Domain leaders, department heads, academic counselors, instructors and program chairs | Email announcement and information |
| July | Collect contribution confirmation | Domain leaders, department heads, academic counselors, instructors and program chairs | Email request for contributions and additional ideas |
| August | Apply to present at annual conference receive confirmation to present and schedule | researcher and assistants | Upload application to site |
| September | Schedule time and room location of professional development confirm link location for online participants | Researcher | Upload time confirmation to internal site and create step-by-step plan and materials list, list of contact information for technical support should issue arise, room and food arrangements |
| October | Present professional development sessions | Researcher, assistants, and participants | Power Point and handouts for the professional development on nontraditional undergraduate students |
| November | Review evaluations and feedback to make improvements to professional development | Researcher and assistants | Feedback and evaluation forms, |

Roles and Responsibilities

As the researcher and facilitator of this professional development series on nontraditional undergraduate students, I will take the role as lead presenter. I will have many responsibilities associated with the introduction, distribution of information, and facilitation of this important conversation on strategies that can be implemented to improve student success. I will organize the materials and invite key members of the organization to participate in the planning and involvement of all faculty members and support staff. I will set up the meetings and be responsible to maintain accurate and timely distribution of updates to all participants. Assistants will be selected for this professional development to ensure that I have enough help for the facilitation and preparation of the event. I will apply for permission to present at the annual professional development conference. Once I receive approval, I will secure a link for those online participants and test it prior to use with some volunteers. I will meet with all domain leads, department heads, academic counselors, and program chairs. I will solicit support and include ideas from participants throughout the planning project. I will be responsible to encourage engagement and support for this project to help nontraditional undergraduate students and ultimately all students.

Project Evaluation Plan

Formative Assessment

Feedback is a very important part of checking for understanding and for improving my presentation skills. A formative assessment is used to check the understanding of the participants so that clarifications can be included in the next day's

introduction. I will use exit tickets each day of the 3-day professional development (See Appendix B). Participants will be asked to complete an exit ticket so that I can check for understanding. I will review these exit tickets at the end of each day. I will clarify any misunderstandings that I found on the exit tickets where students did not completely understand something that was presented. This allows me to check for understanding without putting participants in an awkward position because they did not clearly understand something that was presented. After participants are divided into groups of four, they will use the PowerPoint slide as a guide to answer specific questions on how to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students in each area of concern which will later be questioned on the exit ticket to check for understanding. On Day 1, participants will learn about the challenges nontraditional undergraduate students have with managing time. The areas of concern related to managing time for nontraditional undergraduate students are job responsibilities, scheduling activities, and inconsistent effort. On Day 2, participants will learn about the challenges undergraduate students experience related to social connections in a school environment. After learning about these social issues, participants will create strategies to help students identify socially with other students, prioritize schoolwork over social interaction, and assimilate into the social group. On Day 3 participants will learn about the importance of setting goals and how ineffective goal setting affects student success. Together, the participants and I will generate strategies to support students in setting goals.

Summative Assessment

In order to modify existing programs or create new programs that can support nontraditional undergraduate student success, appropriately responding to constructive honest feedback is imperative. At the end of the professional development series participants will complete a summative assessment to give participants the opportunity to show how this professional developments' content and presentation will affect current best practices. I will supply a summative assessment evaluation form to each participant to elicit a review of the information presented and suggestions on areas of further research. A summative assessment is an overall evaluation of how the organization will utilize the new information or implement the strategies discussed during the professional development collaboration. Assessment that provides feedback on how the material presented will directly affect the practices of this organization. In my summative assessment, I will ask instructors how can you use these strategies to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students?

Built within the professional development are several opportunities for participants to collaborate with their colleagues and discuss potential solutions to the issues in relationship to the local human, financial, and time resources available. Using the experts in each content area we can create real solutions for the challenges that nontraditional undergraduate students face. By discussing ways that these strategies could be implemented within the current organizational system participants could suggest real solutions for the three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included:

(a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with

time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

Overall Evaluation Goals

At the end of Day 3 participants will be asked to fill out a professional development evaluation form (See Appendix C). This evaluation form is designed to provide participants with the opportunity to evaluate the overall presentation, value of the information, engagement, materials and there will be a space provided for additional comments that they would like to make regarding the presentation its content or its presentation. The goals for this professional development entitled Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students were to

1. Identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
2. Discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and
3. Offer strategies that may change conditions for students.

University officials, faculty members, and support staff can lower the attrition rates of nontraditional undergraduate students to:

1. Incorporate time management strategies into each content area,
2. Develop effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, and
3. Demonstrate the importance of effective goal setting.

In order to evaluate the effectiveness of the professional development content, activities, and suggested strategies, it is necessary to combine both the formative and summative assessments with continued dialogue. Each of the 3 days includes a collaborative small group work followed by whole group discussion and evaluation of the efficacy of potential strategies. Participants will have the opportunity to examine the problem nontraditional undergraduate students experience from multiple perspectives. The information presented is data analysis from the students' perspectives. In addition, each group will contain faculty members, department heads, academic counselors, and other support staff who can offer their experiences and suggest techniques that they have tried or would be interested in implementing to improve conditions for students.

Key Stakeholders

This project was developed to assist the key stakeholder group in reaching the nontraditional undergraduate students who have exhibited challenges that appear to be nonacademic in nature. Domain leaders, who are leaders of multiple departments, department heads, academic counselors, instructors and support staff members were invited so that they could contribute their expertise of content and how it relates to their issues.

Instructors. The instructors will be an integral part of this professional development session. Each instructor will bring their expertise related to how their content relates to the skills that could support nontraditional undergraduate student issues (a) managing time, (b) managing social connections, and (c) managing goals. Instructors' participation is important because they can see the areas where students struggle. While

they generally practice anticipating student needs and identifying pitfalls that cause students' performance to falter, having this additional information can further assist them in preparing activities to support student skill building and academic success.

Domain leaders and department heads. The domain leaders and department heads are typically members of decision-making committees within the university. I included them because they have the teaching experience and knowledge of accreditation issues and program alignment. In their supervisory roles, they coach instructors to help nontraditional undergraduate students succeed. They can help with a general buy-in and morale of faculty members on their respective teams. When they have team meetings instructors can continue to share their successes and challenges in implementing the new strategies.

Academic counselors. Academic counselors monitor admissions, enrollments, and academic progress of students who are at-risk. This group of professionals have a unique perspective related to nonacademic and academic challenges. They are aware of university sponsored student support programs, and they can also share their observations about the services that students access most frequently. Their experiences and perceptions will be enlightening to discussions and collaborations about the challenges of nontraditional students.

Project Implications

Social Change Implications

Since some nontraditional undergraduate students faced challenges during or immediately following secondary education completion, they may also have lacked the

opportunity to practice necessary skills that would have made degree attainment easier. Participants discussed their educational planning and preparation as minimal due to their decision to postpone or exclude college education as a choice. My research indicates that college education planning begins prior to the application process. Those who provide support to these students and advise them on course selection or extracurricular activity involvement could examine the ways in which they encouraged participation sustained interest in college education pursuit. The lack of experiences and opportunities to practice could be attributed to the difficulties that participants described in their interviews where they said that: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. Increased retention and student success can be achieved by improving best practices among faculty using the following approaches: (a) incorporating time management strategies into each content area, (b) developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections, and (c) demonstrating the importance of effective goal setting.

Access to education can significantly influence nontraditional undergraduate student future opportunities for themselves and their families. Based on my research those nontraditional undergraduate students who later decided to pursue higher education did so in order to secure personal, professional, and financial gains for themselves and their families. They faced barriers and obstacles which precluded them from making an

earlier decision to seek college degree attainment. Nonacademic obstacles could, according to data results, have been helped by more effective scheduling, connecting with other students, and using existing university resources to support goal attainment.

Social change will be promoted if high school administrators or university officials implement changes based on findings from this study regarding nontraditional undergraduate student challenges related to issues with managing time, social connections and goal setting. Modifying existing programs to support the needs of nontraditional undergraduate students, will promote positive social change when attrition rates decrease, and student persistence and performance improve based on my findings. Social change will be promoted if conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students are improved as current programs may be modified to extend resources to the nontraditional undergraduate student population or new program initiatives may be established with additional mentor type support to intervene early when these students begin to struggle.

Importance of the Project to Local Stakeholders

Local stakeholders can examine the reasons why this issue and project are of importance to the immediate and larger community. Financing a college education is expensive so creating debt without the benefits of degree attainment can yield more financial implications for nontraditional undergraduate students that began this endeavor with hopes of improving the situation for themselves and their families. This 3-day professional development project will bring attention to the issue, define the affected population, and provide strategies to improve success and conditions for nontraditional

undergraduate students. Faculty members will benefit from increased satisfaction and teaching efficacy with these and other students. Adjunct faculty members will also benefit since their employment depends upon sustained enrollment and student success.

Importance of the Project to the Larger Context

The financial implications to the students' families as well as the amount of defaulted student loans add to the importance to this project. Any successful interventions or program interventions achieved based upon the results of this study and the collaborative efforts following the 3-day professional development will serve to improve nontraditional undergraduate student conditions and success for those locally and in the larger context. Even best practices among faculty members can be shared. Those who advice and help to prepare nontraditional undergraduate students can assist students in selecting coursework or activities that will build skills in time management, social connection, and goal setting for all students. This 3-day professional development project was designed to begin a sustained dialogue and collaboration between faculty members, support staff, university officials and students, through their interview descriptions, once the problem was highlighted and its importance explained. Nontraditional undergraduate students are unique in their experience, perception and motivating factors for pursuing a college degree. The challenges they face do not exclude them from the educational community but rather establish their value and necessity to the community. They have experience in work and life that they can share with other students and bring additional Resources to each course in which they participate. Improving conditions for

nontraditional undergraduate college students is important as they also need to be embraced as a valuable part of the educational process.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Project Strengths and Limitations

Project Strengths

This project is based upon information obtained directly from the perspectives of the nontraditional undergraduate students who have been experiencing issues related to time management, social connections, and goal settings. Much of the prior study data resulted from observations or assessments from others' perspectives. By creating possible alternative approaches to nontraditional undergraduate student support based upon their descriptions and explanations about the issues they faced, a more effective program can be created to improve conditions for these students. Professional developments provide information, opportunities to collaborate, and suggestions for further research and program modifications. The conceptual framework that grounded this study was Tinto's model of student departure. According to Tinto (1975), when students faced academic difficulties such as grade performance, lack of enthusiasm for the subject, lack of interest in studying the subject, and lack of responsibility as a student, they were likely to drop out of the class. Improving nontraditional undergraduate student conditions may increase their success rates, retention rates, and graduation rates.

Project Limitations

With any project there may be limitations. This 3-day professional development is limited by the time groups will have to discuss the strategies designed to improve conditions for students. Sometimes faculty members and support staff need time to process the information and buy into the ideas presented before they will enthusiastically

support the project. For faculty members and support staff members to participate, they will need paid time away from their regular duties. When professional development hours are offered to participants, they may still find it difficult to participate due to conflicts with other projects in which they may already be involved (McChesney & Aldridge, 2019). Any changes to the existing curriculum are strictly forbidden due to possible accreditation implications. All insertions or deletions to the curriculum despite any apparent benefit to students must be approved and that process can be lengthy.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

Alternate Approaches to the Problem

During this study, the focus was on the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students; however, there are alternative approaches to this problem. Researchers might focus on the perceptions and experiences of faculty as they interact with and instruct nontraditional undergraduate students. Faculty could also be surveyed to offer positive and negative experiences with the preparation or academic skills possessed by nontraditional undergraduate students. The financial aid department members might offer case studies or testimonials regarding issues they encountered while helping to process the financial aid applications or manage the financial needs of nontraditional undergraduate students. Nontraditional students might offer some information regarding what they retained immediately following orientation sessions to improve delivery. Academic managers could provide additional examples of problems and unsuccessful attempts and successful solutions to challenges nontraditional undergraduate students experienced and shared. The tutoring department could also

discuss how academic help sessions were received and participated in by nontraditional undergraduate students.

Alternate Definitions of the Problem

Despite the good efforts of university officials, graduation gaps continue to widen for nontraditional undergraduate students; this gap in completion rates for nontraditional students requires university personnel to find solutions to support the students. The problem that justified the need for this study was that at Northern University, nontraditional undergraduate students have had a high attrition rate over the course of a 4-year program. Ten nontraditional undergraduate students were interviewed to gain a first-hand perspective about the issues they faced by exploring their perceptions and experiences. During the interviews, they discussed the following: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. From these findings, I determined that a 3-day professional development would be the most effective way to engage all stakeholders to incorporate strategies to help support nontraditional undergraduate student success. Per my findings, there are some alternative definitions to the problem. I explored the problem from an academic perspective using Tinto's theory as a conceptual framework, but it could be explored using a different lens. The problem could be alternatively defined as (a) nontraditional undergraduate students face nonacademic issues that affect their success, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students

lack nonacademic life skills that affect their success, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students need mentorship and coaching to help them acclimate to their new responsibilities as students.

Nontraditional undergraduate students make up a large percentage of incoming students. Their needs and the challenges they faced are of importance to the students themselves as well as to the stakeholders and staff. In order to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students, a deeper understanding of the challenges they faced is necessary. The university and other researchers have examined this problem from various perspectives. In this project, I focused on understanding the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students from their own perspective. They described the challenges that they felt had the greatest impact on their performance perceptions, experiences, and, ultimately, persistence. This problem could have been explored in other ways from other perspectives as well. I could have asked nontraditional undergraduate student graduates to describe the challenges that most affected them. Another perspective would have been to ask the nontraditional undergraduate student participants to give recommendations to faculty and staff on how to better support them. Instead of focusing on the challenges that nontraditional undergraduate students face, I could have focused on the benefits that they bring to the classroom. I could have explored ways in which the faculty could capitalize on their maturity, work experience, and abilities.

Alternative Solutions to the Local Problem

University officials realize that many students have shared characteristics and challenges with nontraditional undergraduate students. Addressing the issues that affect them will inevitably have a positive effect on all students. They have created support, recruitment, admission, and course schedules to accommodate the different needs that nontraditional undergraduate students have. I suggest that there are alternative solutions to the local problem. Nontraditional undergraduate students should be required to either take a course on time management or test out of the information provided. Nontraditional undergraduate students could be invited to belong to a club or cultural center to promote social connection. Nontraditional undergraduate students could submit as a part of their orientation a sample schedule and include their goals and action items so that their academic counselor could review them and offer suggestions and guidance.

Alternate solutions to the difficulties experienced by nontraditional undergraduate students in the areas of time management, social connections, and goal setting are varied and depend on resource availability. If there are financial or human resource deficiencies, maybe a student run clinic on time management and assignment work time planning could be instituted. A student or volunteer faculty member might also facilitate a mentor or coaching program for students who are identified as having some risk factors or those shared by nontraditional undergraduate students. Nontraditional undergraduate students could be involved directly in the creation of support programs or volunteer to join others to work for increased student success in an extracurricular club type atmosphere. Perhaps

faculty and staff members could volunteer, as a part of their general duties, to hold open office hours online for questions and social connections and advertise helpful seminars.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

This study on the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students provided important insights into the issues that have a significant effect on student performance. I interviewed students and collected data from these former nontraditional undergraduate students related to Tinto's model of student persistence categories: (a) academic difficulties, (b) social life, and (c) unresolved educational and occupational goals. The findings indicated that (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

As a researcher, instructor, former high school teacher, and parent, I have seen the significant contributions degree attainment can have on the lives of students and their families. Upon analyzing the findings about the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students, the project naturally and logically developed. Nontraditional undergraduate students need training and practice to improve their ability to manage time, social connections, and goals. These improvements cannot be made in isolation. The necessary skills for improvement are not innate but are developed, and faculty members are essential tools to facilitate this development. I was aware of my

interests and concern for students who were unsuccessful due to factors other than intelligence or capacity and tried to withhold my bias and report all findings accurately.

I enjoyed the process of interviewing the participants and sought to discover through their responses how their perceptions and experiences affected their performance. Initially, the process of interviewing participants was intimidating; however, my curiosity and concern for the problem encouraged my exploration. Current literature supported my idea to use a professional development as the way to engage faculty and support members to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students.

Reflective Analysis of Personal Learning

There was a large gap and a difference in learning about the process and planning the procedures of how to conduct the research and conducting the research with live participants. Despite the many years of study, I still felt unprepared and struggled with my confidence. I began to see how all the preparation and years of study worked together to prepare me for my research. Although I was aware that the participants volunteered for the project, I still felt as if I was intruding into private areas of their lives as I asked the questions during the interviews. With the completion of each interview I feel that I grew as a practitioner, researcher, and scholar. Through the journal, I was even able to distinguish between my accurate reporting of findings and when I began to describe my observations with bias. As my confidence and experience grew, I believe my efficacy as a researcher increased to a level of which I can be proud.

Growth of Self as a Scholar

In the beginning, I was constantly referring to the guide and second guessing my decisions. Through my experiences I started to see how my training and experience had prepared me for this project. Each time I conducted an interview with the 10 participants, my confidence and attention to detail improved. I became immediately aware of when to ask probing questions for clarity during the interviews. Following the interviews which were simultaneously recorded and transcribed I began the coding process which I repeated to increase the likelihood of accuracy of findings. When I recoded and found the same kinds of categories and emerging themes my confidence increased in my ability to analyze data. When I presented my initial findings to the participants and allowed them the opportunity to make modifications to the findings and they did not find errors in the interpretation it increased my confidence as well. The interpretation of findings became easier to see as the themes began to repeat themselves. Seeing common themes emerge increased my proficiency and increased my desire to authenticate my findings with scholarly citations.

Growth as a Practitioner

Professionally I have been asked to participate in many different activities related to student development and engagement. As I prepared for this study and participated in the many actions required to complete it, I saw how this study helps me to grow as a practitioner. I have worked on committees for curriculum development, student engagement, effective faculty instruction, assignment and assessment evaluation and mentorship programs. Understanding the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional

undergraduate students and how those experiences translated into unique student challenges which could have been addressed by university official intervention.

As an instructor I had interactions with students who shared challenges with nontraditional undergraduate students, and I empathized with the difficulties that interfered with their studies. Both as a high school teacher and a college instructor, I worked with very intelligent and interested students who were unable to complete assignments not due to a lack of aptitude but rather for a lack of skills or support to help them manage nonacademic issues. As I researched the current body of knowledge, the interview transcripts and emerging themes, and compared the emerging themes to the current body of knowledge I was able to identify areas of need and imagine possible solutions to improve conditions for nontraditional students. This process has made me better equipped to help create programs to support nontraditional undergraduate student success.

Growth as a Project Developer

Examining all the details necessary for the creation of this professional development project, have significantly contributed to my growth as a project developer. The most difficult part was sifting through all the important information to determine which information was the most essential and would provide the greatest benefit to nontraditional undergraduate students and those who support them. I had to consider the available resources and the most effective use of time, method of delivery, and avenue for discourse. I wanted participants (a) to be engaged in professional development, (b) be challenged to consider their current interactions with nontraditional undergraduate

students, and (c) to provide input into possible improvements that the university can institute with available resources.

Using the allotted professional development time effectively was also a challenge. I tend to engage in conversation with participants without a natural ability to remain mindful of the time and redirect participants to ensure that all information would have enough time for (a) presentation, (b) deliberation, and (c) implementation. I had to be careful to schedule time for each activity and pay attention to also include transition time as well. I decided to use a timer and inform the group of how much time was allotted for each activity and use redirection techniques to address any questions or important discussion points that exceed those time allotments.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

As I reflect on the problem of nontraditional undergraduate students enrolling, incurring debt, but not graduating I can see how far reaching the implications are for this type of work. Nontraditional undergraduate students decided later in life or despite personal obligations that hindered their admission and participation in school to pursue a college education. These students may enter at a disadvantage and it is important to investigate their experiences and perceptions so that conditions and success can improve. Faculty, support staff, and students begin with a common goal of them graduating. Each is trying to achieve that goal with different measures. By understanding the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students from their perspective changes can be made that might facilitate college degree attainment for this previously disenfranchised group.

By improving conditions that support learning for nontraditional undergraduate students, subsequently conditions may improve for all students since often they share characteristics or factors that affect them. Also, other populations will benefit from this information as well. Secondary educational institutions might want to institute changes to better prepare students for the issues that they may face as college students. It might be beneficial to all students to practice strategies to improve their efficacy with time management, social connections within a school environment, and setting academic goals.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

Since the numbers of students who have some shared characteristics with nontraditional undergraduate students is increasing, the relevance of this and other similar studies is important to the education field. There are many possible directions for continued inquiry into the needs, experiences, and perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate students. Researchers might also find it beneficial to ask for the perceptions and experiences of instructor, counselor, and other support staff that work with nontraditional undergraduate students as their perspectives may offer helpful observations to improve student success. Future research might do well to inquire if the training, support, and practice of strategies to improve nontraditional undergraduate student success are effective.

Although the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate students were studied there is more that can be ascertained from continued study and comparison with findings of similar studies with different participants. It may also be

very beneficial to ask students for their recommendations on support program enhancement. They may want to offer suggestions for the establishment of additional programming. Possibly nontraditional undergraduate students could perhaps assist in the creation of a mentor program or modifications to the current orientation programs offered. Researchers could ask nontraditional undergraduate students to evaluate current program offerings, course load combinations in relationship to their outside obligations to determine if any changes could be made to the program. Researchers could ask nontraditional undergraduate students to reflect on their prior preparation and educational experiences to see if changes could be made to the secondary educational system to better prepare students for a late term decision to attend college.

Conclusion

Higher education officials have worked hard to provide greater access to those students who were previously excluded from participation due to certain factors. Officials created programs to support the needs of students who had unique challenges that hindered their college degree attainment. Although enrollment increased for these populations, persistence continues to be a problem. Despite these measures, nontraditional undergraduates have not improved. To gain an in-depth perspective of the problem, I interviewed 10 former nontraditional undergraduate students to participate in a qualitative study about their perceptions and experiences. The purpose of this study was to investigate the perceptions and experiences of nontraditional undergraduate dropout students about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating. I tried to

understand their experiences and analyze the challenges they described to uncover ways that officials might improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students.

This study was prompted by the fact that nontraditional undergraduate student attrition has been a problem at Northern University, and dropout rates have increased since 2008. Through data analysis, the main themes that emerged were: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. I learned from the findings that nontraditional undergraduate students require training, support, and practice in the following areas: (a) managing time by incorporating time management strategies into each content area, (b) managing social interactions by developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections and (c) managing goals by demonstrating the importance of effective goal setting. Nontraditional undergraduate student performance would improve greatly by addressing their needs in the areas of managing time, managing social interactions, and managing goals.

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Appendix A: The Project

Professional Development Series: Nontraditional Undergraduate Student

The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

Goals for the Professional Development

Following the data analysis of the study of Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students, a 3-day professional development session was created with the goals and learning outcomes. This professional development includes goals designed to explore strategies to improve support for students, to minimize academic difficulties, social life isolation and unresolved occupational or educational goals. Ultimately the goal of all the activities included in this 3-day professional development is to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate students.

Learning Outcomes

The power point presentation and the activities included were designed to help participants achieve specific learning outcomes. The learning outcome achievement will encourage instructors to help nontraditional undergraduate students improve their skills, enable instructors to engage students, and empower instructors to take ownership of the nonacademic life skill development that hinders student success. Post collaboration in this professional development, instructors and other key stakeholders will be able to:

1. identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
2. discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and
3. create strategies that may change conditions for students

Target Audience

The target audience for this professional development includes but is not limited to instructors and academic counselors since have the most direct contact with nontraditional undergraduate students. The information presented and the strategies created can also be shared with secondary education teachers and counselors to improve exposure, experience, and excellence in challenging areas including managing time, managing social connections, and managing goals.

Components

The findings of nontraditional undergraduate students showed that: (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time, (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals. The 3-day professional development was designed and will be presented and organized according to these findings.

Professional Development Series: Day 1 MANAGING TIME

The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to

1. job responsibilities,
2. scheduling activities, and
3. demonstrating consistent effort.

Components:

During this professional development for instructors that work primarily with nontraditional undergraduate college students. Based upon the findings of the study each day will focus by theme to improve conditions for nontraditional undergraduate college students. The three themes for this professional development based upon experiences of nontraditional undergraduate college students were issues related to time, social connections, and goal management. Strategies will be discussed by theme each day.

Day 1: Time Management Strategies for Managing (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort.

Day 2: Social Connections Strategies for Managing (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group.

Day 3: Goal Setting Strategies for Managing (a) nonspecific or nonexistent goals, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers.

This professional development project is organized by the three themes that emerged from the findings of this study. To improve student efficacy each day the

facilitator will lead activities designed to allow participants to understand the issues related to time management, social connection management, and goal management. During collaborative work participants can investigate ways to incorporate strategies that will strengthen nontraditional undergraduate college students' skills related to time management, social connection management, and goal management.

Each day will include,

- a) an exploration of the issue,
- b) discussion on how this affects students' performance and persistence,
- c) group collaboration for the most effective strategies,
- d) sharing ideas of how to implement new skill building activities into each content area, and
- e) creating a plan to evaluate the progress and efficacy of the new ideas.

At the end of each day participants will have an opportunity to ask questions and demonstrate understanding during the question and answer time and by completing an exit ticket. The facilitator will review exit tickets to check for understanding and begin Day 2 and Day 3 with a recapitulation of the day before and also clarify any misunderstandings.

Participants will provide an evaluation of the professional development materials, presentation, slides, and relevancy of the information presented. Formative and summative assessments will be used and are included in the appendices. Below is a chart that will outline the themes, activities, strategies and provide a schedule for each day of the professional development.

Professional Development Session Schedule - Day 1 Time Management

| Time | Activity | Method |
|---------------|--|---|
| 8:30 – 9:00 | Sign-in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas | Sign-in for PD attendance verification Label name and position and attach to clothing Use table markers to sit by content areas |
| 9:00 – 9:30 | Continental Breakfast Provided | By the entrance doors and sign-in table in the Conference Room |
| 9:30 – 10:00 | Welcome, Individual Introductions, Outline and Overview of each day | Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Ice Breaker – How do you manage your time? | Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme |
| 10:45 – 12:00 | Time Management Exploration Activity Challenges and Opportunities | Lead by PD facilitator |
| 12:00 – 1:00 | Lunch | Not Provided - On your own |
| 1:00 – 2:00 | Small Group Collaboration, Whole Group Discussion, | PowerPoint presentation-presented by PD facilitator. |
| 2:00– 2:30 | Closing Question and Answer Session Preview Next Day | Assessment: Exit Ticket |

Professional Development Facilitator Notes for Day 1

- Participants will sign-in and attach a label including their name, content area, and position. Participants will eat, locate their seat, and participate in the ice breaker activity.
- The ice breaker activity asks participants to describe their system of time management. The goal is to see the different techniques and discover how comfortable participants are in effective time management.
- The facilitator will introduce the goals and objectives to explore the issues of time management as described in the findings and how these time management issues affected nontraditional undergraduate college student performance.
- Explain how these issues may be demonstrated by students. Identify strategies to introduce, review, model, or strengthen student skills related to time management of (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort.
- Participants will participate in a discussion on how this affects students' performance and persistence. What is time management? Why is time management important for nontraditional undergraduate student success? What are the current methods of teaching or reinforcing this skill? How can we improve upon current methods? Ask for suggestions of new strategies and how they can be incorporated into all content areas?
- The facilitator will divide participants into groups of four to for group collaboration activity to establish the most effective strategies for teaching

time management. Remind participants to allow each person to respond without interruption, record the responses, ask clarifying questions, and share openly.

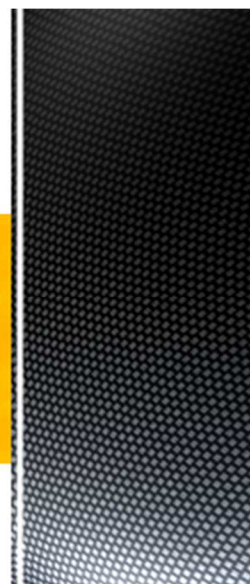
- Participants will return to whole group discussion in order to share ideas of how to implement new skill building activities into each content area and create a plan to evaluate the progress and efficacy of the new ideas.
- The facilitator will distribute exit tickets and support the Question and Answer session while reviewing the key points associated with nontraditional undergraduate student challenges related to (a) job responsibilities, (b) scheduling activities, and (c) demonstrating consistent effort. How has your own system of time management developed or changed? Do you use technology to help support your time management system? How can we encourage students to use an effective time management system?
- Review the time management theme and the strategies discussed. Distribute exit tickets. The facilitator will review exit tickets to check for understanding and begin Day 2 and Day 3 with a recapitulation of the day before and also clarify any misunderstandings.

The nontraditional undergraduate college students' issue of time management PowerPoint presentation slides, references, and descriptions for Professional Development for Day 1 are found below:

Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students



Professional Development Series
Erica B. Wattley



Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Professional Development Series



LET'S GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER!

1. WHO ARE YOU?
2. WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE ORGANIZATION?
3. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH FROM PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?



LET'S GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER!

1. WHO ARE YOU?
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3. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH FROM PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?

Professional Development Series:
Nontraditional Undergraduate
Student

Objectives:

- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.

Professional Development Series:
Nontraditional Undergraduate
Student

Goals:

- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.

Professional Development Series: Nontraditional Undergraduate Student

Goals:

- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions,
and
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.

WHO ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS?



▪ *Nontraditional undergraduate students* are students who need special modifications to schedules, format, or delivery of university level courses.

- Nontraditional undergraduate students usually meet one or more of the following characteristics:
- ✓ (a) enrolled in postsecondary education later than most undergraduate students;
 - ✓ (b) attended college part-time;
 - ✓ (c) worked full time;
 - ✓ (d) may be financially independent;
 - ✓ (e) have dependents; or
 - ✓ (f) do not have a high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010, p. 1).

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WHAT ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ISSUES?



The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included:

- (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time,
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- (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

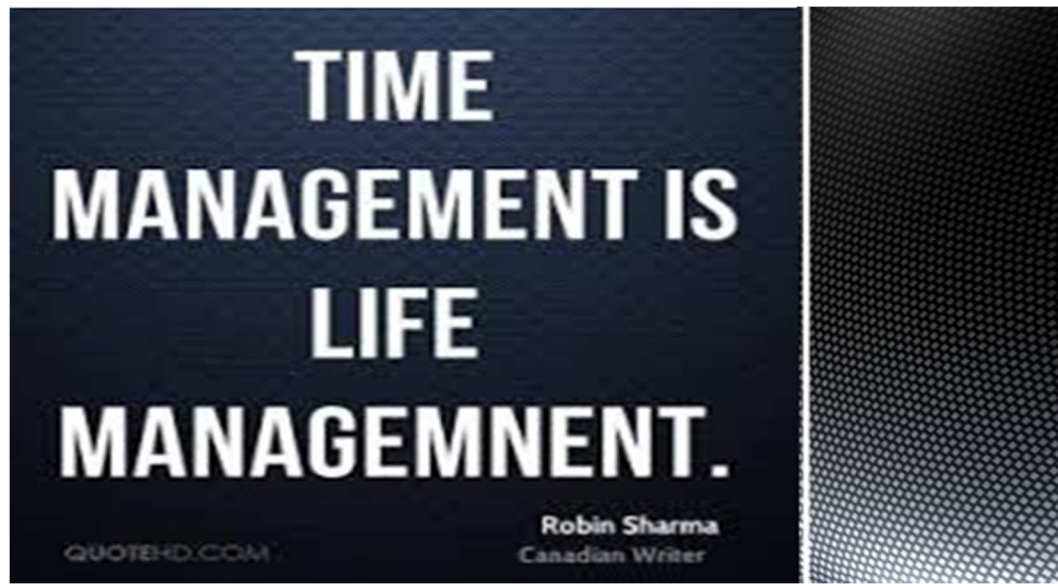
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ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your personal time?
2. How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your professional time?
3. How do you think you could incorporate time management technique strategies to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of time management?

ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

1. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your personal time?**
2. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your professional time?**
3. **How do you think you could incorporate time management technique strategies to help students?**
4. **Have you struggled with issues of time management?**

Professional Development Series:
Incorporating time management strategies into each content area
STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- MAKING LISTS
- USING A UNIFIED CALENDAR
- SCHEDULING WORK TIME AS APPOINTMENTS
- TIME BLOCKING
- TOP THREE EACH DAY
- INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY
- USING REMINDERS



Time Management : Failure Reasons



- ✓ *No List For "TO-DO"*
- ✓ *Not Setting Personal GOALS*
- ✓ *No Priorities*
- ✓ *Failing To Manage Distractions*
- ✓ *Procrastination*
- ✓ *Too Many Tasks Without Plan*
- ✓ *No Breaks*
- ✓ *No Upgradation Based On Milestone Results*
- ✓ *Ineffectively Scheduling Tasks*

Diary Store  www.diarystore.com



Professional Development Series: Day 1

**Professional Development
Series: Day 1**

TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO SCHEDULE STUDY, WORK, AND LIFE OBLIGATIONS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

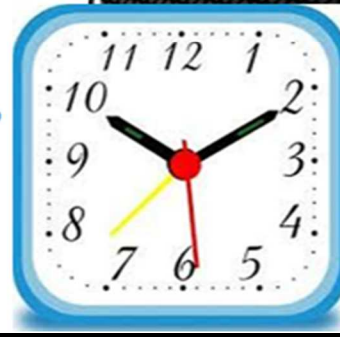
- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO SCHEDULE STUDY, WORK, AND LIFE OBLIGATIONS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

Professional Development Series:
Day 1 MANAGING TIME

The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to

- job responsibilities,**
- scheduling activities, and**
- demonstrating consistent effort.**



Professional Development Series: Day 1 MANAGING TIME

The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to


- job responsibilities,**
- scheduling activities, and**
- demonstrating consistent effort.**

Developing a Schedule.

Determine how you spend a typical 24-hour day:

Enter the hours you spend on each activity.
If the time entered is less than one hour, use "0.5"

Watch as your time slips away...



| | |
|----------------------|--|
| <input type="text"/> | Classes |
| <input type="text"/> | Studying |
| <input type="text"/> | Sleeping |
| <input type="text"/> | Exercise/sports |
| <input type="text"/> | Work/internship |
| <input type="text"/> | Family commitments |
| <input type="text"/> | Personal care/grooming |
| <input type="text"/> | Meal preparation/eating/clean-up |
| <input type="text"/> | Transportation (school, work, etc.) |
| <input type="text"/> | Reading/TV/video games, etc. (alone) |
| <input type="text"/> | Socializing/entertainment (with friends) |
| <input type="text"/> | Other |

Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 1 Issues with Time**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to

- **job responsibilities,**
- **scheduling activities, and**
- **demonstrating consistent effort.**
- **Strategies to help?**
- **Preview for Day 2 Issues with Social Connection**

Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 1 Issues with Time**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to

- **job responsibilities,**
- **scheduling activities, and**

- **demonstrating consistent effort.**

Strategies to help.

Preview for Day 2 Issues with Social Connection

Professional Development Series: Day 2 MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS

Participants struggled to identify socially with other students, and this did not facilitate their involvement in campus activities.

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

1. identifying socially with other students,
2. prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and
3. assimilating into the social group.

Professional Development Session Schedule - Day 2 Social Connection and Communication Management

| Time | Activity | Method |
|---------------|--|--|
| 8:30 – 9:00 | Sign-in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas | Sign-in for PD attendance verification Label name and position and attach to clothing Use table markers to sit by content areas |
| 9:00 – 9:30 | Continental Breakfast Provided | By the entrance doors and sign-in table in the Conference Room |
| 9:30 – 10:00 | Welcome, Individual Introductions, Review Day 1 and Outline Day 2 | Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Ice Breaker – How do you manage communication and social connection? | Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme |
| 10:45 – 12:00 | Social Connection Management and Communication Exploration Activity Challenges and Opportunities | Lead by PD facilitator |
| 12:00 – 1:00 | Lunch | Not Provided – On your own |
| 1:00 – 2:00 | Small Group Collaboration, Whole Group Discussion, | PowerPoint presentation-presented by PD facilitator. |
| 2:00– 2:30 | Closing Q & A Preview Next Day | Assessment: Exit Ticket |

Professional Development Facilitator Notes for Day 2

- Participants will sign-in and attach a label including their name, content area, and position. Participants will eat, locate their seat, and participate in the ice breaker activity.
- The ice breaker activity asks participants to describe their system of social connection and communication skill management. The goal is to see the different techniques used and discover how comfortable participants are in effective social connection and communication management.
- The facilitator will introduce the goals and objectives to explore the issues of social connection and communication management as described in the findings and how these social connection and communication management issues affected nontraditional undergraduate college student performance.
- Explain how these issues may be demonstrated by students. Identify strategies to introduce, review, model, or strengthen student skills related to social connection and communication management including the following: (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group.
- Participants will participate in a discussion on how this affects students' performance and persistence. What is social connection and communication management? Why is social connection and communication management important for nontraditional undergraduate student success? What are the current methods of teaching or reinforcing this skill? How can we improve

upon current methods? Ask for suggestions of new strategies and how they can be incorporated into all content areas?

- The facilitator will divide participants into groups of four to for group collaboration activity to establish the most effective strategies for teaching social connection and communication management. Remind participants to allow each person to respond without interruption, record the responses, ask clarifying questions, and share openly.
- Participants will return to whole group discussion in order to share ideas of how to implement new skill building activities into each content area and create a plan to evaluate the progress and efficacy of the new ideas. What are the differences in verbal and nonverbal communication? Why are nonverbal cues or gestures important? What is the difference between formal and informal written communication? Why is written communication an important skill for students? How does this skill affect students' connection and communication efficacy with peers and faculty?
- The facilitator will distribute exit tickets and support the Question and Answer session while reviewing the key points associated with nontraditional undergraduate student challenges related to social connection and communication management including the following: (a) identifying socially with other students, (b) prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and (c) assimilating into the social group. How has your own system of social connection and communication management developed or changed? Do you

use technology to help support your social connection and communication management system? How can we encourage students to use an effective social connection and communication management system?

- Review the social connection and communication management theme and the strategies discussed. Distribute exit tickets. The facilitator will review exit tickets to check for understanding and begin Day 3 with a recapitulation of the day before and also clarify any misunderstandings.

The nontraditional undergraduate college students' issue of social connection and communication management PowerPoint presentation slides, references, and descriptions for Professional Development for Day 2 are found below:

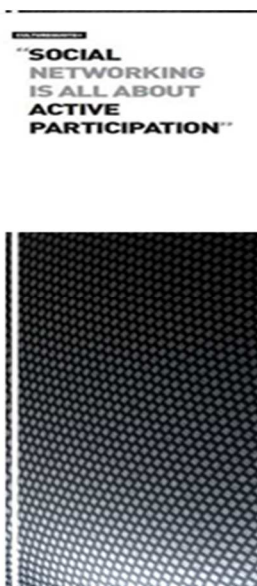
Preview for Day 2 Issues with Social Connection

ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you socially connect with your peers in your personal life?
2. How do you socially connect with people in your professional environment?
3. How do you think you could incorporate social connection and communication techniques or strategies to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of connecting socially?



ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

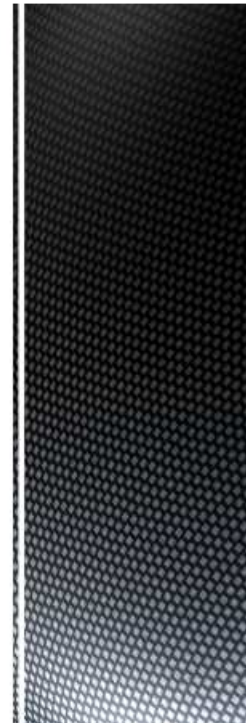
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2. **How do you socially connect with people in your professional environment?**
3. **How do you think you could incorporate social connection and communication techniques or strategies to help students?**
4. **Have you struggled with issues of connecting socially?**

Professional Development Series:

Developing effective verbal and written communication skills to improve social connections

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- DEVELOPING A RAPPORT
- ACTIVE LISTENING
- VERBAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS
- GESTURES AND NONVERBAL CUES
- WRITTEN COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS
- FORMAL VS INFORMAL
- OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY

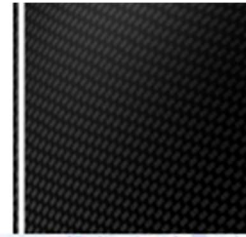


Professional Development Series:
Day 2 MANAGING SOCIAL
CONNECTIONS

Participants struggled to identify socially with other students and this did not facilitate their involvement in campus activities.

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

- identifying socially with other students,**
- prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and**
- assimilating into the social group.**



Professional Development Series: Day 2 MANAGING SOCIAL
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Professional Development Series: Day 2

SOCIAL CONNECTION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FACULTY, PEER, COMMUNITY**
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, PRIORITIZE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, SELF-ADVOCATE**
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**



Professional Development Series: Day 2

SOCIAL CONNECTION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FACULTY, PEER, COMMUNITY**
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, PRIORITIZE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, SELF-ADVOCATE**
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY**



SELF-ADVOCATE – ASK QUESTIONS
BE ENGAGED – LOOK FOR WAYS TO CONNECT

COMMUNICATION WITH FACULTY, PEERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOR SUCCESS!



COMMUNICATION WITH FACULTY, PEERS, AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS FOR SUCCESS!

SELF-ADVOCATE – ASK QUESTIONS

BE ENGAGED – LOOK FOR WAYS TO CONNECT

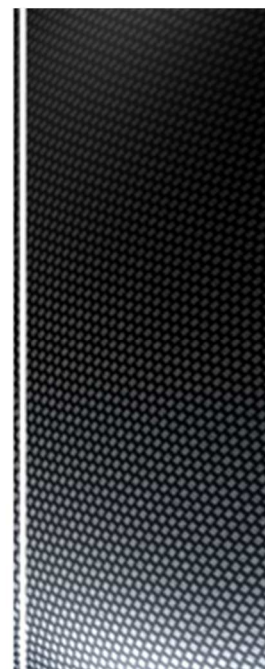
Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day Issues with Social Connection**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

- identifying socially with other students,**
- prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and**
- assimilating into the social group.**

- **Strategies to help?**
- **Preview for Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**



Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day Issues with Social Connection**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

- identifying socially with other students,**
 - prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and**
 - assimilating into the social group.**
- **Strategies to help.**
 - **Preview Day 3 Managing Goals**

Professional Development Series: Day 3 MANAGING GOALS

The third theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students often expressed that they had ambiguous academic goals.

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

1. nonspecific or nonexistent,
2. affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and
3. affected by the opinions of their peers.

Professional Development Session Schedule - Day 3 Goal Management

| Time | Activity | Method |
|---------------|--|---|
| 8:30 – 9:00 | Sign-in Fill out a name tag Locate seating arrangement clusters by content areas | Sign-in for PD attendance verification Label name and position and attach to clothing Use table markers to sit by content areas |
| 9:00 – 9:30 | Continental Breakfast Provided | By the entrance doors and sign-in table in the Conference Room |
| 9:30 – 10:00 | Welcome, Individual Introductions, Review Day 1 and Day 2, Outline Day 3 | Lead by PD facilitator using PowerPoint slides |
| 10:00 – 10:45 | Ice Breaker – How do you manage your goals? | Group activity, participants will use the questions on the ice breaker slide to discuss with their group and relate to the theme |
| 10:45 – 12:00 | Goal Setting and S.M.A.R.T. Goal Exploration Activity Challenges and Opportunities | Lead by PD facilitator |
| 12:00 – 1:00 | Lunch | Not Provided - On your own |
| 1:00 – 2:00 | Small Group Collaboration, Whole Group Discussion, | PowerPoint presentation-presented by PD facilitator. |
| 2:00– 2:30 | Closing Question and Answer Session Action Items List | Assessment: Overall Evaluation |

Professional Development Facilitator Notes for Day 3

- Participants will sign-in and attach a label including their name, content area, and position. Participants will eat, locate their seat, and participate in the ice breaker activity.
- The ice breaker activity asks participants to describe their system of goal setting skill management. The goal is to see the different techniques used and discover how comfortable participants are in effective goal setting skill management.
- The facilitator will introduce the goals and objectives to explore the issues of goal setting skill management as described in the findings and how these goal setting skill management issues affected nontraditional undergraduate college student performance.
- Explain how these issues may be demonstrated by students. Identify strategies to introduce, review, model, or strengthen student skills related to goal setting skill management including the following issues with ambiguous academic goals that were: (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers.
- Participants will participate in a discussion on how this affects students' performance and persistence. What is goal setting skill management? What is a S.M.A.R.T. Goal? How do you divide large goals into smaller goals? What are examples of measurable action items that can be created to support each

step in the goal? Why is goal setting skill management important for nontraditional undergraduate student success? What are the current methods of teaching or reinforcing this skill? How can we improve upon current methods? Ask for suggestions of new strategies and how they can be incorporated into all content areas?

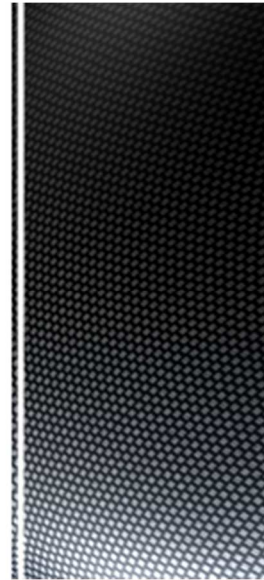
- The facilitator will divide participants into groups of four to for group collaboration activity to establish the most effective strategies for teaching goal setting skill management. Remind participants to allow each person to respond without interruption, record the responses, ask clarifying questions, and share openly.
- Participants will return to whole group discussion in order to share ideas of how to implement new skill building activities into each content area and create a plan to evaluate the progress and efficacy of the new ideas. What are the differences in achievement with goals or without goals? Why are goal setting and goal management skills important? What is the difference between a goal and a wish? Why is goal setting skill management an important skill for students? How does this skill affect students' success and efficacy?
- The facilitator will distribute exit tickets and support the Question and Answer session while reviewing the key points associated with nontraditional undergraduate student challenges related to goal setting and goal management skills including the following issues with ambiguous academic goals that were: (a) nonspecific or nonexistent, (b) affected by difficult financial

situations or unfulfilling careers, and (c) affected by the opinions of their peers. How has your own system of goal setting and goal management skills developed or changed? Do you use technology to help support your goal setting and goal management skills system? How can we encourage students to use an effective goal setting and goal management skills management system?

- Review the goal setting and goal management skills management theme and the strategies discussed. Distribute overall evaluation forms. The facilitator will review overall evaluation forms to check for ways to improve the professional development session and end Day 3 with a recapitulation of the all of the days before and also clarify any misunderstandings.

The nontraditional undergraduate college students' issue of goal setting and goal management skills management PowerPoint presentation slides, references, and descriptions for Professional Development for Day 3 are found below:

ICE BREAKER

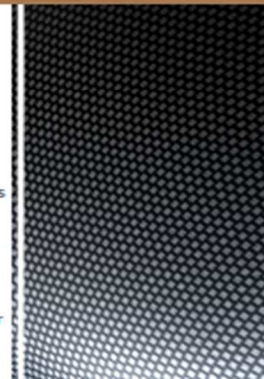


ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you set goals to organize your personal time?
2. How do you set goals and action items to break down what needs to be done to reach your goals in your professional time?
3. How do you think you could set goals and what techniques or strategies that you could share to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of goal setting, creating action items, or accurately evaluating the goals?



LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

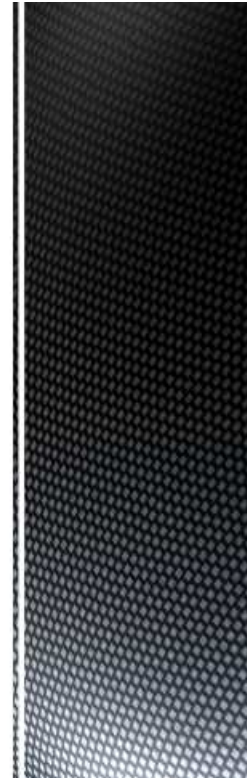
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3. **How do you think you could set goals and what techniques or strategies that you could share to help students?**
4. **Have you struggled with issues of goal setting, creating action items, or accurately evaluating the goals?**

Professional Development Series:
**Demonstrating the importance of
effective goal setting**

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- SMART GOALS - SPECIFIC MEASUREABLE
ACHIEVABLE REALISTIC AND TIMELY
- PROVIDE EXAMPLES
- BREAKING GOALS DOWN INTO SMALLER GOALS
- FREQUENT REFLECTION
- CREATING ACTION ITEMS
- MANAGING DISTRACTIONS

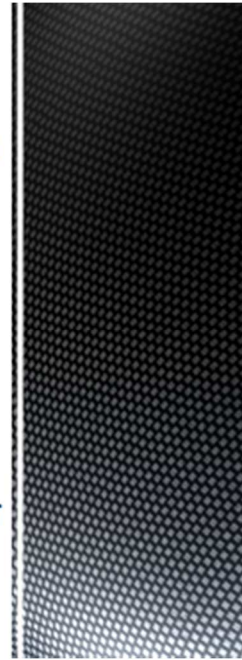


Professional Development Series: Day 3 MANAGING GOALS

The third theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students often expressed that they had ambiguous academic goals.

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- **nonspecific or nonexistent,**
- **affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and**
- **affected by the opinions of their peers.**



Professional Development Series: Day 3 MANAGING GOALS

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- **affected by the opinions of their peers.**

Professional Development Series: Day 3

GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES

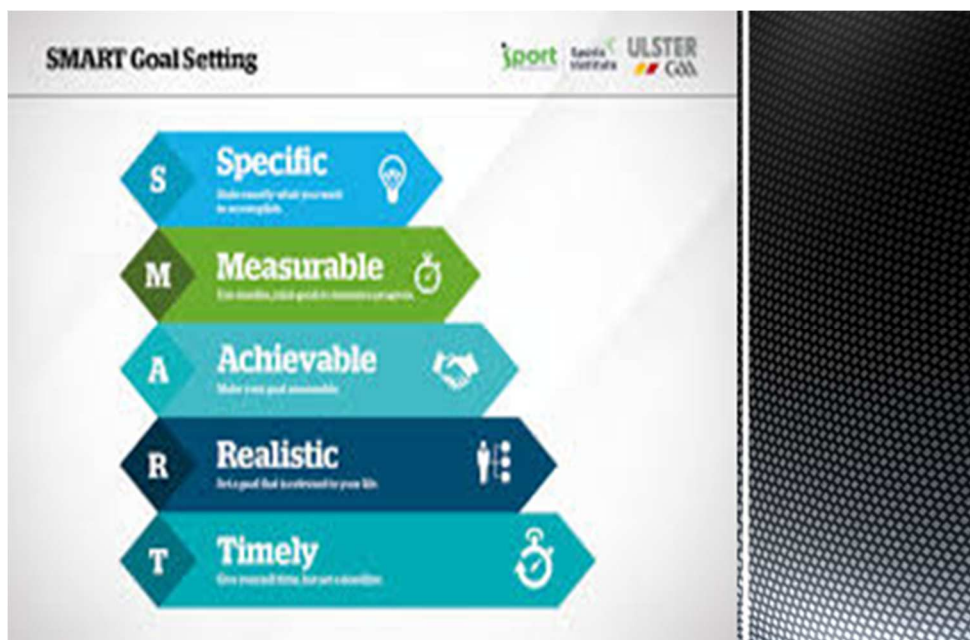
- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO CREATE SMART GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS AND HOW TO MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



Professional Development Series: Day 3

GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO CREATE SMART GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS AND HOW TO MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



Questions and Answers

Questions and Answers

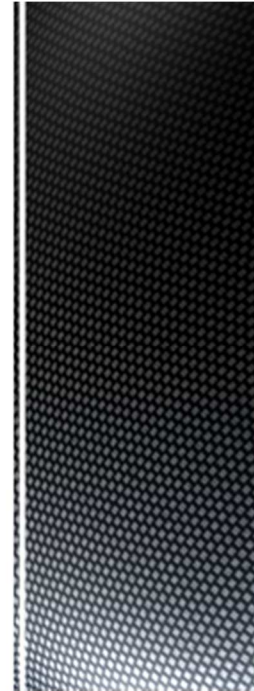
- **Recap Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- nonspecific or nonexistent,
- affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and
- affected by the opinions of their peers.

- **Strategies to help?**

- **Review and Looking Forward for Change**



- **Recap Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- nonspecific or nonexistent,
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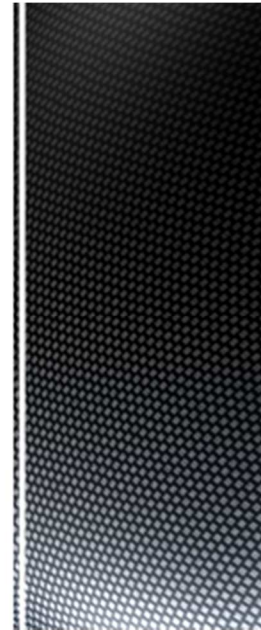
- **Strategies to help.**

- **Review and Looking Forward for Change**

EVALUATION

LET'S BRAINSTORM ON WAYS
TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS
FOR NONTRADITIONAL
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
IN THE AREAS OF

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL
CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**



EVALUATION

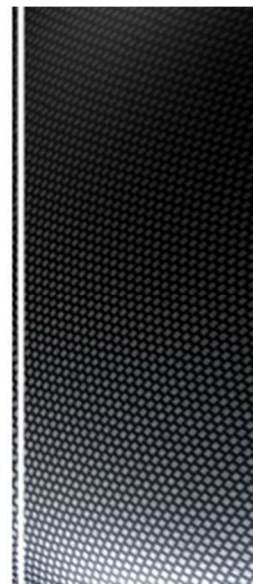
LET'S BRAINSTORM ON WAYS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR
NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE AREAS OF

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**

ACTION ITEMS

What strategies could you implement in your specific subject to help nontraditional students with;

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**



ACTION ITEMS

What strategies could you implement in your specific subject to help nontraditional students with.

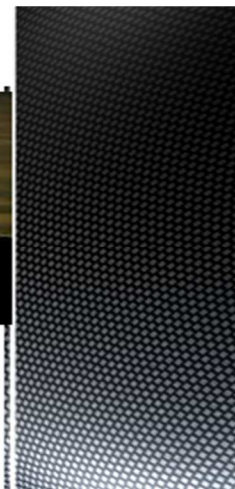
- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

MANAGING GOALS

Thank You



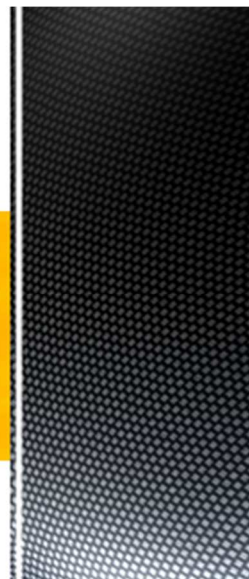
I would now like to invite your questions!



Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students



Professional Development Series
Erica B. Wattley



Perceptions and Experiences of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Professional Development Series



LET'S GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER!

1. WHO ARE YOU?
2. WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE ORGANIZATION?
3. WHAT DO YOU HOPE TO ACCOMPLISH FROM PARTICIPATION IN THIS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT?



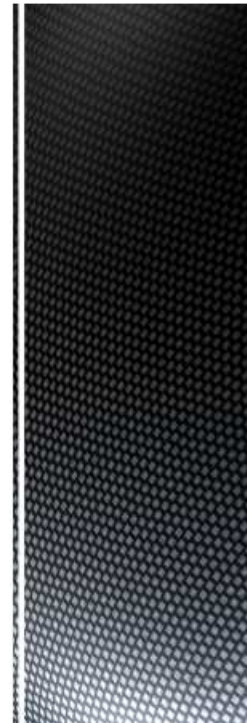
LET'S GET TO KNOW ONE ANOTHER!

4. **WHO ARE YOU?**
5. **WHAT IS YOUR ROLE IN THE ORGANIZATION?**
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Professional Development Series:
Nontraditional Undergraduate
Student

Objectives:

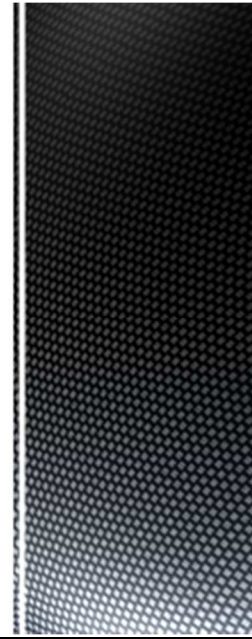
- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.



Professional Development Series:
Nontraditional Undergraduate
Student

Goals:

- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,**
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions, and**
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.**



Professional Development Series: Nontraditional Undergraduate Student

Goals:

- identify nontraditional undergraduate students' challenges,**
- discuss nontraditional undergraduate students' experiences and perceptions,**
and
- offer strategies that may change conditions for students.**

WHO ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS?



- *Nontraditional undergraduate students* are students who need **special modifications to schedules, format, or delivery of university level courses.**
- Nontraditional undergraduate students usually meet one or more of the following characteristics:
 - ✓ (a) enrolled in postsecondary education later than most undergraduate students;
 - ✓ (b) attended college part-time;
 - ✓ (c) worked full time;
 - ✓ (d) may be financially independent;
 - ✓ (e) have dependents; or
 - ✓ (f) do not have a high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010, p. 1).

WHO ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS?

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- ✓ (e) have dependents; or
- ✓ (f) do not have a high school diploma (Pelletier, 2010, p. 1).

WHAT ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ISSUES?



The three themes that resulted from the data analysis of interviews included:

- (a) nontraditional undergraduate students recognized challenges related to issues with time,
- (b) nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to issues with social connections within a school environment, and
- (c) nontraditional undergraduate students demonstrated challenges related to ambiguous academic goals.

WHAT ARE NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENT ISSUES?

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ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your personal time?
2. How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your professional time?
3. How do you think you could incorporate time management technique strategies to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of time management?



ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

5. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your personal time?**
6. **How do you incorporate time management techniques to organize your professional time?**
7. **How do you think you could incorporate time management technique strategies to help students?**
8. **Have you struggled with issues of time management?**

Professional Development Series:
Incorporating time management strategies into each content area
STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- MAKING LISTS
- USING A UNIFIED CALENDAR
- SCHEDULING WORK TIME AS APPOINTMENTS
- TIME BLOCKING
- TOP THREE EACH DAY
- INTEGRATING TECHNOLOGY
- USING REMINDERS



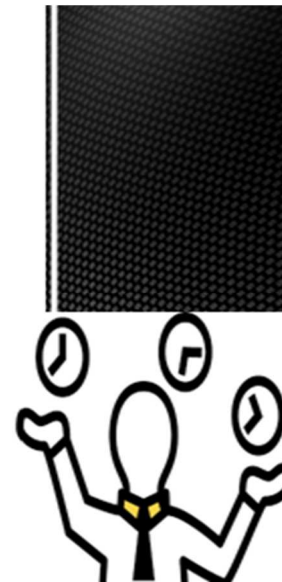


Professional Development Series: Day 1

Professional Development Series: Day 1

TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME MANAGEMENT
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO SCHEDULE STUDY, WORK, AND LIFE OBLIGATIONS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



TIME MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF TIME

MANAGEMENT

SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO SCHEDULE STUDY, WORK, AND LIFE OBLIGATIONS

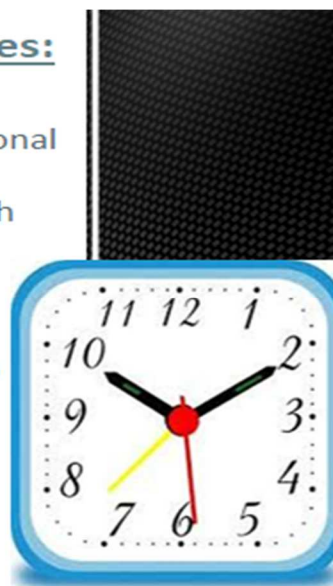
INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY

Professional Development Series:
Day 1 MANAGING TIME

The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to

- job responsibilities,**
- scheduling activities, and**
- demonstrating consistent effort.**



Professional Development Series: Day 1 MANAGING TIME

The first theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students experienced academic difficulties related to issues with time.

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced such as challenges related to


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- scheduling activities, and**
- demonstrating consistent effort.**

Developing a Schedule.

Determine how you spend a typical 24-hour day:

Enter the hours you spend on each activity.
If the time entered is less than one hour, use "0.5"

Watch as your time slips away...



24
Hours Remaining

- Classes
- Studying
- Sleeping
- Exercise/sports
- Work/internship
- Family commitments
- Personal care/grooming
- Meal preparation/eating/clean-up
- Transportation (school, work, etc.)
- Reading/TV/video games, etc. (alone)
- Socializing/entertainment (with friends)
- Other

Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 1 Issues with Time**

- **Key points**

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to

- **job responsibilities,**
- **scheduling activities, and**
- **demonstrating consistent effort.**

- **Strategies to help?**

- **Preview for Day 2 Issues with Social Connection**

Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day 1 Issues with Time**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional undergraduate students experienced challenges related to

- **job responsibilities,**
- **scheduling activities, and**

- demonstrating consistent effort.

Strategies to help.

Preview for Day 2 Issues with Social Connection

ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you socially connect with your peers in your personal life?
2. How do you socially connect with people in your professional environment?
3. How do you think you could incorporate social connection and communication techniques or strategies to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of connecting socially?

**"SOCIAL
NETWORKING
IS ALL ABOUT
ACTIVE
PARTICIPATION"**



ICE BREAKER

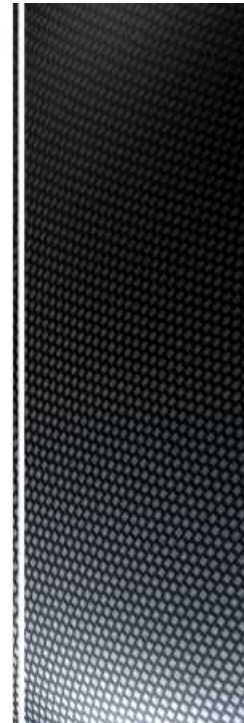
LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

5. How do you socially connect with your peers in your personal life?
6. How do you socially connect with people in your professional environment?
7. How do you think you could incorporate social connection and communication techniques or strategies to help students?
8. Have you struggled with issues of connecting socially?

Professional Development Series:
**Developing effective verbal and
 written communication skills to
 improve social connections**

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- DEVELOPING A RAPPORT
- ACTIVE LISTENING
- VERBAL COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS
- GESTURES AND NONVERBAL CUES
- WRITTEN COMMUNICATION EFFECTIVENESS
- FORMAL VS INFORMAL
- OPPORTUNITIES TO PRACTICE INDIVIDUALLY AND CORPORATELY

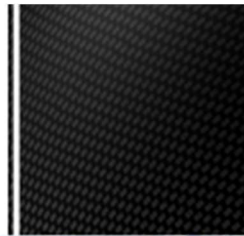


Professional Development Series:
**Day 2 MANAGING SOCIAL
 CONNECTIONS**

Participants struggled to identify socially with other students and this did not facilitate their involvement in campus activities.

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

- identifying socially with other students,**
- prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and**
- assimilating into the social group.**



Professional Development Series: Day 2 MANAGING SOCIAL

CONNECTIONS

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Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

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Professional Development Series: Day 2

SOCIAL CONNECTION MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF SOCIAL CONNECTIONS FACULTY, PEER, COMMUNITY
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO COMMUNICATE EFFECTIVELY, PRIORITIZE SOCIAL INTERACTIONS, SELF-ADVOCATE
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



Professional Development Series: Day 2

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- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



**SELF-ADVOCATE – ASK
QUESTIONS**
**BE ENGAGED – LOOK
FOR WAYS TO CONNECT**

**COMMUNICATION WITH
FACULTY, PEERS, AND
COMMUNITY MEMBERS
FOR SUCCESS!**



**COMMUNICATION WITH FACULTY, PEERS, AND COMMUNITY
MEMBERS FOR SUCCESS!**

SELF-ADVOCATE – ASK QUESTIONS

BE ENGAGED – LOOK FOR WAYS TO CONNECT

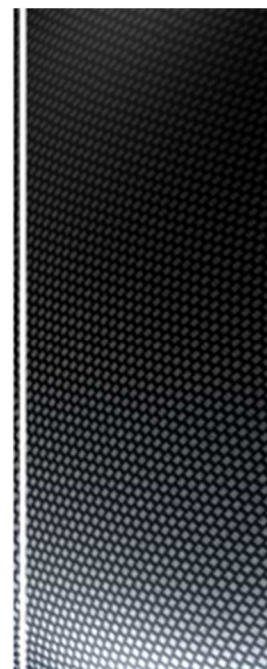
Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day Issues with Social Connection**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

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- assimilating into the social group.**

- **Strategies to help?**
- **Preview for Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**



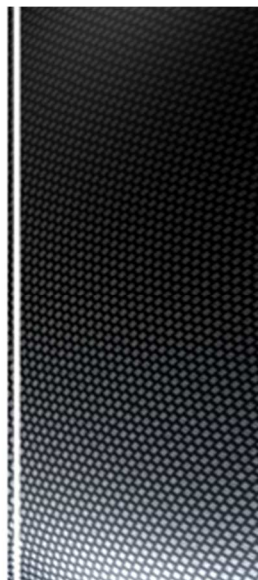
Questions and Answers

- **Recap Day Issues with Social Connection**
- **Key points**

Nontraditional Undergraduate Students had issues:

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 - prioritizing schoolwork over social interaction, and**
 - assimilating into the social group.**
- **Strategies to help.**
 - **Preview for Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**

ICE BREAKER



ICE BREAKER

LET'S BREAK
INTO GROUPS
OF 4



1. How do you set goals to organize your personal time?
2. How do you set goals and action items to break down what needs to be done to reach your goals in your professional time?
3. How do you think you could set goals and what techniques or strategies that you could share to help students?
4. Have you struggled with issues of goal setting, creating action items, or accurately evaluating the goals?



LET'S BREAK INTO GROUPS OF 4

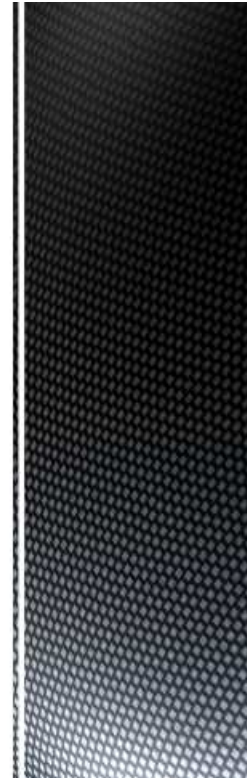
5. **How do you set goals to organize your personal time?**
6. **How do you set goals and action items to break down what needs to be done to reach your goals in your professional time?**

7. **How do you think you could set goals and what techniques or strategies that you could share to help students?**
8. **Have you struggled with issues of goal setting, creating action items, or accurately evaluating the goals?**

Professional Development Series:
Demonstrating the importance of
effective goal setting

STRATEGIES AND APPROACHES INCLUDE:

- SMART GOALS - SPECIFIC MEASUREABLE
ACHIEVABLE REALISTIC AND TIMELY
- PROVIDE EXAMPLES
- BREAKING GOALS DOWN INTO SMALLER GOALS
- FREQUENT REFLECTION
- CREATING ACTION ITEMS
- MANAGING DISTRACTIONS

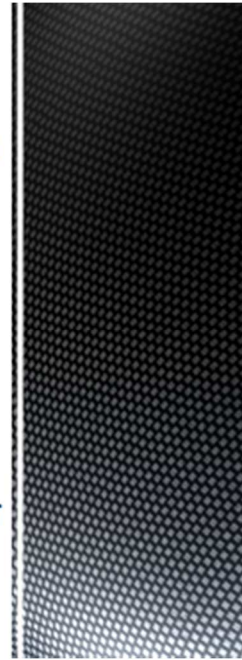


Professional Development Series: Day 3 MANAGING GOALS

The third theme identified that nontraditional undergraduate students often expressed that they had ambiguous academic goals.

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- **nonspecific or nonexistent,**
- **affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and**
- **affected by the opinions of their peers.**



Professional Development Series: Day 3 MANAGING GOALS

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Professional Development Series: Day 3

GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES

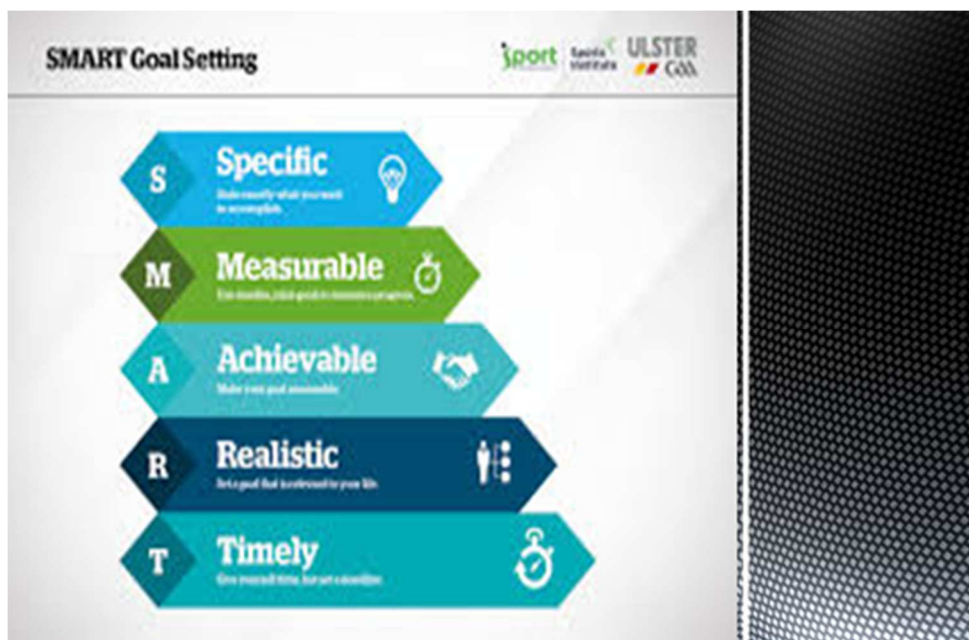
- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO CREATE SMART GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS AND HOW TO MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



Professional Development Series: Day 3

GOAL SETTING STRATEGIES

- INTRODUCTION/REVIEW OF THE IMPORTANCE OF GOALS
- SKILL BUILDING IN EACH CLASS ON HOW TO CREATE SMART GOALS AND ACTION ITEMS AND HOW TO MEASURE YOUR PROGRESS
- INTEGRATED TECHNOLOGY



Questions and Answers

Questions and Answers

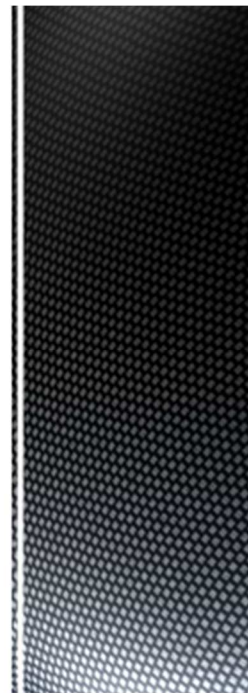
- **Recap Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- nonspecific or nonexistent,
- affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and
- affected by the opinions of their peers.

- **Strategies to help?**

- **Review and Looking Forward for Change**



- **Recap Day 3 Issues with Goal Setting**

Nontraditional undergraduate students had issues with ambiguous academic goals that were:

- nonspecific or nonexistent,
- affected by difficult financial situations or unfulfilling careers, and
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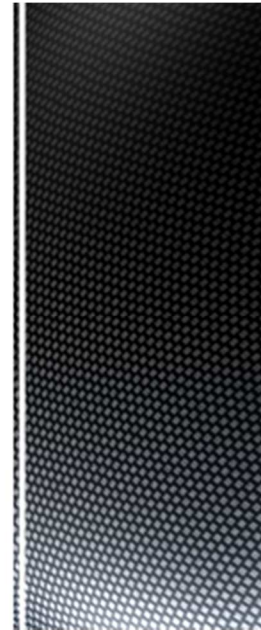
- **Strategies to help.**

- **Review and Looking Forward for Change**

EVALUATION

LET'S BRAINSTORM ON WAYS
TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS
FOR NONTRADITIONAL
UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS
IN THE AREAS OF

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL
CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**



EVALUATION

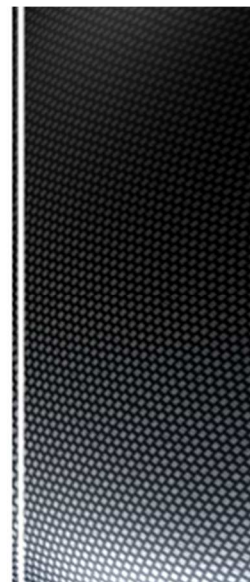
LET'S BRAINSTORM ON WAYS TO IMPROVE CONDITIONS FOR
NONTRADITIONAL UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN THE AREAS OF

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**

ACTION ITEMS

What strategies could you implement in your specific subject to help nontraditional students with;

- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**
- **MANAGING GOALS**



ACTION ITEMS

What strategies could you implement in your specific subject to help nontraditional students with.

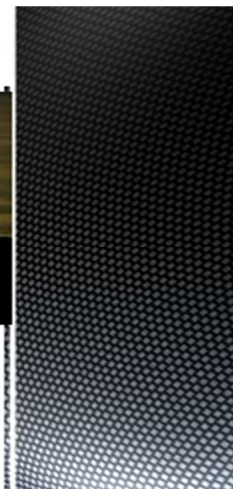
- **MANAGING TIME**
- **MANAGING SOCIAL CONNECTIONS**

MANAGING GOALS

Thank You



I would now like to invite your questions!



Formative Assessment

Daily Exit Tickets for Professional Development on Perceptions and Experiences
of Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Day 1 Exit Ticket

Describe the issues nontraditional undergraduate students had with managing time?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Day 2 Exit Ticket

Describe the issues nontraditional undergraduate students had with managing social connections?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Day 3 Exit Ticket

Describe the issues nontraditional undergraduate students had with managing goal setting?

Name an approach that could be used to improve these issues.

Summative AssessmentEvaluation Form of Professional Development on Perceptions and Experiences of
Nontraditional Undergraduate Students

Please provide your feedback below using a scale of 1 (lowest) to 5 (highest).

Please rate this professional development on the content.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the presentation.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the materials.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the participant engagement opportunities.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the location.

1 2 3 4 5

Please rate this professional development on the presenter.

1 2 3 4 5

Please share any additional comments here below.

Thank you for your time and participation!

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Appendix B: Participant Interview Guide

The overarching question that will guide this study is as follows: What are the academic, social, and goal achievement perceptions and experiences about leaving the university before graduating of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts? The research questions for this study are:

RQ1 What are the perceptions of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts about the influence of academic difficulties, social life, and unresolved educational and occupational goals on leaving the university before graduating?

Tell me about the classes in which you enrolled.

- What academic challenges did you face?
- Did you seek extra help, tutoring or academic guidance while taking classes?
- Can you tell me about how you expected to spend your time during a typical week with regards to coursework?

Tell me about the social life.

- How did you integrate your existing social life with the new social life you developed while taking classes?
- What did find challenging about the new aspects of your social life?
- Can you tell me about how you expected to spend your time during a typical week with regards to social activities?

Tell me about your educational and occupational goals that prompted you to begin school.

- How did your work experience compare to your educational and occupational goals?
- Describe your family or social life at that time and its relationship to your educational and occupational goals?
- What were your expectations of how college would impact your opportunities, skills, or preparation to achieve your educational and occupational goals?

RQ2 What were the academic, social and/or unresolved goal experiences of nontraditional undergraduate student dropouts that led them to decide to leave the university before graduating?

Tell me about the classes in which you enrolled.

- Describe any negative experiences in class or with your instructors?
- Describe any negative academic experiences in your classes related to your performance, preparation, or peers?
- Can you tell me about how you spent your time during a typical week with regards to coursework?

Tell me about your experiences in the social realm outside of school.

- Describe any negative experience you had in your social life while taking classes.
- How did those negative experiences affect your performance, efforts, or motivation?
- Can you tell me about how you spent your time during a typical week with regards to social activities?

Tell me about your experiences in reaching your educational and occupational goals.

- How did your educational and occupational goals affect your performance, efforts, or motivation?
- Describe any challenges or barriers to success that you experienced in trying to meet your educational and occupational goals?
- Can you tell me about how you spent your time during a typical week with regards to achieving your educational and occupational goals?