2021

Formative Needs Assessment Evaluation of Nontraditional Student-Parents at a Private 4-Year University

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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2021

Abstract

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MAEd, University of Phoenix, 2013

BBA, Mercer University, 2005

Project Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

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Abstract

Nontraditional student-parents compose approximately one-quarter of the student body on college and university campuses. Student-parents face unique challenges, have unique needs, and graduate at lower rates than other nontraditional students. Yet many campuses, like the local study site, focus support on traditional students. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to assess the needs of student-parents in their persistence to graduation at a private 4-year university in the Southeastern United States. Astin's I-E-O model was the conceptual framework used to identify student-parents' characteristics (input), services needed (environment), and intended outcomes. A basic qualitative design and interviews yielded narrative data from nine participants who were purposefully selected and attended a Regional Academic Center. Descriptive and pattern coding by research question was the approach to data analysis. Key findings were that nontraditional student-parents needed mentorship, convenience and scheduling, financial assistance, and marketed services. Implications of the evaluation were that nontraditional student-parents valued existing support services but needed additional and modified services. Recommendations included offering more hybrid or asynchronous courses, increasing assistance and scholarships, and creating a mentor program, childcare facilities in the library or research centers, and orientation programs specifically for student-parents. Recommendations were presented in an evaluation report for campus stakeholders to review and decide about services for which to seek funding and develop programming. Offering services focused on student-parents may lead to higher graduation rates at the local study site and affiliated regional sites.

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Dedication

I dedicate this current pinnacle of my educational pursuits to those who have taught me the most throughout this process. My husband, Travis Harris, has imparted the efficacy of determination. My parents, Jerome and Denise Vanzant, have shared their never ending supportive and encouraging belief that I could soar beyond my wildest dreams. All of my children have echoed my sentiments of high achievement and spent countless study sessions with me. I love you each unconditionally. This is for you.

Acknowledgements

My heart is beaming with joy as I take a moment to acknowledge and say thank you to those who have contributed to the successful completion of this process. My Heavenly Father who gives all wisdom, patience, and longsuffering has certainly made this possible. With His guidance and love, I have connected with so many persons who have been extraordinarily instrumental in this process. My doctoral committee has provided immeasurable support and guidance throughout this process. My committee chair, Dr. Kelly Hall has compassionately felt the ups and downs of life I have experienced during this process, provided valuable direction, and chastened my tendency to sulk, moving me into action when overcoming obstacles. I would like to thank Dr. Stacy Wahl whose wisdom and knowledge of this process and subject matter helped to provide a firm topical foundation. Since the beginning, she has held me to the core essence of the purpose of this study with unwavering support. I also thank Dr. Karine Clay, University Research Reviewer, for additional support and guidance and the last named of my “girl power” committee triad. I am thankful for every educator, support staff, and student of higher learning. Through this process, your passions for education have illuminated a facet of my calling here on earth: to increase access to education and increase probability of success. Finally, I must give praise to the countless accountability partners across the world. Whether celebrating each other’s milestones on social media, weekly and daily accountability checks, or stern chastening to remind me of my goals and priorities when I wanted to stray away, I thank each of you for the role you have played in helping to complete this process. I am forever indebted to you. Thank you for your love and undying support!

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Nontraditional college students who are also parents face unique challenges in persisting toward graduation due to their parental responsibilities. National data indicated that nontraditional college students over the age of 24 graduate at a rate 30.8% lower than traditional students under the age of 24: 58.0% of traditional students under the age of 24 and 27.2% of nontraditional students over the age of 24 graduated in 6 years between 2016 and 2018 (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). National data were not available for student-parents but were collected for other nontraditional students enrolled at 4-year private nonprofit institutions.

At the Regional Academic Center (RAC) that served as the local study site, 45% of all students enrolled graduated within 6 years between 2016 and 2018 (personal communication, institutional research analyst, March 11, 2019). This 45% is only 2 percentage points above the average 6-year national graduation rate of 42.6% (calculated as the average of 58.0% and 27.2%). Therefore, it can be extrapolated that nontraditional students graduated from the RAC at a rate similar to the national average, a 30.8% lower rate than traditional students.

I estimated that 26% of students attending the RAC were student-parents based on 2014 U.S. Census Bureau data as reported by Pallas (2018). Extrapolation of an estimate was necessary because data on the parental status of students was not required to receive federal financial aid, to apply for admissions through the registrar’s office, for student reporting to the National Center for Education Statistics, for campus support services through its application form, nor from any other institutional entity. That student-parents were not tracked yet make up one-quarter (26%) of enrolled students nationally indicated a lack of attention to the unique challenges that student-parents faced matriculating to graduation, a gap in practice. This formative evaluation determined services student-parents needed at the RAC of a private baccalaureate-granting university in the Southeastern region of the United States.

Rationale

A formative evaluation of student-parents was called for locally by the executive director of Federal TRiO Programs and Minority Affairs (personal communication, July 2, 2018), and the assistant director of the Center of Career and Professional Development (personal communication, June 23, 2018). Researchers at other universities observed that the population of student-parents is growing faster than accommodations are being made (Lovell, 2014; Mahaffey et al., 2015).

Childcare was identified as a needed service at the local level (assistant director, Center of Career and Professional Development, personal communications, June 23, 2018) and a literature review conducted by Mahaffey et al. (2015) determined childcare to be a themed barrier to persistence. Needed childcare services were not provided by the RAC, prompting an exploration of services student-parents felt they needed to help them to persist to graduation. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation at an RAC of a private, 4-year university in the Southeastern United States.

Definition of Terms

The following three terms informed this study:

Nontraditional students: According to the National Center for Education Statistics (n.d.), nontraditional students are usually over the age of 24 and have responsibilities such as work, family, and life circumstances that could potentially affect persistence to graduation. Other qualifiers for nontraditional students are students who live off campus, work full-time, or are enrolled in non-degree-granting programs.

Nontraditional student-parents: I developed the term nontraditional student-parents by adding the descriptor "nontraditional" to the term student-parent. Therefore, nontraditional student-parents are nontraditional students who are also parenting.

Student-parents: Student-parents are students who are parenting while pursuing an education (Theisen et al., 2018).

One additional term provided context for student matriculation experiences:

Stopping out: According to Rosen et al (2019), stopping out is a temporary status of dropping out where students may return later to complete the initial or an alternative program.

Significance

This formative evaluation has social change implications at the local and regional levels. Provided this formative evaluation uncovered new insights about services to support success for student-parents, I made recommendations for new service programs and for promotion of existing services to support persistence to graduation among student-parents at the local RAC research site. I suggested that program structures then be shared with other regional campuses of the institution and through dissemination of research results to other campuses. The programs in the RAC and its parent institution rely on federal funding, which will continue only if required minimum graduation rates are maintained. Assessing the needs of nontraditional student-parents provided the RAC research site with information called for by directors and grant-writers (personal communication, executive director of Federal TRiO Programs and Minority Affairs, July 2 and 28, 2018; assistant director of the Center of Career and Professional Development, June 23, 2018). With an understanding of needed services, new services can be suggested and existing services modified or promoted to affect positive social change by helping student-parents persist and graduate.

Research Question

The problem of this formative evaluation was nontraditional student-parents graduated at a lower national rate than traditional students and service needs of the target population were unknown at the RAC of a private baccalaureate-granting university in the Southeastern United States. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation at the RAC. Astin’s (1991) input-environment-outcome (I-E-O) model framed specific characteristics of the sample population (input) and institutional services (environment) that affected student-parents’ persistence toward graduation (output). To fulfill the purpose of this formative evaluation, I addressed one primary research question. The primary research question aligned with Astin’s environmental component of the I-E-O model. I asked interview questions about participant input characteristics and intentions (output) to profile participants and contextualize the study for improved validity of the study. I present research and contextual questions in the next two sections.

Environment Research Question

The environment research question was the focus of the formative evaluation with the purpose of assessing needed services to support student-parents' persistence toward graduation. The central research question asked:

RQ: What support services do student-parents need?

Interview questions supporting the environment research question were related to services student-parents were aware of, desired, used, valued, and recommended. After assessing all institutional services available to student-parents, I asked the following interview questions (I).

I-E-1: What services offered by the institution are you aware of to support your persistence to graduation?

I-E-2: How did you become aware of institutional services available?

I-E-3: What services do you desire to support your persistence to graduation?

I-E-4: What services do you use to support your persistence to graduation (institutional or otherwise)?

I-E-5: What services do you value most to support your persistence to graduation (institutional or otherwise)?

I-E-6: What institutional or other services would you recommend to other student-parents to support their persistence to graduation?

I-E-7: How do you recommend other student-parents be made aware of institutional or other services available?

Contextual Questions

Four questions were asked of participants to gather input and output data to profile and contextualize the study of environmental needs.

I-I-1: How many children do you care for?

I-I-2: What time of day do you typically attend school, mornings, afternoons, or evenings?

I-I-3: What year are you in school—freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior?

I-O-1: In what year do you expect to graduate?

Review of Literature

I present the conceptual framework first in the review of literature. I then present the search process. Last is a review of literature related to the broader problem corresponding to the components of Astin's (1991) I-E-O model, which includes student-parent input literature, student-parent environment literature, and student-parent output literature.

Conceptual Framework

Astin's I-E-O model (1991) served as the conceptual framework for this formative evaluation. Astin's model is most applied with respect to persistence and student success and, therefore, was selected in lieu of other theories such as Tinto's (2012) theory of student departure, theory of student satisfaction accredited to Benjamin and Hollings (1995), and Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. These are more applicable to studies focused on attrition and retention, and not an assessment of needs supporting persistence to graduation.

Student affairs personnel and researchers of student persistence have used Astin's (1991) I-E-O model. The model contains three components: input, environment, and output (McClellan & Stringer, 2015).

Input: Inputs are skills and attributes with which students come to the institution. Input can include several sets of demographical data including marital status, age, parental status, cultural background, race or ethnicity, prior experiences, and other demographics.

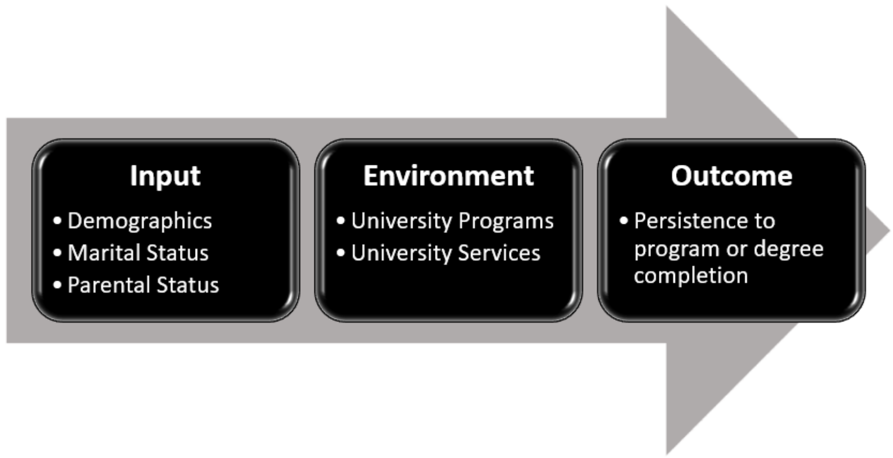
Environment: The environment comprises the services, supports, and programming made available to students to support their persistence towards the learning outcome.

Output: The output is the result when students leave the institution. Institutions define their desired output, which might include having met learning objectives or completed a program or degree.

The model's concept is students produce the desired outcome of academic success and persistence to graduation in relation to student attributes prior to entering the institution (input) and the services provided by the institution (environment). According to York et al. (2015), the I-E-O model best emphasizes the importance of understanding the tandem dynamic between input and output to create and sustain meaningful programming and services to promote student success. The I-E-O model provides a means of defining persistence as an outcome.

Figure 1

Conceptual Framework for Assessing Persistence



Callahan et al. (2017) proposed Astin's (1991) I-E-O model as instrumental for assessing and meeting student needs in higher education aligned to student, administrative, faculty, and institutional development (Park, 1991). Astin's I-E-O model is used extensively as a framework for studies of persistence and retention in higher education (Callahan et al., 2017; Paterson et al., 2016). Callahan et al. (2017) used Astin's model to frame a decade of literature concerning program efficacy and advocated that the model can be used to inform strategies based on students' input and program attributes.

In summary, Astin's (1991) I-E-O model was an appropriate model to use to assess student persistence among nontraditional student-parents provided that the model concept is that students produce the desired outcome of academic success and persistence to graduation in relation to their individual characteristics (input) and institutional support (environment). This concept reflected this formative evaluation's research problem.

Search Process

The search process included the topics relevant to the research problem and purpose and reflection on the conceptual framework. Summarizing the literature led to confirmation of the gap in research and an indication of a gap in practice at the local level. I used refined search terms to canvas the literature pool.

Topics included in the literature review were student-parent demographics, support services offered to or needed by the target population, and the desired outcome of persistence to graduation. These topics reflected the major components of Astin's (1991) I-E-O model. To conduct the search, I defined the main ideas and terms I wanted to research. At the core of the research purpose and problem were nontraditional student-parents and the services they needed to persist to graduation. From there, I developed search terms to canvas literature, working retrospectively to identify most recent literature first (between the years of 2015-2018) and to exhaust Walden library and Google Scholar search engines. These engines yielded articles in EbscoHost, ERIC, and SAGE. I sought to identify supporting information for the problem and purpose. I also was careful to assess the fit of the conceptual framework to the supporting literature to align literature with the study framework.

Furthermore, I searched within credible sources' citation pages to identify authorities on the subject matter and sought their most recent works. Lastly, I looked specifically for services offered to student-parents for a more targeted assessment of current services offered at the broader level. I continued to search until I began to see recurring themes and ideas or until search queries turned up no new sources. I used a literature matrix to organize important details from sources such as citation information, overarching themes, problem, purpose, theories, methodologies, and details relevant to my formative evaluation.

I used several terms to search for relevant and recent literature. Broader terms, such as *student affairs and higher education*, were refined to find more relevant literature. Refined terms included *student-parent, nontraditional student-parent, nontraditional persistence and university services, single-parenthood and dependent children, Astin's IEO, student-parent persistence, demographics in higher education*, and *services and persistence.* Singular and plural forms of the search terms as well as spelling variations and different combinations of terms were also helpful in yielding relevant and recent literature. I used Google Scholar and university libraries to identify academic and peer-reviewed scholarly literature, searching terms independently and utilizing search email subscriptions where available. Themes resultant from the literature review were student-parent input literature, student-parent environment literature, student-parent output literature, and critical analysis of current literature related to student-parents.

Student-Parent Input Literature

In an analysis of high school graduation and college enrollment trends, Payne et al. (2017) stated, "Demographic research findings support conducting needs assessments to meet the emerging needs of our changing student demographics" (p. 21). In their analysis, demographic information measured for students pertained to age, gender, ethnicity, college readiness (such as standardized test scores and gap), first generation status, and veteran status. Information was not collected on student-parent status. Shenoy et al. (2016) noted in a bivariate analysis of single parents at a community college that nearly 17% were single-parents (a subgroup of student-parents). They also found that this population of students experienced higher levels of mental health stressors, reporting almost double the amounts of suicide attempts than students who were not single parents.

McClellan and Stringer (2015) postulated that input assessments are necessary to best design student affairs programming and services to support student persistence, leading to attained intended outcomes. Pallas (2018) reported that 26% of students enrolled in institutions of higher education were also parents. Despite the call by McClellan and Stringer, the literature search process revealed no current profile of student-parents. No current national, state, or regional profile of student-parents was available. Current studies of student-parents provided demographic information as it pertained to the nontraditional student, but not particularly the nontraditional student-parent.

I collected input characteristics in my formative evaluation so characteristics of student-parents who participated in the formative evaluation were known. Data were not generalizable given the small sample but provided a description of participants' "environmental" situations.

Student-Parent Environment Literature

Bohl et al. (2017) proposed that to meet students' needs, it is imperative that the institution understand nontraditional students' overall higher education experiences.

Moreau (2016) conducted semistructured interviews with student services staff in 10 English higher education institutions, which highlighted the relationship between policies and student-parent experiences. Moreau (2016) advocated for student-parents in a culture where current policies exclude this unique population, furthering the marginalization of the population.

Lovell and Munn (2017) concluded that institutional services rarely cater to the student-parent population. In fact, through nonprobability sampling, Lovell's (2014) survey results of the nontraditional student population at a rural institution with a 2-year and 4-year program in the Rocky Mountains indicated that student-parent retention services were uniquely disproportionate to the population of student-parents on the campus studied. Having conducted interviews with student-parents in English universities, Moreau and Kerner (2015) stated student-parents' struggles are often ignored or overlooked in policymaking discussions.

Mahaffey et al. (2015) conducted a study on retention barriers among student mothers in Michigan and found that overwhelming stress and lack of childcare were the barriers reported. Authors observed that neither services nor research are keeping up with the pace of the growing population of student-parents. In response to institutions not providing adequate childcare despite demand, student-parents have been forced to consider online courses (Hechinger Report, 2018).

In qualitative interviews with students at a small private university in New Jersey, Goncalves and Trunk (2014) found an inattention to needs and other factors as obstacles to nontraditional students' levels of persistence. Cox and Sallee (2018) advocated for the visibility of student-parent needs after having assessed the types of services offered to the population and lack of administration's attention to this marginalized population. Their study was conducted with semistructured interviews of administration and personnel at a large urban-serving community college in New York and British Columbia, Canada.

According to Yavuz (2016), students who have access to student support personnel or other individuals who are knowledgeable in college admissions, financial aid, and additional areas of college are more likely to persist and succeed. Current literature about student-parents called for an assessment of their needs so student-parents can be better supported in their persistence to graduation, the last component of Astin's (1991) model (output).

Student-Parent Output Literature

Parental responsibilities impede persistence to graduation. National data indicated that students over the age of 24 graduated at a rate 30.8% lower than traditional students (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). This rate is similar to the rate at the local level. The scant literature of outcomes or outputs for student-parents revealed that they do not do as well as traditional students. With an understanding of population needs and experiences, colleges and universities can work to protect federal finances that support the student-parent population (Kruvelis, 2017). Grabowski et al. (2016) recommended that colleges and universities incorporate proactive and preventative measures to alleviate barriers to persistence.

Student-parents need social, institutional, and financial support/aid, childcare services, faculty support, and their own tenacity to persist amid the stressors of parenting

(Green, 2018; Kaka, 2016; Theisen et al., 2018), as social and emotional supports are contributors to student retention and persistence (Kensinger & Minnick, 2017). In a phenomenological analysis, Peterson (2016) recommended institutional services include affordable on-site childcare and learning communities tailored for student-parents after analysis of interview data.

Godfrey et al. (2017) reported that one library in Salt Lake City incorporated family-friendly spaces in the library to better accommodate student-parents. Keyes (2017) suggested that libraries could be better focused on servicing the student-parent population, and Carmen (2018) suggested that family-friendly areas in libraries and lactating rooms would yield a positive effect on student-parent retention and persistence.

A single student success course is insufficient for helping students ascertain college-going social skills (Hatch et al., 2018). Additionally, the timing of the provision of services is important to foster engagement, and timing of services provision must not be overlooked (Hatch & Garcia, 2017). In a survey study, Kimbark et al. (2017) found a positive relationship between participation in student success courses and persistence, retention, and academic achievement among students ranging from age 18 to 65 at a middle-sized community college in Southeast Texas. Southwell et al. (2018) compared frequency of service usage by nontraditional service member and veteran students (who were, on average, older) against civilian student populations in a web-based survey and determined that student persistence was greater in relation to use of support programming among the older group.

Critical Analysis of Current Literature Related to Student-Parents

Nontraditional student demographics have evolved and now include more student-parents than in prior years. As student demographics change, so do student needs. Needs assessments should therefore be conducted to allow institutions to better serve the emerging needs of the student body by designing programming with student characteristics and expressed needs in mind. Student programming evolution is not substantial enough to serve the emerging, marginalized student-parent population. This inattention to student-parent needs affects students' ability to persist toward program and degree completion, the intended output of enrollment in higher education.

Implications

Possible project directions based on the results of the formative evaluation include an evaluation report, curriculum plan, professional development or training curriculum and materials, or a policy white paper. Findings revealed services student-parents need most. A curriculum plan could have resulted as a project if new curricula were revealed as a need of student-parents. Had student-parents revealed needs related to instruction, a curriculum plan or professional development materials geared toward faculty would have been indicated and produced based on results of the study. Staff development training could have been the project if staff supported areas were revealed by student-parents as needed.

It would have been possible to make recommendations to administration through a policy paper based on the results of the formative evaluation. A policy recommendation would have resulted as the formative evaluation deliverable had policies existed to service nontraditional student-parents specifically. An evaluation report, however, was most aligned with an assessment of student-parent needs. Therefore, the most appropriate deliverable was a formative evaluation report presenting nontraditional student-parent needs and programmatic recommendations to meet those needs.

Summary

In Section 1, I identified the local problem and justified research for the problem. I defined relevant terms and identified the conceptual framework. I defined Astin's (1991) I-E-O model and related it to the research problem and research questions. Additionally, I presented an overview of current literature, reviewing the broader problem within the context of the I-E-O model. Lower graduation rates for nontraditional students indicated that additional services were needed to support the marginalized population of student-parents, which is estimated as 26% of campus student body at the study site. Assessment of student inputs and institutional services, or environment, were needed to make a positive impact on the intended output, persistence to graduation.

In Section 2, I describe the design approach and rationale for choosing it; participants, including the study setting and selection criteria; sampling method and access to the target population; data collection; and data analysis.

Section 2: The Methodology

Qualitative Research Design and Approach

I used a traditional, basic qualitative design using individual interviews (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) to assess the needs of student-parents at the RAC of a private, 4-year university. I used semistructured interviews to collect data to explore research questions. Qualitative research designs help researchers understand how people interpret and respond to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). An interview design was appropriate because the aim of this formative evaluation was to explore services needed from the perspective of student-parents as guided by the research question,. Interviews are most appropriately used for data collection when findings are reported as recurrent themes or patterns based on data collected (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Furthermore, with a formative evaluation assessing needs, the researcher can gain an understanding of how participants understand their environment (Boulmetis & Dutwin, 2011). A basic qualitative interview design was most appropriate because I used only interviews (see Merriam, 2009).

Consideration of Other Research Designs

I selected basic qualitative research as the most appropriate design after considering other research designs including quantitative research, a qualitative case study, critical narrative analysis, phenomenology, and ethnography. I did not pursue quantitative research in the form of a survey or archival data because numeric data would not provide the rich description required to probe student-parents about services they needed and recommended. I used interviews to allow for a deeper probing to help gain meaning and understanding (see Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

A qualitative case study design would have been appropriate if multiple data sources were sought within the bounded system being studied. For this study, I did not use multiple data sources nor were research elements specific enough to qualify as a case (see Stake, 1995). A critical qualitative study was not applicable because in this formative evaluation I sought to assess needs rather than critique power relations among individuals or groups. A narrative analysis was not appropriate because I did not use storied texts to gather or present information, though I used some stories as examples from interviews to illuminate resultant categories and themes (see Merriam, 2009).

Phenomenology was not applicable because there was no study of a single, specific experience but rather inquiries to explore student-parents' needs with an understanding that their individual experiences varied. Though "epoche" or "bracketing" (Merriam, 2009, p. 25) are found in most phenomenological studies, they have become common practice in most methodologies. These processes include examining the researcher's own experiences with the phenomenon being studied and considering researcher biases and prejudices to study the phenomenon (epoche) and then setting those biases aside (bracketing; Merriam, 2009, p. 25).

Ethnography was also not applicable because this formative evaluation did not study the culture of a group through extensive fieldwork. In addition, no theory was derived or produced from the data collected; therefore, a grounded theory study did not apply. I used inductive thematic analysis, used by a grounded theory approach, to analyze data for this formative evaluation, but constant comparative methods used to generate theory was not the approach to data analysis (see Guest et al., 2013).

A basic qualitative design using individual interviews (McMillan & Schumacher, 2014) was the best choice for the type of applied research represented by this formative evaluation study.

Participants

The setting of the study, sampling method, sampling criteria, access to population, role of the researcher, and research-participant working relationship are described in this participant subsection.

Setting

The study setting was a private baccalaureate-granting university in the Southeastern United States. More specifically, the university's RACs served as the local research setting. RACs were extensions of the institution serving nontraditional students not served by the undergraduate main campus. Six of the seven RACs were in a different city than the main campus.

To provide a thick description of the setting, I described my insider observations and the social action at the university and its RACs (see Ponterotto, 2006). I have observed that student affairs programming and services for nontraditional students rarely happens. Rather, planning is usually conducted with the traditional undergraduate student in mind. Services like the library and resource centers do reach across all campuses. Nontraditional students usually maintain full-time jobs while matriculating and often have families and a nonlinear postsecondary educational experience. Many nontraditional students have some college history but have previously stopped out due to family obligations, financial needs, or in response to academic rigor.

Sampling Method

I collected interview data from a purposefully selected sample. I recruited nine nontraditional student-parents at an RAC of the local study institution to participate in the formative evaluation. Though there is no set formula for determining sample size for qualitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), interviews were continued until saturation was reached; that is, until no new information was forthcoming from participants (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016).

Sampling Criteria and Access to Population

Participants in this formative evaluation met the definitional criteria of nontraditional student-parents: students who were parenting while attending the local study institution's RAC as a nontraditional student. Access to the population was informally granted by the assistant director of the Center of Career and Professional Development and local study institution. Formal access was requested through approval of the regional campus research site's Institutional Review Board. Acceptance from Walden University's Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to the formative evaluation's commencement (Walden Institutional Review Board approval number 11-19-19-0588944).

To identify participants, I engaged faculty who taught classes at the RAC to go to their classes and issue an inquiry for student-parents to participate in phone interviews and to obtain and confirm contact information for potential participants who answered the inquiries. The inquiry and follow-up correspondence highlighted risks and benefits of participating in the formative evaluation to include, but not limited to, time, inconvenience, emotional stress, potential of need-meeting services, and $25 gift card incentive participants were given for their time to provide data for the formative evaluation.

Participants also received a statement of confidentiality, informed consent, and protection from harm. Participants consented prior to the commencement of the interview. To establish rapport with participants, I shared that I was a student-parent during my undergraduate years and was curious to see what services they needed. My goal was to remain objective and only report what participants reported accurately without the filter of my own experiences.

Role of the Researcher

I am an alum of the local study institution, having participated in Student Support Services, a TRiO program that provides services to at-risk undergraduate students, during the time I completed my undergraduate studies on the main campus as a student-parent. My current role is as an employee working in the Upward Bound program. The Upward Bound program is also a TRiO program that provides services to support postsecondary enrollment and graduation to at-risk, low-income, and first-generation secondary students. Though I do not provide services directly to the target population of this formative evaluation, it was conceivable that many of them were served by Student Support Services' Office of Nontraditional and Evening Services, a TRiO program that helps at-risk adult, nontraditional students.

Although I have an interest in the success of TRiO programs because I work for one, I had no formal conflict of interest because the target population may or may not be served by a TRiO program not directly related to my duties at the university. I do believe institutions in general can do more to provide support to student-parents and feel a vested interest in discovering what support services student-parents feel they need. I would like to see my alma mater in the forefront of universities implementing supportive programming and services for student-parents.

Data Collection

I undertook the following procedures to collect data.

1. I made an inquiry to classes populated with nontraditional students at RACs. The inquiry asked for nontraditional students attending the RAC who were also parenting to participate in a telephone interview for research purposes. I made additional inquiries until the number of targeted participants was reached.
2. I asked students who met the selection criteria and answered the inquiry to complete a confirmation of participation via email and a verbal confirmation prior to the start of the interview. The email to confirm contained details about the formative evaluation, participation agreement, confidentiality agreement, disclosures, incentive, and risks to participants. I informed participants that they would be contacted three times to: (a) conduct the interview, (b) review the transcript of their interview, and (c) present themes derived from transcribed interview data.

3. In the confirmation email, students selected a date and time for a teleconference or opted to complete the interview questions as a questionnaire.
4. I recorded participant responses via Otter phone application. Recording the call allowed me to transcribe the call verbatim afterwards. The resulting transcription of calls served as the data source.
5. At the agreed upon time and on the agreed upon contact number, I called the participant, thanked them for participating, summarized participation and confidentiality agreements, and requested verbal consent. I proceeded to conduct the interview only when verbal consent was received.
6. Participants answered researcher-produced research and interview questions.
    a. I collected descriptive characteristics of student-parents to profile interviewees (input).
    b. Support services student-parents needed were explored through open-ended interview questions (environment).
    c. Student-parents' intended outcomes were explored through open-ended interview questions (output).
7. Participants received emailed correspondence thanking them for participating in the formative evaluation and providing details to retrieve the participant $25 gift card incentive.
8. Calls were transcribed and summaries were emailed to participants for member-checking.

Data Analysis

I explain the process I used to analyze data in this section. I explain coding procedures, measures to ensure trustworthiness, and handling discrepant cases procedures.

Coding Procedures

After transcribing all calls, I read transcripts and responses thoroughly several times and created codes to label and link words and phrases from data collected (Miles et al., 2014). After codifying data, I created new subcategories that encompassed the codes. I codified and categorized in several cycles (see Saldaña, 2016), and produced emergent themes. Descriptive coding was used in the first cycle and pattern coding in the second (see Saldaña, 2016). All procedures were done by hand.

Measures to Ensure Trustworthiness

Shenton (2004) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) described ways the qualitative researcher can use Guba’s (1981) constructs of “credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability” to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of data (p.64).

Credibility

To ensure credibility, I used an established method of research and data collection: traditional, basic qualitative design using interviews (see Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016). To help ensure honesty, I asked participants to be as frank as possible and made them aware of their ability to refuse the interview, as participation was voluntary. I used iterative questioning, providing participants with open-ended prompt questions with examples to help probe participants when needed. I discussed each interview with my research supervisor in frequent debriefing sessions as suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018). I also drew upon my qualifications and background to ensure credibility, having conducted interviews in my professional environment.

Lincoln and Guba (1985) argued that performing member checks is pertinent to a study's credibility. I used member checks during the interview, after transcription, and after data analysis, to ensure accuracy. After completing the transcript of an interview, I emailed the transcript to the participant to review for accuracy and errors and allow opportunity for the participant to provide clarity where needed. I asked participants to review accuracy and theme appropriateness that evolved from the analysis. Lastly, I examined previous research findings to compare and contrast those findings with my findings as suggested by Miles et al. (2014).

Transferability

To ensure transferability of my formative evaluation, I described the institutional setting thoroughly, including funding sources and implications of the study for funding, indicators of the cultural setting, my observations of the morale and feel of the institution, along with other significant details about methodology and findings, thereby providing a "thick description" (see Ravitch & Carl, 2016, p. 188) to afford other researchers pertinent information that can be applied in and compared to other situations (see Shenton, 2004).

Dependability

According to Ravitch and Carl (2016), having a well-constructed design is pertinent to achieving dependability of a study. I developed and implemented my data collection and analysis procedures that met professional research guidelines and presented them in a step-by-step fashion so other researchers could replicate my study dependably. I checked my own biases throughout data collection, analysis, and reporting processes so data were dependable and reflected the participants' narratives (see Miles et al., 2014). I used bias checking to contribute to data confirmability.

Confirmability

Disclosure of researcher biases is important to assess how these biases affect the data collection and analysis as well as the research design overall (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). I explained my role as the researcher and kept my employment role separate to enhance confirmability. I employed an external audit and kept an audit trail so I could confirm my findings (see Guba, 1981; Shenton, 2004). I took a data-oriented approach to the audit trail, detailing each step in the data collection and analysis process including transcription and emerging codes, categories, and themes.

I coded interview data for each interview question from word to sentence segments using an open coding process (see Saldaña, 2016). I labeled concepts descriptively. I developed categories and defined them based on the dimensions and properties of labeled concepts. Recurring patterns emerged from analysis across interview questions, therefore I presented themes when making recommendations for student-parent services to facilitate their persistence to graduation.

In summary, I improved data trustworthiness using the following procedures:

1. Established method of research and data collection
2. Voluntary participation

3. Researcher qualifications
4. Iterative questioning
5. Frequent debriefing
6. Peer scrutiny
7. Member checks
8. Examination of previous research findings
9. Thick description of institutional setting
10. Well-constructed research design
11. Disclosure of researcher biases
12. Audit trail

Procedures for Handling Discrepant Cases

I discussed the deviant case with my dissertation research supervisor. After discussion, I decided that the case was discrepant. I presented it separately in the Data Analysis Results section below.

Limitations

This formative evaluation was limited in scope and research design. According to Price and Murnan (2004), there are two types of limitations to a study: internal and external. Possible internal limitations included participant truthfulness and attrition. Though not suspected, participants may have been less than truthful during the interview process by willful choice, misunderstanding of interview questions, or preconceived notion about what a socially acceptable response should be. Also, student-parents who chose to participate may have had some innate bias about the topic.

Possible external validity limitations included generalizability, methodology, and participation. Generalizability was limited because only one institution was evaluated. Evaluation results might be applicable to other similar institutions, but generalizability was not the purpose of the formative evaluation. The evaluation was also limited by its methodological design as interviews were the only source of data for assessing the needs of student-parents. Interviews included only nine student-parents.

Data Analysis Results

The overarching research question addressed by this needs assessment centered around support services needed by student-parents. The research question addressed the problem. The problem was that nontraditional student-parents graduated at a lower national rate than traditional students and service needs of the target population were unknown at the RAC of a private baccalaureate-granting university in the Southeastern region of the United States. Interview questions were formulated around Astin's (1991) I-E-O model.

I gathered data using a basic qualitative design approach through nine interviews with student-parents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). I collected data as described in sections above with adjustments made because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments for the pandemic included soliciting participants virtually. I maintained quality of data by employing techniques outlined the Trustworthiness section above. Appendix B contains the interview protocol.

Interviews allowed participants to reflect upon and describe their individual characteristics, learning environments, and projected college outcome. Of nine participants, one discrepant case was noted. One interviewee was a student-grandparent who provided care for grandchildren and received tuition waiver from the institution. I excluded this account from data analysis after discussing the case with my research supervisor but included the case in a separate section. I present input, environment, and outcome results from data analysis of transcribed interviews.

Input Questions

Input questions helped me to learn more about the participants' characteristics and demographics as a student-parent. I asked interviewees three input questions. There was one discrepant case identified through input question one.

Possible Discrepant Case

I considered whether Participant 2 should be a discrepant case due to their employment status in addition to the rationale that Participant 2 cared for two adult children and helped care for grandchildren as well. I became aware of employment status when Participant 2 revealed they received an employee tuition waiver. Only employees in certain academic programs receive this tuition benefit. The assumption could be made that an employee would be privier to services than a student not employed by the institution, thus responses should be considered separately.

However, Participant 2 turned out to not be a discrepant base on employment status because answers provided did not reflect an anomaly situation and two other participants were also either current or former employees of the institution with similar working history and scope of employment. Participant 2 provided more depth in response to this question, including the academic resource center, counseling center, student support services, educational opportunity center, employee tuition waiver, and the ability to attend classes during work hours. Participant 2's classification also differed from the two other participants with current or former employment status, which indicated that student-parent needs vary across programs but is not necessarily related to employment status. For these reasons, I analyzed Participant 2's responses with other responses and did not treat them as a discrepant case.

Interview Input Question 1

In input interview question one, I asked for how many children the participant provides care. Eight participants provided responses ranging from one to four children. See Table 1 below.

Interview Input Question 2

In input interview question two, I asked what time of day the participant typically attended school: mornings, afternoons, or evenings. Participants reported attending in the afternoon, evenings, and on the weekends. Eight out of nine participants reported attending class in the evenings, two mentioned the afternoon, one stated they attended class online, and one mentioned they attended class once a month on the weekend. Some participants indicated more than one time of day, but the consensus was eight out of nine participants reported attending in the evening as noted in Table 1 below. None mentioned attending classes during the morning as RAC classes are not offered in the mornings.

Interview Input Question 3

In input interview question three, I asked in what year of school the participant was. Participant response varied from first year freshmen to students completing a terminal degree, also noted in Table 1 below.

Table 1

Interview Input Responses

Student-parent	No. children	Class times	Student classification
1	One	Evening	Sophomore
2	Two adult children	Online-evening	Senior
3	One	Evening	7th yr. grad student
4	Three	Evening & 1/mo. weekends	PhD candidate
5	Two	Evenings	Senior
6	One	Evenings	Freshman
7	Four	Afternoon and evenings	Freshman
8	Two	Afternoon	Freshman
9	One	Evenings	Prerequisites for Pharmacy program

Environment Questions

I asked environment questions to learn more about university services or other services that the participant was aware of, needed, used, or found valuable. I asked seven open-ended questions. Responses are listed in Tables 2, 3, and 4.

Interview Environment Question 1

In environment question one, I asked about participants’ awareness of services offered by the university to help them get to and through classes. Student-parents reported various services and programs offered by the institution. The depth of the response generally increased with students who were further along in their programs. Freshmen and sophomore students listed the ONES (Office of Nontraditional and Evening Services) program, library, bursar, Canvas (a digital learning management system), tutoring, and Handshake (an online platform for career support). More tenured students included some of these and added online and asynchronous classes and research tools, writing workshops, programs for working adults, and faculty office hours. Student-parent 3, a doctoral candidate stated, “I know there are a lot of services that are supported in the library. I know that the faculty are available to assist. And I know they had regular writing workshops to assist” (interview August 28, 2020). However, despite being a sophomore at the RAC, student-parent 9’s response was “none at this time” (interview, September 26, 2020).

Interview Environment Question 2

In environment question two, I asked how the participant became aware of the services they mentioned in the previous question. Participants became aware of information through a faculty member, advisor, student, or at program orientation. Participant 4, who has three children, expressed not being informed of any services specifically for student-parents. Although asked, this question did not apply to Participant 9 because they gave no answers to environmental question one. The fact that Participant 9 knew of no services was indicative of gaps in communication of services for student-parents. Student-parent 5 who mentioned tutoring and flexible faculty office hours in the previous question stated they were made aware through “orientation, advisor and teachers. It’s part of the syllabus” (interview, July 15, 2020).

Table 2

Interview Environment Questions 1 and 2 Responses

Student-parent	Awareness of services	Became aware
1	ONES program	student appreciation event
2	academic success center, counseling center, student support services, education opportunity center; employee tuition waiver; offering to employees to take class during work hours	new student orientation
3	library; faculty; writing workshops	had someone talk to us early in the program; faculty always made themselves available
4	program designed for working adults and parents with weekly online classes and only 3 Saturday meetings per semester	didn't recall seeing anything related to being a parent
5	tutors; flexible office hours; online classes; sync and async; online library and research tools	orientation; advisor; teachers; it's part of each syllabus
6	tutoring	told by faculty
7	canvas; handshake; bursar; library	campus visit tour; faculty
8	writing services	searching through website; relative
9	none	n/a

Interview Environment Question 3

In environment question three, I asked services the participant needed or desired. Participants' responses included financial support, peer or mentoring support, support for working or single parents, academic and tutoring support, and an overall truncated program with fewer general education courses. Two of the nine participants mentioned flexibility in classes. Participants raised the need for more classes offered online, flexibility with attendance policies, and time or progress management tools. Participants stated they greatly desired and needed convenient class times, online classes, flexible attendance policy, and childcare.

> I have not required any additional services other than some flexibility if I was unable to attend a Saturday meeting due to a sick child. My professors were always understanding … I would like more support as a full-time working parent trying to complete my dissertation. I am having a hard time finding time to research and write…. I have hired sitters for class meetings. That was expensive! (Student-parent 4, interview, September 1, 2020)

Interview Environment Question 4

In environment question four, I asked about services the participant used currently, at the university or otherwise, to help them get to graduation. Participants mentioned services and programs offered by the institution and used by them including the ONES program, faculty support, peer support (from host and other institutions), the library, online support, and Working Adults Program. Participants also volunteered and stressed the services they needed and desired in this question. Services not offered by the institution but mentioned by 3 of the 9 participants included after-school childcare, hired babysitters, and daycare.

Participant 4, who had reenrolled several times, mentioned that lack of daycare was the main reason for stopping out. Student-parent 4 highlighted the need for childcare and accountability.

> I have had to hire babysitters about once a month when I have my kids and needed to be researching or writing. I am going to have to do that moving forward a substantial amount if I want to finish. I am a single mom. I have help from both fathers but there are a number of weekends I need to write and they are not able to

> watch the girls. I think the service I would be most grateful for is a chair or someone that helps those of us falling behind on writing to keep us on track with small portions due each week or every other week another 7 pages due. A requirement to submit work on a schedule which allows those of us with kids and crazy lives to keep writing and not put it off. (Student-parent 4, interview, September 1, 2020)

Interview Environment Question 5

In environment question five, I asked about the services participants used, which they valued most. The ONES program, tuition waiver, support (faculty, peers, family, friends, coworkers), Working Adults Program, online support, and tutoring were most valued services. “I think the one that I'm mostly dependent upon right now would be writing resources like Grammarly (Student-parent 7, interview, September 1, 2020). One participant was unsure if any services were offered at all for student-parents.

The ONES program (Office of Nontraditional and Evening Services) is a TRiO program under Student Support Services. It offered a grant aid scholarship, academic support, loaner laptops and calculators, and other support resources. The Working Adults Program recruited nontraditional students, advertised resources to support the working adult lifestyle, aided with transfer credits, and offered flexible class schedules.

Table 3

Interview Environment Questions 3, 4, and 5 Responses

Student-parent	Services needed/desired	Services used	Valued services
1	financial; child provision/daycare; health care	ONES program	ONES program
2	flexibility/more classes offered online each semester	larger student counseling staff to help younger students navigate	family, friends, coworkers; tuition waiver
3	mentor supporter; programs for working parents; childcare	faculty committee; friends outside the program to help mentor	people suggestions in other similar programs; faculty
4	flexibility in attendance due to sick child; need more support as fulltime working parent trying to complete program; time to research and write; write in weekends; hired sitters to drive to class - expensive; chair assistance to write on a schedule to help those with kids not fall behind	hired sitters;	not sure they have any for students with kids
5	tutors, teacher availability; learning resources like library and websites	tutors, teacher availability; learning resources like library and websites; classmates	facility; classmates; web resources
6	academic help overall tutoring	n/a; lack of daycare was a reason #6 had to call out of class when enrolled before	tutoring
7	nontraditional academic study group	online; grammarly; time management software	writing resources like grammarly and refreshers for returning to school
8	shorter program - less classes to get to the degree program classes to graduate with less years; advisor familiar with the program	RAC Working Adults Program; online classes	Working adults Program
9	don't know what services are available; support groups for single parents	aftercare	Jesus

Interview Environment Question 6

In environment question six, I asked what university or other services the participant would recommend to other student-parents to support their persistence to graduation. Responses varied between students suggesting services the institution should offer and services currently offered. Of the services currently offered, participants mentioned the ONES program because of the scholarship they offered. Participants also mentioned online classes that are asynchronous, online time management, and the Working Adults Program.

Of the services not offered, student-parent participants suggested mentoring and support groups for students with similar backgrounds, child/day care, support for single parents, and allowance for children to come onto campus. Of the nine participants, three suggested child/day care and programs specifically for student-parents. One participant mentioned asynchronous learning with the rationale to attend to family needs. Another participant provided no recommendations because they were unaware of any services provided by the institution.

> I would recommend a mentoring/support program for students with similar backgrounds. It helps to know other people may have the same hardships and what methods they use to cope. Programs should exist to establish a solid foundation of financial literacy in students (Student-parent 2, interview, June 30, 2020).

Interview Environment Question 7

In environment question seven, I asked for recommendations about how to create awareness of institutional or other services to other student-parents. Participants mentioned various forms of communications. Methods varied by participant and included communications through faculty, within recruitment materials, in classrooms, emails and bulletins, word of mouth, and gatherings such as informational meetings and open houses.

> I really found that it was helpful to have someone from the different services come into the classroom. I know that there are the fairs and orientations and things like that but sometimes those opportunities are overwhelming, particularly for an adult. It's basically they're mixed in with the general campus fair. And so, I think definitely having someone come in the first 10 to 15 minutes of class talk about what they have and show what it is, really helps with that connection. (Student-parent 3, interview, August 28, 2020).

Table 4

Interview Environment Questions 6 and 7 Responses

Student-parent	Resommended services	Recommendations for creating awareness
1	existing: ONES - gives scholarships for a variety of different students	broadcasting about when to apply and deadlines for scholarships
2	suggestions: mentoring/support program for students with similar backgrounds; financial literacy program	beginning with recruitment materials
3	suggestions: cohort/mentor group; childcare services if available	representative from the services come into classroom; fairs and orientations can be overwhelming
4	none b/c haven't seen any provided by institution	advise student to contact faculty chair
5	flexible online classes async to be able to tend to work/family needs	attend orientation, ask about resources if not given; communicate with advisor and teacher
6	daycare services	bulletins; emails
7	online time management offered throughout the university	gathering or informational for nontraditional students like an open house
8	Working Adults Program	communicating word of mouth
9	childcare; support for single parents; can kids come on campus	offer services to single parents when accepted into the school; email; text; calls

Output Question

The final output question allowed me to understand the participants' expected outcome. I asked in what year the participant expected to graduate. Four participants were within 1 to 2 years of graduating while the other five anticipated graduating within 3 to 6 years. Four out of nine expected to graduate in 2023. Responses by participant are outlined in Table 5 below.

Table 5

Interview Output Responses

Student-parent	Expected graduation
1	2023
2	2021
3	2020
4	2021-2022
5	2020
6	2023
7	2023
8	2023
9	2026-2027

Emergent Themes

Student-parents participated in interviews for this study. I recorded, transcribed, and then coded their responses into categories. Participant interview responses fell into numerous thirty-three categories and nine subcategories. From these, emerged five themes: provide specialized services for student-parents, create peer mentorship program, schedule hybrid and convenient class times, offer assistance with childcare and tuition, and enhance marketing efforts.

Student-parents expressed they wanted and valued programming that is separate from the general population that caters to working adults and student-parents. They expressed the value of knowledgeable faculty and staff with office hours for availability but also expressed the need for and organized peer-to-peer mentoring program. Student-parents who participated also wanted peace of mind to complete assignments regarding scheduling, wanted flexible class attendance policies, and valued time management resources. Participants raised concerns for the cost of childcare outside the university, lack of childcare offered by the university, cost of tuition, and the need for financial aid to afford school. Participants also expressed that they wanted to receive communications about services for student-parents through multiple media.

Evidence of Quality

Shenton (2004) and Ravitch and Carl (2016) described ways in which the qualitative researcher can use Guba's (1981) constructs of to ensure trustworthiness and accuracy of data. I included measures to ensure credibility, transferability, and conformability by using an established method of research and data collection, encouraging voluntary participation, using iterative questioning, frequently debriefing with my research supervisor, allowing for peer scrutiny, stating researcher qualifications, and conducting member checks. I conducted an examination of previous research findings, provided a thick description of institutional setting, used a well-constructed research design, disclosed researcher biases, used an exemplary quote from one participant who was a single parent. I also left an audit trail, which helped me monitor my research process.

Nine participants responded to interview questions to identify needs nontraditional student-parents have. I composed these into an evaluation report which may be used by administration and other stakeholders to modify or create programming and services to meet expressed needs. I introduce the evaluation report in Section 3 and present the actual report in Appendix A.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I concluded that a formative evaluation report was the most appropriate deliverable. Formative evaluations are conducted on newer programs to determine what suggestions can be made for improvements. Summative evaluations are usually conducted in the final stages of a program to determine whether to continue or discontinue the program (Alkin & Vo, 2018; Patton, 2019). In the formative evaluation project deliverable (found in Appendix A), I present nontraditional student-parent needs and programmatic recommendations to meet those needs. The goals of the project were to present research findings, provide measures for research accountability, and serve as a basis for programmatic recommendations.

Rationale

The central research problem for my study was that nontraditional student-parents graduate at a lower national rate than traditional students and needs of nontraditional student-parents are unknown. The purpose of this study was to assess nontraditional student-parent needs. A formative evaluation report was most aligned with a needs assessment of nontraditional student-parents so I chose it as the deliverable to present nontraditional student-parent needs and programmatic recommendations to meet those needs.

I would have chosen a curriculum plan as the selected project if new curricula were identified as a need of student-parents. Had student-parents revealed needs related to instruction, a curriculum plan or professional development materials geared toward faculty would have been indicated. Staff development training would have been the selected project if staff supported areas were revealed by student-parents as a need. I did not chose a policy recommendation paper because policies did not exist to service nontraditional student-parents specifically.

Assessments are used to understand client or student knowledge while evaluations are used to judge the program the clients use (Alkin & Vo, 2018). Stufflebeam (2001), a seminal author in evaluation methods, identified Utilization-Focused Evaluations as one of the best and most applicable methods for evaluations. This method is based on the idea that the evaluation will lead to practical use by targeted stakeholders for program improvement purposes. Stufflebeam (2001) emphasized "all aspects of a utilization-focused program evaluation are chosen and applied to help the targeted users obtain and apply evaluation findings to their intended uses, and to maximize the likelihood that they will" (p. 76).

Review of the Literature

I present a review of literature related to evaluation in this section. The goal of the review was to add justification for the project deliverable. Additionally, I conducted the review to define evaluation reports, explain various types of evaluation; and to discuss the use, application, theory, and product of evaluation reports. Resulting from the review of the literature were 26 resources regarding evaluation.

I began my search in the Walden University library with several key words and terms including *evaluation, evaluation report, evaluation Patton, evaluation Gullickson, evaluation use*, and *formative evaluation in nontraditional colleges*. I also searched the

Evaluation and Program Planning and *Studies in Education Evaluation* journals for relevant and recent peer-reviewed articles. Once I began to identify who the major and most recent contributors to the body of literature were, I searched their recent contributions and references cited to narrow my focus of related literature.

Evaluation Defined

Though considered a social construction, Patton (2018b) described evaluation as a process that includes making judgement calls about the merit, value, credibility, and utility of a program. Gullickson (2020) added the goal of evaluations is to give full description of what is being studied, justify criteria used to judge it, and allow for judgement to take place. Gullickson (2020) reiterated "or, in simpler terms: deciding what makes something a something, deciding how to know that something is good, and then deciding how good a specific something is" (pp. 2-3). Evaluations involve the systematic collection, analysis, interpretation, and presentation of findings to make stakeholder decision-making possible with respect to program efficacy and efficiency. This often considers the needs of the organization, the effect of program on outcomes, cost-effectiveness, and overall usefulness (Anderson et al., 2020).

Types of Evaluation

Creating an evaluation begins with proper planning. An evaluator should use planning to flesh out the goals, objectives, and methods of the evaluation, and inform how the evaluation will be conducted (Rossi et al., 2018). There are several types of evaluations. Alkin and Vo (2018) identified five types of evaluations: product, personnel, policy, program, and outcome. Evaluations require a systematic, unbiased, and contextsensitive process to reveal the intrinsic merit or value of that which is being evaluated. Patton (2018a) emphasized Freire's concept of critical consciousness. The idea is that an evaluator must be involved with continuous and ongoing evaluation. Critical consciousness is "attaining a deep, meaningful, realistic, and reality-based understanding of one's world" (Patton, 2018a, p. 14).

It is important to suit the type of evaluation to that which is being evaluated and for whom (Patton, 2019). Patton described six evaluation niches: summative, formative, developmental, systems change, principles-focused, and blue marble. A summative evaluation provides judgements concerning merit, worth, and significance of a program to inform decision making. The goal of a formative evaluation is to seek program improvements or interventions. Developmental evaluations are used for highly intricate environments to support innovations and new developments. A system's change evaluation is an evaluation where systems are the evaluand and impacts of the system are assessed. A principles-focused evaluation looks at the meaningfulness of principles, and how they are followed, and the results produced when principles are adhered to. Blue marble evaluation refers to a global perspective originating from the idea of a boundless Earth viewed from space. Of these, I have created a formative evaluation report because the purpose was to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation and to present those needs alongside programmatic recommendations to meet those needs.

Evaluation Applied to Programmatic Planning

When evaluators take a close look into programs and pay close attention to the things they observe and document what they learn, value is added and understanding is increased (Patton, 2015). In a study conducted on a large, private university campus in the South United States, evaluators found that social network analysis was a beneficial tool to conduct system-wide evaluations on college campuses and that more quality-based evaluations are needed on the programmatic level (Patterson et al., 2020).

Utilization-Focused Evaluation Theory

Evaluation theories are the foundational basis for how evaluations should be conducted (Alkin & Patton, 2020). Gates (2016) recounted the five components of evaluation theory according to Shadish et al. (1991) in *Foundations of Program Evaluation: Theories of Practice.* The five components included social programming, knowledge construction, valuing, knowledge use, and evaluation practice. Although new contributions to literature are important and significant, evaluators believe their research is optimized and justified when it affects the institution and is implemented (Neuman et al., 2013).

If one were to liken theories to prescriptions, then theories would be how evaluators "prescribe" how to conduct evaluations (Alkin & Patton, 2020, p. 10). Evaluation theory has three main parts, which include use, valuing, and methods. Of the use theorists, Alkin and Christie (2019) highlighted a few key theorists with varying approaches to evaluation: Scriven, House, Boruch, and Patton.

I selected Patton’s (2019) utilization-focused evaluation because his research has informed and influenced much of the literature base for evaluations and was best suited this study. According to Alkin and Christie (2019), Patton’s utilization-focused evaluation allows for stakeholders to be involved in the evaluation process prior to concluding judgements and allows for process use or use of information throughout the process of evaluation. Patton’s commitment is that evaluations remain a value-added practice for stakeholders, producing the details they need to make informed decisions, reduce uncertainty, and navigate complexity (Alkin & Christie, 2019).

Evaluation Utility and Ethics

King and Alkin (2018) reiterated Kirkhart (2000) who emphasized the broadening of the concept of “use” to incorporate three dimensions: intention (intended or unintended), source (evaluation process or results), and time (immediate, end-of-cycle, and long-term). Kirkhart (2000) expounded that these three dimensions present a framework to look more closely at positive and negative effects of evaluation. Azzam and Whyte (2018) analyzed the factors that affect an evaluation’s credibility, influence, and utility and found that stakeholders perceive evaluations as credible when the evaluation is positive and accurate, regardless of the delivery strategy. Evaluators must consider assumptions made about the problem and evaluation strategies and provide data that has the potential to influence decision making (Mertens, 2016).

Schultes et al. (2018) pointed out the need for evaluators to consider the stakeholders’ attitudes about the study. Positive attitudes lead to more supported evaluations and greater benefit of evaluations. A systems-thinking or holistic approach can influence how evaluators frame research questions and relate to stakeholders (Chatterji, 2016).

Weiss (1998) described four kinds of use: instrumental, conceptual, mobilized support, and influence on other institutions and events. Instrumental is described as the type of use that leads to decision making and is quite common when the evaluator is most thorough on all aspects of understanding the problem, collecting data, and communicating the research yield. Conceptual use refers to the ideological views and insights gained by the local program personnel. The third type of use refers to mobilized support for ideas already held about the needed changes or modifications of a program. The fourth kind of use refers to the ability of evaluations to be generalized or applied across entities outside of the researched program or institution. Beyond professional ethics, evaluators should normalize care ethics to better the world with respect to humanist values (Abma et al., 2020).

Evaluation Product

The evaluation report is a final product of an evaluation study that supports programmatic recommendations and suggestions (Martin, 2008). Communication of findings (i.e., formal written reports) and utilization of findings are two integral parts of the evaluation process (Mertens & Wilson, 2018). Evaluators must be clear in reporting findings and establish conditions to help encourage use, understanding that findings may not lead to implementation immediately.

Evaluators should also be available for postreporting services including but not limited to interpreting findings regarding newly raised questions from stakeholders and planning a postreporting investigation to further explore program issues (Stufflebeam & Coryn, 2014). For ease of stakeholders' ability to connect findings to recommendations, evaluators should list summaries of evaluation findings with the decision questions they intend to answer or resolve (Morris et al., 1987). According to Nkwake and Morrow (2016), "good evaluation should produce evidence from which stakeholders can learn and base decisions" (p. 98).

Project Description

I chose an evaluation report as the most fitting project for this study. The goal of the research was to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation at an RAC of a private, 4-year university in the Southeastern United States. Therefore, in keeping with Gullickson's (2020) description of evaluation goals, this evaluation report was designed to fully describe the evaluand and allow a space for judgement to take place. In it are the details of how the evaluation was conducted, findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The project was reported according to standards established by Miron's (2004) checklist. Using a standard might improve the acceptance of evaluation findings and recommendations among stakeholders. Acceptance by stakeholders might improve their willingness to create innovative change to fill service gaps to address the problem.

Project Implications

The needs assessment is important to local stakeholders and in the larger context of higher education. Social change could occur if recommendations are implemented. Results of the evaluation are that nontraditional student-parents valued existing support services but needed additional and modified services. Their indicated needs include services specialized for student-parents, mentorship, convenience and scheduling, financial assistance, and marketing. Recommendations for the university to address needs include create a mentor program for nontraditional student-parents, offer childcare facilities on-site for face-to-face classes and library or research centers, host orientation programs for nontraditional student-parents highlighting services for this population of students separate from the general population of students, provide more hybrid/asynchronous instruction to accommodate scheduling, and offer more tuition assistance programs and scholarships.

Social change implications of the project at the local level include data informed program and service modifications and innovations. This will lead to increased enrollment, persistence, and graduation rates. After publication, implications of the evaluation project at the field and national levels include an addition to scant literature on student-parent needs.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

In this section, I share reflections and conclusions. I begin with the strengths and limitations of the project study followed by recommendations for alternative approaches. Next, I share my personal thoughts about what I learned about scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change. Thirdly, I reflect on the importance of my work. Fourthly, I describe the implications, applications, and directions for future research, and finish with a conclusion.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I conducted the formative evaluation project to address the problem of nontraditional student-parents’ lower graduation rates and unknown service needs at the RAC of a private baccalaureate-granting university in Southeastern United States. The project had both strengths and weaknesses. Service gaps were identified by the target population; however, access to the population was limited because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Strengths

I gained insight into perspectives of students with varying time and student roles at the university. The executive director of Federal TRIO Programs and Minority Affairs (personal communication, July 2, 2018) and the assistant director of the Center of Career and Professional Development (personal communication, June 23, 2018) suggested conducting a needs assessment among nontraditional students to discover service gaps and to make recommendations to address organizational problems. The evaluation project identified service gaps which, if filled, have the potential to increase student persistence to graduation, the problem addressed by the needs assessment.

The project was reported according to standards established by Miron's (2004) checklist. Using a standard might improve the acceptance of evaluation findings and recommendations among stakeholders. Acceptance by stakeholders might improve their willingness to create innovative change to fill service gaps to address the problem.

Limitations

Unforeseen circumstances affected the planning and execution of the evaluation. COVID-19 consequences and protocol adaptations affected access to the participants because students were in a volatile situation. Students were concerned with returning to campus and whether to continue with the host institution or to transfer to a different institution. Additionally, students were likely considering if persisting during the pandemic was going to be beneficial.

Faculty and staff were reluctant to offer access to in-person and virtual classrooms. Therefore, time to collect data far surpassed my expectations. Although saturation was reached by interviewing nine participants, a larger sample size may have been more representative of the population. Dworkin (2012) stated several experts argue that sample sizes should be between 5 and 50. Galvin (2015) suggested no finite number will ever be enough but that the number chosen should be enough that the researcher is confident that saturation was reached.

The evaluation report is limited because it is one-way communication. Additional communications will have to be agreed upon and scheduled if stakeholders have questions or concerns about the report. Follow up information will not be available from participants to provide additional clarity to stakeholders if needed. Stakeholders will have to rely on the report and the researcher to represent the phenomena and provide postreport services.

Another limitation is that stakeholder buy-in is not guaranteed. The burden of providing value through research and reporting rests on the researcher. Being that the report is a one-way communication, the data in the report must be convincing to stakeholders to influence buy-in and further courses of follow up action.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

In conducting research, I found that the university does not collect or disaggregate data on nontraditional student-parents. An alternative approach to the problem might be to identify how many nontraditional students are parents and on which campuses they are most represented. How many children are in the household and whether the household is a single- or two-parent household would also be valuable to inform institutions of the need to address the nontraditional student-parent body with intentionality.

Needs could then be assessed for services among a larger population. Resultant services needed among student-parents could be concentrated on the campuses they frequent. Modified services and new innovative services could then be included in the admissions and enrollment marketing to increase admission and enrollment of nontraditional student-parents. New students and current students could be made aware of the services designed with this population in mind to promote and encourage persistence to program and degree completion.

Another approach to the problem of persistence and graduation among student-parents would be to focus on students on academic probation, financial probation, or with low attendance to assess what factors contributed to the status. Students could suggest what they feel would best help them to recover. Targeted programs could be developed to address factors and offer solutions to students in the early stages of stopping out.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

I explore assessments of scholarship, project development and evaluation, and leadership and change in this section. I have learned a lot about myself as a scholar, the existing research, gaps in the research, and opportunities for leadership and change. With this knowledge, I rededicate to continue my advocacy for nontraditional student-parents.

Scholarship

Returning to a scholastic and research environment seemed daunting at first. I never envisioned myself to be a scholar in a terminal degree program. With time, I learned to embrace my talents and skills and utilize them in a way that propelled me beyond my fears. Writing has always been a strong skill, but research always came with more challenges. During this process, I learned to develop self-efficacy and self-accountability measures to ensure quality scholarly work and persistence.

Astin’s (1991) I-E-O model began to become a reality in my own life. I considered my own demographics as a first-generation college student and the only member of my family to seek a terminal degree, a mother, a wife, and a full-time employee, I realized that I needed an environment that would contribute to my success. Therefore, I enlisted accountability agents, created a study space, gathered writing tools, heeded the advice of faculty, and adopted several peer mentors. I also incorporated writing times when my children and I would complete homework and research together without interruption. Lastly, we instituted a phone check-in process to minimize distractions and took sabbaticals from social media when needed.

According to Neumann (1993), “Scholarship is seen as keeping up to date with the research literature in one's field” (p. 98). The process of conducting, editing, and updating literature reviews has deepened my knowledge of current services offered to student-parents and lack of data collection on this specific target group. With the continued growth of the nontraditional student population, a lifetime of continued evaluation research is waiting for me.

Project Development and Evaluation

Conducting a needs assessment evaluation and reporting on findings seemed to be the most logical first step toward addressing the problem concerning nontraditional student-parent graduation rates. The evaluation report yielded results that point toward services institutions could offer in the future. The project does not solve or remedy the problem directly but offers information on how to best address the problem. An evaluation can translate to more immediate and detailed procedures for institutions to implement to quickly respond to evidence about student-parent needs. Being an employee of the institution, I will maintain my relations with stakeholders and address any questions they have about recommendations as well as offer insight into any decisions as is suggested Stufflebeam and Coryn (2014).

Leadership and Change

As a professional who provides services to marginalized populations, I know firsthand how important services can be to students' persistence and efficacy. By conducting this research and study, I have learned just how underserved the nontraditional student-parent population is. In my line of work, I hear many times how students reenter the institution after stopping out due to family demands relating to their children's changing needs. I also hear how students are forced to leave the learning environment prematurely due to the same reasons. As a leader and change agent, I will include material for student-parents in workshops I build and facilitate in the community, revisit conversations with administrators and grant-writers to advocate for services; and reference this study in partnership meetings because the study and project also add to the scant literature concerning nontraditional student-parent service needs.

Reflection on Importance of the Work

My reflections and experiences as a student-parent were the driving forces behind this research and evaluation project. The study is important because nontraditional student-parents have many concerns for services to help them persist that are not currently offered by the institution and services that are offered could be shared better with students. Institutions have inadequately adapted services to meet the needs of nontraditional students and, by extension, nontraditional student-parents (Witkowsky et al., 2016). Therefore, I will continue to advocate for servicing to be enhanced and marketed to nontraditional student-parents.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In this section, I address implications, applications, and directions for future research. The goal of this research and project was to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation at an RAC of a private, 4-year university in the Southeastern United States. This information can be used by administrators and grant writers to design and implement programming to address needs and concerns raised by the target population to increase persistence to graduation and program completion.

If administration and grant writers at the host institution were to consider the data contained in this research and project, existing programs and services could be modified, or new innovative approaches could be taken to address nontraditional student-parent needs at the RAC that might result in increased graduation rates. This increase would result in program sustainability and the host institution would then become an exemplar for other institutions.

If other institutions model the host institution's projected innovations, they will see increased enrollment and increased graduation rates of nontraditional student-parents. Future research initiatives might include surveying nontraditional students to explore if recommended services were offered, how likely would participants be to use them. Other future research then might include pilot programming of recommended services with measured persistence and graduation rates compared to prepilot program rates.

Conclusion

Nontraditional student-parents have been underserved and graduate at a rate lower than that of traditional undergraduate students. My research indicated that nontraditional student-parents have unique needs. If needs are properly addressed, nontraditional student-parents’ persistence and graduation rates will likely increase. My recommendation is that institutions consider the needs raised by the target population and modify, enhance, and implement programming to meet these unique needs. Continued research on how institutions can best serve students with student-parent needs is scant. My hope is that institutions will consider the needs explored by this research and project, develop adequate programming, and implement services that will assist nontraditional student-parents with program persistence and degree completion.

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Appendix A: Evaluation Report

Executive Summary

Nontraditional student-parents compose approximately one-quarter of the student body on college and university campuses. Student-parents face unique challenges, have unique needs, and graduate at lower rates than traditional students. Yet many campuses, like the local study site, focus support on traditional students. The purpose of this formative evaluation was to assess the needs of student-parents in their persistence to graduation at a private 4-year university in the Southeastern United States. Astin's (1991) I-E-O model was the conceptual framework used to identify student-parents' characteristics (input), services needed (environment), and intended outcomes. A basic qualitative design and interviews yielded narrative data from 9 participants who were purposefully selected and attended a regional academic center. Descriptive and pattern coding by research question was the approach to data analysis. Key findings were that nontraditional student-parents needed mentorship, convenience and scheduling, financial assistance, and marketed services. Implications of the evaluation were that nontraditional student-parents valued existing support services but needed additional and modified services. Recommendations included offering more hybrid or asynchronous courses and increasing assistance and scholarships; and, creating a mentor program, childcare facilities, library or research centers, and orientation programs specifically for student-parents. Recommendations were presented in an evaluation report for campus stakeholders to review and decide about services for which to seek funding and develop programming. Offering services focused on student-parents may lead to higher

graduation rates among them at the local study site and affiliated regional sites; and may inform other campuses about needed supports for the growing number of student-parents enrolled at their institutions.

Summary of Main Findings

Nontraditional student-parents were recruited to participant in interviews for this study. After codifying responses, five categories of needs emerged:

1. Services specialized for student-parents
2. Mentorship
3. Convenience and scheduling
4. Financial assistance
5. Marketing

Implications of Findings and Recommendations

Implications of the evaluation are that nontraditional student-parents valued existing support services but needed additional and modified services. Recommendations for the university include the following:

1. Creating a mentor program for nontraditional student-parents
2. Providing childcare facilities on-site for face-to-face classes and library or research centers
3. Requiring nontraditional student-parent orientation programs highlighting services for this population of students separate from the general population of students
4. Offering more hybrid/asynchronous instruction to accommodate scheduling

5. Supplying tuition assistance programs and scholarships

Evaluation Report

Miron's checklist (2004) was used as the guide for this report. The Table of Contents reflects components of professional evaluation reporting.

Table of Contents

Introduction and Background

This formative needs assessment was designed to evaluate nontraditional student-parents' needs. Student-parents are students who are parenting while pursuing an education (Theisen et al., 2018). I developed the term nontraditional student-parents by adding the descriptor "nontraditional" to the term student-parent. Therefore, nontraditional student-parents are nontraditional students who are also parenting.

Target Population, Relevant Audiences, and Stakeholders

The target population was nontraditional student-parents who attended the local study institution through a Regional Academic Center. These students were at least 24 years old, have at least one dependent child. Stakeholders included RAC administrators and program grant writers. Audiences included stakeholders and consumers of scant literature on student-parents' needs.

Review of Related Research

I have found through related research that the nontraditional student-parent group is a population of students that is growing but schools rarely give attention to this group (Cox & Sallee, 2018). Nontraditional student demographics have evolved and now include more student-parents than in prior years. As student demographics change, needs assessments are needed to attend to the changing needs Payne et al. (2017).

Nationally, students over the age of 24 graduate at a rate 30.8% lower than traditional students (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2019). Student programming evolution is not substantial enough to serve the emerging, marginalized nontraditional student-parent population. Provided that student-parents do not perform as well as traditional students, this inattention to nontraditional student-parent needs affects students' ability to persist toward degree completion, the intended output of enrollment in higher education.

Astin's Model and Rationale

Astin's (1991) I-E-O Model was used for the conceptual framework to inform the evaluation approach. It was used to shape evaluation questions to identify specific characteristics of the sample population (input) and institutional services (environment) that affect student-parents' persistence toward graduation (output). This model is most commonly used with respect to persistence and student success. Student affairs personnel and researchers of student persistence have used Astin's I-E-O model.

The model contains three components: input, environment, and output (McClellan & Stringer, 2015). Astin's model was chosen because his model was not based solely on retention and attrition as are other models such as Tinto's (2012) theory of student departure, theory of student satisfaction accredited to Benjamin and Hollings (1995), or Bean and Metzner's (1985) model of nontraditional undergraduate student attrition. The three components of Astin's model are defined next.

Input: Inputs are skills and attributes with which students come to the institution. Input can include several sets of demographical data including marital status, age, parental status, cultural background, race or ethnicity, prior experiences, and other demographics.

Environment: The environment is comprised of the services, supports, and programming made available to students to support their persistence towards the learning outcome.

Output: The output is the result when students leave the institution. Institutions define their desired output, which might include having met learning objectives or completed a program or degree.

The model's concept is students produce the desired outcome of academic success and persistence to graduation in relation to student attributes prior to entering the institution (input) and the services provided by the institution (environment).

Input Literature

McClellan and Stringer (2015) postulated that input assessments are necessary to best design student affairs programming and services to support student persistence, leading to attained intended outcomes. Pallas (2018) reported that 26%, about one-quarter of students enrolled in institutions of higher education are also parents. Despite the call by McClellan and Stringer, the search process revealed no current profile of student-parents. No current national, state, or regional, profile of student-parents was available. Current studies of student-parents provided demographic information as it pertained to the nontraditional student, not particularly the nontraditional student-parent.

Environment Literature

Lovell and Munn (2017) concluded that institutional services rarely cater to the student-parent population. In fact, through non-probability sampling, Lovell's (2014) survey results of the nontraditional student population at a rural institution with a 2-year and 4-year program in the Rocky Mountains indicated that student-parent retention services were disproportionate to the population of student-parents on the campus.

In response to institutions not providing adequate childcare despite demand, student-parents have been forced to consider online courses (Hechinger Report, 2018).

Outcome Literature

A single student success course is insufficient for helping students ascertain college-going social skills (Hatch et al., 2018). Student-parents need social, institutional, and financial support/aid, childcare services, faculty support, along with their own tenacity to persist amid the stressors of parenting (Green, 2018; Kaka, 2016; Theisen et al., 2018), as social and emotional supports are contributors to student retention and persistence (Kensinger & Minnick, 2017).

Methodology

Evaluation Design

A traditional, basic qualitative design using interviews (Merriam, 2009; Ravitch & Carl, 2016) was used to assess the needs of student-parents at the RAC of a private, 4-year university. Semistructured interviews were used to collect data to explore the research questions. Interview data was collected from a purposefully selected sample. There is no set formula for determining sample size for qualitative studies (Ravitch & Carl, 2016; Rubin & Rubin, 2012), therefore, interviews were continued until saturation is reached; that is, until no new information was forthcoming from participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). Nine nontraditional student-parents at an RAC of the local study institution elected to participate in the formative evaluation.

Evaluation Limitations

According to Price and Murnan (2004), there are two types of limitations to a study: internal and external. Possible internal limitations include participant truthfulness and attrition. Though not expected, participants may have been less than truthful during the interview process by willful choice, misunderstanding of interview question, or preconceived notion about what a socially acceptable response should be. Possible external validity limitations include sampling and participation. Also, student-parents who chose to participate may have had some innate bias about the topic.

Results

The overarching research question addressed by this needs assessment centered around support services needed by student-parents. The research question addressed the problem. The problem was that nontraditional student-parents graduated at a lower national rate than traditional students and service needs of the target population were unknown at the RAC of a private baccalaureate-granting university in the Southeastern region of the United States. Interview questions were formulated around Astin's (1991) I-E-O model.

Data were gathered using a basic qualitative design approach through nine interviews with student-parents (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Data were collected as described in sections above with adjustments made because of the COVID-19 pandemic. Adjustments for the pandemic included soliciting participants virtually. Quality of data was maintained by employing techniques outlined the Trustworthiness section above. Appendix B contains the interview protocol.

Interviews allowed participants to reflect upon and describe their individual characteristics, learning environments, and projected college outcome. Of nine participants, one discrepant case was noted. One interviewee was a student-grandparent who provided care for grandchildren and received tuition waiver from the institution. I excluded this account from data analysis after discussing the case with my research supervisor but included the case in a separate section. Input, environment, and outcome results from data analysis of transcribed interviews are presented in sections below.

Input Questions

Input questions helped me to learn more about the participants' characteristics and demographics as a student-parent. Interviewees were asked three input questions. There was one discrepant case identified through input question one.

Possible Discrepant Case

Consideration was made concerning whether Participant 2 should be a discrepant case due to their employment status in addition to the rationale that Participant 2 cared for two adult children and helped care for grandchildren as well. I became aware of employment status when Participant 2 revealed they received an employee tuition waiver. Only employees in certain academic programs receive this tuition benefit. The assumption could be made that an employee would be privier to services than a student not employed by the institution, thus responses should be considered separately.

However, Participant 2 turned out to not be a discrepant base on employment status because answers provided did not reflect an anomaly situation and two other participants were also either current or former employees of the institution with similar working history and scope of employment. Participant 2 provided more depth in response to this question, including the academic resource center, counseling center, student support services, educational opportunity center, employee tuition waiver, and the ability to attend classes during work hours. Participant 2's classification also differed from the two other participants with current or former employment status, which indicated that student-parent needs vary across programs but is not necessarily related to employment status. For these reasons, I analyzed Participant 2's responses with other responses and did not treat them as a discrepant case.

Interview Input Question 1

In input interview question one, I asked for how many children the participant provides care. Eight participants provided responses ranging from one to four children. See Table A1 below.

Interview Input Question 2

In input interview question two, I asked what time of day the participant typically attended school: mornings, afternoons, or evenings. Participants reported attending in the afternoon, evenings, and on the weekends. Eight out of nine participants reported attending class in the evenings, two mentioned the afternoon, one stated they attended class online, and one mentioned they attended class once a month on the weekend. Some participants indicated more than one time of day, but the consensus was eight out of nine participants reported attending in the evening as noted in Table A1 below. None mentioned attending classes during the morning as RAC classes are not offered in the mornings.

Interview Input Question 3

In input interview question three, I asked in what year of school the participant was. Participant response varied from first year freshmen to students completing a terminal degree, also noted in Table A1 below.

Table A1

Interview Input Responses

Student-parent	No. children	Class times	Student classification
1	One	Evening	Sophomore
2	Two adult children	Online-evening	Senior
3	One	Evening	7th yr. grad student
4	Three	Evening & 1/mo. weekends	PhD candidate
5	Two	Evenings	Senior
6	One	Evenings	Freshman
7	Four	Afternoon and evenings	Freshman
8	Two	Afternoon	Freshman
9	One	Evenings	Prerequisites for Pharmacy program

Environment Questions

Environment questions helped me to learn more about university services or other services that the participant was aware of, needed, used, or found valuable. I asked seven open-ended questions. Responses are listed in Tables A2, A3, and A4.

Interview Environment Question 1

In environment question one, I asked about participants' awareness of services offered by the university to help them get to and through classes. Student-parents reported various services and programs offered by the institution. The depth of the response generally increased with students who were further along in their programs. Freshmen and sophomore students listed the ONES (Office of Nontraditional and Evening Services) program, library, bursar, Canvas (a digital learning management system), tutoring, and Handshake (an online platform for career support). More tenured students included some of these and added online and asynchronous classes and research tools, writing workshops, programs for working adults, and faculty office hours. Student-parent 3, a doctoral candidate stated, “I know there are a lot of services that are supported in the library. I know that the faculty are available to assist. And I know they had regular writing workshops to assist” (interview August 28, 2020). However, despite being a sophomore at the RAC, student-parent 9’s response was “none at this time” (interview, September 26, 2020).

Interview Environment Question 2

In environment question two, I asked how the participant became aware of the services they mentioned in the previous question. Participants became aware of information through a faculty member, advisor, student, or at program orientation. Participant 4, who has three children, expressed not being informed of any services specifically for student-parents. Although asked, this question did not apply to Participant 9 because they gave no answers to environmental question one. The fact that Participant 9 knew of no services was indicative of gaps in communication of services for student-parents. Student-parent 5 who mentioned tutoring and flexible faculty office hours in the previous question stated they were made aware through “orientation, advisor and teachers. It’s part of the syllabus” (interview, July 15, 2020).

Table A2

Interview Environment Questions 1 and 2 Responses

Student-parent	Awareness of services	Became aware
1	ONES program	student appreciation event
2	academic success center, counseling center, student support services, education opportunity center; employee tuition waiver; offering to employees to take class during work hours	new student orientation
3	library; faculty; writing workshops	had someone talk to us early in the program; faculty always made themselves available
4	program designed for working adults and parents with weekly online classes and only 3 Saturday meetings per semester	didn't recall seeing anything related to being a parent
5	tutors; flexible office hours; online classes; sync and async; online library and research tools	orientation; advisor; teachers; it's part of each syllabus
6	tutoring	told by faculty
7	canvas; handshake; bursar; library	campus visit tour; faculty
8	writing services	searching through website; relative
9	none	n/a

Interview Environment Question 3

In environment question three, I asked services the participant needed or desired. Participants' responses included financial support, peer or mentoring support, support for working or single parents, academic and tutoring support, and an overall truncated program with fewer general education courses. Flexibility in classes was repeated by two of the nine participants. The need for more classes offered online, flexibility with attendance policies, and time or progress management tools was raised. Convenient class times, online classes, flexible attendance policy, and childcare were greatly desired and needed by participants.

> I have not required any additional services other than some flexibility if I was unable to attend a Saturday meeting due to a sick child. My professors were always understanding… I would like more support as a full-time working parent trying to complete my dissertation. I am having a hard time finding time to research and write…. I have hired sitters for class meetings. That was expensive! (Student-parent 4, interview, September 1, 2020)

Interview Environment Question 4

In environment question four, I asked about services the participant used currently, at the university or otherwise, to help them get to graduation. Participants mentioned services and programs offered by the institution and used by them including the ONES program, faculty support, peer support (from host and other institutions), the library, online support, and Working Adults Program. Participants also volunteered and stressed the services they needed and desired in this question. Services not offered by the institution but mentioned by 3 of the 9 participants included after-school childcare, hired babysitters, and daycare.

Participant 4, who had reenrolled several times, mentioned that lack of daycare was the main reason for stopping out. The following quoted response by student-parent 4 highlighted the need for childcare and accountability.

> I have had to hire babysitters about once a month when I have my kids and needed to be researching or writing. I am going to have to do that moving forward a substantial amount if I want to finish. I am a single mom. I have help from both fathers but there are a number of weekends I need to write and they are not able to

> watch the girls. I think the service I would be most grateful for is a chair or someone that helps those of us falling behind on writing to keep us on track with small portions due each week or every other week another 7 pages due. A requirement to submit work on a schedule which allows those of us with kids and crazy lives to keep writing and not put it off (Student-parent 4, interview, September 1, 2020).

Interview Environment Question 5

In environment question five, I asked of the services participants used, which they valued most. Most valued services were the ONES program, tuition waiver, support (faculty, peers, family, friends, coworkers), Working Adults Program, online support, and tutoring. “I think the one that I'm mostly dependent upon right now would be writing resources like Grammarly (Student-parent 7, interview, September 1, 2020). One participant was unsure if any services were offered at all for student-parents.

The ONES program (Office of Nontraditional and Evening Services) is a TRiO program under Student Support Services. It offered a grant aid scholarship, academic support, loaner laptops and calculators, and other support resources. The Working Adults Program recruited nontraditional students, advertised resources to support the working adult lifestyle, aided with transfer credits, and offered flexible class schedules.

Table A3

Interview Environment Questions 3, 4, and 5 Responses

Student-parent	Services needed/desired	Services used	Valued services
1	financial; child provision/daycare; health care	ONES program	ONES program
2	flexibility/more classes offered online each semester	larger student counseling staff to help younger students navigate	family, friends, coworkers; tuition waiver
3	mentor supporter; programs for working parents; childcare	faculty committee; friends outside the program to help mentor	people suggestions in other similar programs; faculty
4	flexibility in attendance due to sick child; need more support as fulltime working parent trying to complete program; time to research and write; write in weekends; hired sitters to drive to class - expensive; chair assistance to write on a schedule to help those with kids not fall behind	hired sitters;	not sure they have any for students with kids
5	tutors, teacher availability; learning resources like library and websites	tutors, teacher availability; learning resources like library and websites; classmates	facility; classmates; web resources
6	academic help overall tutoring	n/a; lack of daycare was a reason #6 had to call out of class when enrolled before	tutoring
7	nontraditional academic study group	online; grammarly; time management software	writing resources like grammarly and refreshers for returning to school
8	shorter program - less classes to get to the degree program classes to graduate with less years; advisor familiar with the program	RAC Working Adults Program; online classes	Working Adults Program
9	don't know what services are available; support groups for single parents	aftercare	Jesus

Interview Environment Question 6

In environment question six, I asked what university or other services the participant would recommend to other student-parents to support their persistence to graduation. Responses varied between students suggesting services the institution should offer and services currently offered. Of the services currently offered, participants mentioned the ONES program because of the scholarship they offered. Online classes that are asynchronous, online time management, and the Working Adults Program were also mentioned.

Of the services not offered, student-parent participants suggested mentoring and support groups for students with similar backgrounds, child/day care, support for single parents, and allowance for children to come onto campus. Of the nine participants, three suggested child/day care and programs specifically for student-parents. One participant mentioned asynchronous learning with the rationale to attend to family needs. Another participant provided no recommendations because they were unaware of any services provided by the institution.

I would recommend a mentoring/support program for students with similar backgrounds. It helps to know other people may have the same hardships and what methods they use to cope. Programs should exist to establish a solid foundation of financial literacy in students (Student-parent 2, interview, June 30, 2020).

Interview Environment Question 7

In environment question seven, I asked for recommendations about how to create awareness of institutional or other services to other student-parents. Responses included various forms of communications. Methods varied by participant and included communications through faculty, within recruitment materials, in classrooms, emails and bulletins, word of mouth, and gatherings such as informational meetings and open houses.

> I really found that it was helpful to have someone from the different services come into the classroom. I know that there are the fairs and orientations and things like that but sometimes those opportunities are overwhelming, particularly for an adult. It's basically they're mixed in with the general campus fair. And so, I think definitely having someone come in the first 10 to 15 minutes of class talk about what they have and show what it is, really helps with that connection. (Student-parent 3, interview, August 28, 2020).

Table A4

Interview Environment Questions 6 and 7 Responses

Student-parent	Resommended services	Recommendations for creating awareness
1	existing: ONES - gives scholarships for a variety of different students	broadcasting about when to apply and deadlines for scholarships
2	suggestions: mentoring/support program for students with similar backgrounds; financial literacy program	beginning with recruitment materials
3	suggestions: cohort/mentor group; childcare services if available	representative from the services come into classroom; fairs and orientations can be overwhelming
4	none b/c haven't seen any provided by institution	advise student to contact faculty chair
5	flexible online classes async to be able to tend to work/family needs	attend orientation, ask about resources if not given; communicate with advisor and teacher
6	daycare services	bulletins; emails
7	online time management offered throughout the university	gathering or informational for nontraditional students like an open house
8	Working Adults Program	communicating word of mouth
9	childcare; support for single parents; can kids come on campus	offer services to single parents when accepted into the school; email; text; calls

Output Question

The final output question allowed me to understand the participants' expected outcome. I asked in what year the participant expected to graduate. Four participants were within 1 to 2 years of graduating while the other five anticipated graduating within 3 to 6 years. Four out of nine expected to graduate in 2023. Responses by participant are outlined in Table A5 below.

Table A5

Interview Output Responses

Student-parent	Expected graduation
1	2023
2	2021
3	2020
4	2021-2022
5	2020
6	2023
7	2023
8	2023
9	2026-2027

Summary of Results

Student-parents participated in interviews for this study. I recorded, transcribed, and then coded their responses. Participant interview responses fell into several categories and subcategories. From these, emerged five themes: services specialized for student-parents, mentorship, convenience and scheduling factor, financial concerns, and marketing. Student-parents expressed that they wanted and valued programming that is separate from the general population that caters to working adults and student-parents. They expressed the value of knowledgeable faculty and staff with office hours for availability but also expressed the need for and organized peer-to-peer mentoring program. Student-parents who participated also wanted peace of mind to complete assignments and flexible class attendance policies and valued time management resources. They raised concerns about the cost of childcare outside the university, lack of childcare offered by the university, tuition, and the need for financial aid to afford school. Participants also expressed that they wanted to receive communications about services for student-parents through multiple media.

Recommendations

Five recommendations for the RAC resulted. My first recommendation is for administration to consider increasing the number of hybrid or asynchronous courses. This addresses childcare concerns student-parents raised for in-person instruction by allowing students to attend virtually or during a time that best fits their parenting schedule. Secondly, student-parents cited the cost of tuition as a concern, therefore, administration should allow for increased financial assistance by offering a university scholarship just for student-parents. Thirdly, RAC administration and staff should create a mentor program to meet student-parents' need for support and accountability. Additionally, RACs should offer childcare facilities in a space within the libraries and research centers. This will meet student-parents' need for childcare assistance affording them time to study, research, and complete schoolwork. Finally, the RAC should host separate orientation events for student-parents showcasing services that cater specifically to students who have children. Program structures should be shared with other regional campuses of the institution.

Conclusion

Student-parents participated in interviews to express several needs to support their matriculation to graduation. I made program recommendations to address these needs to increase persistence to gradation and program completion. Addressing needs will lead to increased graduation rates.

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Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Hello, is this student-parent 1? Great. I am Athea Vanzant and I will be conducting the phone interview with you. I received your consent to participate in this study entitled *"Formative Needs Assessment Evaluation of Nontraditional Student-Parents at a Private 4-year University"*. Do you affirm that you are 24 years or older, attend the RAC, and a parent of at least one dependent child? Do you have any questions before we begin? Are you ready to begin?

[I answer questions, ask if ready to begin. If ready, I will begin recording, read the script below and proceed to interview questions.]

Today is [DATE] and I am with student-parent 1. I am Athea Vanzant and I would like to thank you for agreeing to participate in this study entitled *Formative Needs Assessment Evaluation of Nontraditional Student-Parents at a Private 4-year University*. The purpose of this study is to assess the needs of nontraditional student-parents in their persistence to graduation. Your participation is voluntary, and you are free to stop at any time. This call is being recorded and transcribed, and a copy of the transcription summary will be provided to you via email to ensure accuracy.

The interview will take no longer than 15 to 20 minutes and will include questions about you, your environment, and your expectations about graduation. I will read each question and allow you to answer. Feel free to ask for clarity.

Input Questions

I have three questions about you. [Input questions help me to learn more about participant characteristics and demographics as a student-parent.]

I-I-1: For how many children do you provide care?

Response: ____

____

____

I-I-2: What time of day do you typically attend school: mornings, afternoons, or evenings?

Response: ____

____

____

I-I-3: In what year are you in school—freshman, sophomore, junior, or senior?

Response: ____

____

____

Environment Questions

Now that I know a little about you, I have seven questions about your needs as a student-parent. [These questions help me to learn more about university services or other services that you are aware of, need, use, or find valuable.]

I-E-1: What services, offered by the university, are you aware of—services that help you get to and through classes; service that support you?

Response: ____

____

____

I-E-2: How did you become aware of those services you mentioned?

Response: ____

____

____

I-E-3: What services do you need or desire?

Response: ____

____

____

I-E-4: What services do you use now to help you get through to graduation, services at the university or otherwise)?

Response: ____

____

____

I-E-5: Of the services you use, which do you value most?

Response: ____

____

____

I-E-6: What university or other services would you recommend to other student-parents to support their persistence to graduation?

Response: ____

____

I-E-7: How do you recommend other student-parents be made aware of institutional or other services available?

Response:

Output Questions

Now I have one final question… [This last question helps me to understand your expected outcome.]

I-O-1: In what year do you expect to graduate?

Response:

This concludes the interview. Thank you again for participating. You will be invited to retrieve a $25 gift card via email for participating within one week of the interview. Also, within one week of the interview, you will be invited to review and confirm accuracy of interview transcription via an emailed summary. Time to review and confirm will vary based on length and degree of accuracy, but please take no more than one hour. Again, thank you for your time, and enjoy the rest of your day.

[I will stop the recording.]

Appendix C: Miron's Checkist

Evaluation Checklist Project

Evaluation Report Checklist

Gary Miron

The Evaluation Report Checklist has two intended applications that are related to evaluation management: (1) a tool to guide a discussion between evaluators and their clients regarding the preferred contents of evaluation reports and (2) a tool to provide formative feedback to report writers. Evaluators can self-rate their own progress during the writing phase. They can also use the checklist to identify weaknesses or areas that need to be addressed in their evaluation report(s). When two or more persons work on the same report, the checklist can serve as a tool to delegate, coordinate, and monitor progress among the contributors.

This checklist is not intended to be used as a metaevaluation tool. Evaluation reports differ greatly in terms of purpose, budget, expectations, and needs of the client. If one were to use this checklist to evaluate actual reports or draw comparisons across reports, one would need to consider or weigh the checkpoints within sections and to weigh the relative importance and value of each section.

This checklist draws upon and reflects The Program Evaluation Standards (Joint Committee on Standards for Educational Evaluation, 1994).

Instructions: Rate each component of the report using the following rubrics. Fill in the circle or place a check mark in the cell that corresponds to your rating on each checkpoint. If the item or checkpoint is not applicable to the report, indicate the "NA" cell to the far right. Additional checkpoints may be added as agreed upon by those using the checklist.

1=Not addressed, 2=Partially addressed, 3=Fully addressed, NA=Not applicable

1. Title Page	1	2	3	NA
A. Title is sufficiently clear and concise to facilitate indexing	①	②	③	○
B. Author(s)' names and affiliations are identified	①	②	③	○
C. Date of preparation is included	①	②	③	○
D. Title identifies what was evaluated, including target population, if applicable	①	②	③	○

	1	2	3	NA
E. Name of client or funder(s) is identified	①	②	③	○
F. Text and material on title page are clearly and properly arranged	①	②	③	○
G.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

2. Executive Summary	1	2	3	NA
A. Description of program/project	①	②	③	○
B. Evaluation questions and purpose of the evaluation	①	②	③	○
C. Brief description of methods and analytical strategy (if appropriate)	①	②	③	○
D. Summary of main findings	①	②	③	○
E. Implications of findings	①	②	③	○
F. Recommendations, if appropriate	①	②	③	○
G.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

3. Table of Contents and Other Sections That Preface the Report	1	2	3	NA
A. Table of contents contains at least all first and second level headers in the reports	①	②	③	○
B. Titles and page numbers are accurate	①	②	③	○
C. Lists of tables, figures, and appendices are included, if appropriate	①	②	③	○
D. List of acronyms or abbreviations is included, if appropriate	①	②	③	○
E. Acknowledgments section references sponsors, data collectors, informants, contributors to the report, research assistants, reviewers of the report, etc.	①	②	③	○
F.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

4. Introduction and Background	1	2	3	NA
A. Purpose of evaluation and evaluation questions, if not covered in the methodology section	①	②	③	○
B. Description of the program/project or phenomenon being evaluated (including goals and historical context, if appropriate)	①	②	③	○
C. Identification of target population for the program and relevant audiences and stakeholders for the evaluation	①	②	③	○
D. Review of related research	①	②	③	○
E. Overview and description of report structure	①	②	③	○
F.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

5. Methodology	1	2	3	NA
A. Purpose of evaluation and evaluation questions, if not covered in the introduction	①	②	③	○
B. Evaluation approach or model being used, as well as rationale for the approach or model	①	②	③	○
C. Design of the evaluation, including sample sizes and timing of data collection	①	②	③	○
D. Methods of data collection, including desciption of data collection instruments	①	②	③	○
E. Sources of information and data	①	②	③	○
F. Limitations of the evaluation (e.g., limitations related to methods, data sources, potential sources of bias, etc.)	①	②	③	○
G.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

6. Results Chapters	1	2	3	NA
A. Details of the evaluation findings are clearly and logically described	①	②	③	○
B. Charts, tables, and graphs are understandable and appropriately and consistently labeled	①	②	③	○
C. Discussion of evaluation findings is objective and includes both negative and positive findings	①	②	③	○
D. All evaluation questions are addressed or an explanation is included for questions that could not be answered	①	②	③	○
E. Findings are adequately justified	①	②	③	○
F.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

7. Summary, Conclusion, and Recommendations	1	2	3	NA
A. Summaries of findings are included in each chapter or altogether in a summary chapter	①	②	③	○
B. Discussion and interpretation of findings are included	①	②	③	○
C. Summary and conclusion fairly reflect the findings	①	②	③	○
D. Judgments about the program that cover merit and worth are included	①	②	③	○
E. If appropriate, recommendations are included and are based on findings in the report	①	②	③	○
F.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

8. References and Appendices	1	2	3	NA
A. A suitable style or format (e.g., APA) is used consistently for all references	①	②	③	○
B. References are free of errors	①	②	③	○
C. References cover all in-text citations	①	②	③	○
	1	2	3	NA

D. All appendices referenced in the text are included in the appendix section, in the order they are referenced	①	②	③	○
E. Data and information in the appendices are clearly presented and explained	①	②	③	○
F.	①	②	③	○

Comments:

Suggested Citation

Miron, G. (2004). *Evaluation report checklist.* Retrieved from https://wmich.edu/evaluation/checklists.