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Accelerated Courses and Barriers to Persistence for Traditional-Age College Students

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Clarissa Davis-Ragland

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Walden University
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Abstract

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MBA, Grand Canyon University, 1998

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Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

Offering 8-week courses in a traditional 16-week semester schedule supports degree completion; however, traditional-age students, who belonged to Generation Z, at a Southwest community college indicated a preference for 16-week courses. The problem investigated in this study was that traditional-age college students experienced barriers to completing accelerated 8-week courses at this institution. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the in-class and out-of-class barriers these college students experienced that impacted their motivation to persist in accelerated 8-week courses. The conceptual framework was Rendón's validation theory, which described students' intentional, proactive affirmation by in- and out-of-class college agents. Three research questions explored traditional-age college students' experiences at the study site regarding (a) persisting in accelerated 8-week courses and 16-week courses, (b) in-class barriers to persisting in accelerated 8-week courses, and (c) out-of-class barriers to persisting in accelerated 8-week courses. Semistructured interviews were conducted with eight study participants aged 18–24 years. Data were analyzed manually using open coding, and thematic analysis was conducted using NVivo qualitative analysis software. Findings indicated that (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness were barriers to persistence. The findings from this study may promote positive social change through use of the insights gained to enrich the collaboration between college administrators, faculty, and course schedulers to assess the effectiveness of course schedules that support student progress toward graduation.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Emory Hoosier Davis Sr., and Elizabeth Ann Davis. My parents raised me with love and support and encouraged me to know God and to be kind. I am forever grateful for their example.

I thank my husband, Reginald Ragland, and my daughters, Michela Ragland Oldham and Mackenzye Ragland, for their love and support throughout this dissertation journey. Special thanks to my sister, my *hero* in the faith, Cassondra Davis-Harris. Your prayers and constant encouragement are the wind beneath my wings.

So many special friends and family were there for me. I cannot name them all, but I am grateful for their time, words of encouragement, and prayers!

By the grace of God, and the help of the village, what was not, is!

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It seems impossible until it is done .

—Nelson Rolihlahla Mandela, *Encyclopedia Britannica*

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Leaders of colleges and universities across the nation have been discussing the impact of accelerated 8-week classes on student degree completion while also considering the increase in both college enrollment and educational funding (Krug et al., 2016). This study explores the problem of barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at a Southwest community college. The gap this study addresses is that although the quicker path to graduation is taking the 8-week courses, 55% of traditional-age students surveyed at the studied college prefer the 16-week version because they are not getting the same experiences from the 8-week courses. In Chapter 1, I discuss the background, problem statement, and purpose of the study. This chapter also includes the research questions, conceptual framework, nature of the study, definitions, and assumptions. I conclude the chapter by presenting the delimitations, limitations, and significance of the study.

Background

This study took place at a Southwest community college, one of multiple colleges in a community college district in the western United States. According to the "About Us" page on the college's website, the administration, faculty, and staff of the studied college have worked to create a sense of place that expresses the historical and cultural values of the surrounding communities while providing students with meaningful and engaging learning environments. Located in the fastest growing region of the county, the studied college enrolls approximately 9,000 students annually and is a Hispanic-serving institution and a minority-serving institution (which means the student population is at least 25% Hispanic students and 25% minority students, respectively), according to the

college's online dashboard at the time of the study. The local college demographics, such as full-time equivalents (FTE), ages, and other data regarding the student body, include but are not limited to the following: 75% of students are of traditional age (18–24 years), 69% of students are first generation, 66% of students attend part time, 34% of students attend full time, 52% of students are Pell Grant recipients, 59% of students are female, 55% of students are Hispanic (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2018), 48% of students are university transfers, and 22% of students are workforce transfers. The average age of students at the studied college is 23 years, according to the college's online dashboard at the time of the study. Students aged 18–24 years are Generation Z students (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Generation Z students were born between 1995 and 2010 (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). At the time of this study, members of Generation Z ranged in age from 10 to 25 years. Approximately 60% of the students at the studied college are 18–24 years old; thus, students aged 18–24 years make up the critical population for this study.

Problem Statement

College students who cannot enroll in the courses necessary for graduation are vulnerable to attrition. This attrition presents a barrier to persistence for the 48% of study site students who intend to transfer to a university, according to the website of the studied college. Twenty-two percent of students who enter the studied college intend to enter or advance in the workforce. Multiple research studies have addressed the need for college administrators to identify barriers and solutions to persistence (Hope, 2017; Krug et al., 2016; Mills-Senn, 2016; S. D. Wilson, 2016). The aforementioned research also indicates

that flexible course options could help students juggle commitments and enable students to register for the classes needed for on-time graduation.

Higher education institutions across the country are collecting, managing, and analyzing data that can be used to connect actual course offerings with student course needs (Hanover Research, 2018a). Through this research, I identified barriers to persistence and provided information to help mitigate barriers to persistence among traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses. Accelerated courses may provide a quick path to graduation; however, according to a 2019 class scheduling survey conducted at the study site, 55% of traditional-age students at the studied college prefer the 16-week course modality, and the survey summary does little to explain why. This qualitative study went beyond these students' stated preferences by interviewing them and asking about the barriers to persistence that they experience in online and face-to-face 8-week accelerated courses at the studied college.

The studied college's Academic Solutions Team (AST) collaborates to investigate and mitigate college issues, including student persistence and course completion barriers. Specifically, the AST listens to the campus community and engages experts in the area of student success. The AST includes division chairs, directors of student services and student life, the scheduling team, deans, and vice presidents. The AST has begun investigating alternative scheduling modalities and considering a possible transition from primarily offering 16-week courses to primarily offering accelerated 8-week courses to increase student success. During these discussions, the AST requested age-related data about student preferences for course scheduling using a survey from the Office of Institutional Development. The 2019 class scheduling survey asked traditional-age

students (aged 18–24 years) and nontraditional-age students (aged 25 years or older) about their course modality preferences. The students were asked whether they preferred traditional-length courses (16 weeks) or accelerated 8-week courses. The survey findings indicated that 55% of traditional-age students preferred the 16-week course modality, and 37.5% of the nontraditional-age students preferred the accelerated 8-week block courses.

Further investigation of how traditional-age college students attending the studied college experienced accelerated 8-week face-to-face and online courses may uncover barriers and alternative best practices that address course-taking preferences among traditional-age students. Moreover, additional information may allow the study site's AST to understand how best practices in 16-week courses could mitigate barriers to persistence in accelerated 8-week courses.

Fong et al. (2017) identified 17 factors as barriers to persistence and achievement among community college students. The authors clustered these factors into five categories of existing psychological theories: self-perception, motivation, attribution, self-regulated learning, and anxiety. Fong et al.'s study results revealed a relationship linking motivation and self-perception to student engagement with college faculty and staff members. This finding is significant because students have more control over their motivation and self-perception, impacting their success in college. Fong et al. also collected data on student demographics, such as background and environment; however, students cannot change their current demographics. In contrast, receiving validation from college faculty, advisors, counselors, academic coaches, and other college agents can help motivate students to succeed in college (Rendón, 1994).

In 2017, 5,900,000 students were enrolled in college in the United States. Of those, 37% of 2-year college students were full-time students, and 63% were enrolled part time. Overall, 50% of postsecondary students in the United States attend a 2-year college. Enrollment may increase if community college becomes free, if online education grows, and if higher education meets government and community expectations to increase graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics, n.d.). Higher education administrators both locally and nationally anticipate changing demographics that will result in a more diverse student population. To support the need of students for a flexible and faster pathway to graduation, the study site's administrators have discussed transitioning from a predominately 16-week traditional course-delivery schedule to a primarily 8-week accelerated model of course delivery. This study highlighted what motivates traditional-age college students to select their courses. Specifically, I investigated the barriers to persistence for traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week block courses at the studied college.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore the in-class and out-of-class barriers traditional-age college students experience that impact their motivation to persist in an accelerated 8-week course. Additionally, this study reported on the best practices that supported persistence to course completion despite in-class or out-of-class barriers. I used semistructured interviews and open-ended interview questions to investigate student experiences of barriers to persistence.

Participants

The participant pool for this research consisted of eight traditional-age students. I purposefully selected participants from the study site who also met the selection criteria. The criteria for selection included (a) being a traditional-age college student (aged 18–24 years), (b) having been enrolled at the studied college between 2017–2018 and 2018–2019, (c) having enrolled in 8-week online and face-to-face courses, and (d) having enrolled in 16-week online and face-to-face courses.

Research Questions

This study was guided by three main research questions:

1. What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
2. What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
3. What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

Conceptual Framework

This basic qualitative study used open-ended interview questions grounded in validation theory (Rendón, 1994). This theory, introduced by Rendón (1994), is used to address the issues and backgrounds of low-income students who (a) qualify for needs-based federal Pell Grants (Pell Grant Guide, 2020) and (b) are the first in their families to attend college or are adult students returning to college after being away for some time.

During the original development of validation theory, “validation” was defined as the intentional, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class college agents

(Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). In-class agents could be faculty or student peers, and out-of-class agents could be advisors, other student affairs staff members, family, friends, and student peers. College agents validate students as creators of knowledge and valuable members of the college learning community and foster students' personal development and social adjustment (Rendón, 1994). This study contributes to the use of validation theory by highlighting how traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college experience validation from college agents, contributing to their decision to persist.

Validation theory provides an understanding of the nature of the problem addressed in this study because, according to Rendón et al. (2019), the importance of affirmation, support, and encouragement from in- and out-of-class validating agents (e.g., family members, peers, faculty, student affairs staff members, mentors, coaches, advisors, etc.) is emphasized in validation theory. Validation is an enabling, confirming, and supportive process initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that fosters academic and personal development. When implemented early in a student's college transitions and consistently throughout their college experiences, validation (e.g., motivation) could be key to helping students get involved and believe they can learn and achieve their goals (e.g., persist).

Therefore, validation theory was the most appropriate research tool to guide the development of this basic qualitative study. During early applications of this theory, students were asked when they knew they could be successful in college, and their responses addressed both barriers and support for persistence. Students' doubts about their ability to be successful in college served as barriers to persistence, whereas the

reassuring or validating words spoken by college agents helped students decide to continue with college (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Validation theory was first created to provide a framework that faculty and staff members could implement to empower female students to build agency, affirmation, self-worth, and liberation from past invalidation. More recently, Rendón et al. (2019) determined that even the most vulnerable students would benefit from external validation. According to Garcia and Okhidoi (2015), both external affirmation and internal acknowledgments of self-competence contribute to developing confidence and help to shape student academic success overall. Garcia and Okhidoi found that such affirmation and acknowledgment served as an effective model for helping Latinx students to succeed and graduate; in addition, these best practices help all students to succeed and graduate.

Baber (2018) discussed using validation theory to better understand the validating experiences of underrepresented high school students transitioning to higher education institutions and participating in the nonprofit community-based One Million Degrees college transition program. Baber found that students had had several experiences that shaped their enrollment and persistence decisions. For example, students had had positive experiences that motivated them to persist in community college and feel motivated when their existing strengths were recognized. In addition, students said that the positive interventions began when they enrolled and continued until they graduated.

Validation theory addresses persistence supports and barriers, and the focus of this study was the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in 8-week courses. Application of the validation theory lens may highlight new

opportunities for the studied college's AST to mitigate the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses.

Nature of the Study

I used a basic qualitative design in this study. A qualitative research method was essential to understand study participants' deeper or underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Basic qualitative research is related to social constructivism, meaning knowledge is constructed through human interaction, and individuals create learning through their interactions (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Rubin and Rubin (2011) contended that qualitative methods may be used if research is grounded in the lives (i.e., experiences) of research participants. Ravitch and Carl (2015) supported a sample size as small as one participant when the data collection process includes interviews.

Interviews in this study were semistructured. The audio of the interviews was recorded and transcribed, and transcripts were member checked. I collaborated with a panel of experts familiar with the content to create interview questions that aligned with the research questions. I used probing questions in the interviews to collect responses that were most likely to answer the research questions (Weller et al., 2018). In contrast, Hagaman and Wutich (2017) concluded that 16 or fewer interviews are enough to identify common themes from sites with homogeneous groups. In this research study, I conducted eight interviews using a homogeneous group of traditional-age college students, who shared their stories regarding barriers to persistence in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college. In this basic qualitative study, I addressed the gap in

practice by providing an in-depth understanding of the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week classes.

Definitions

The following terms are used throughout this basic qualitative study.

Accelerated course: An accelerated course, or intensive course, is a fast-paced course that is half as long as a 16-week class, and this course modality requires students to devote more study time to complete assignments (Scott & Conrad, 1992; Serdyukov, 2008). Ground-based/face-to-face and accelerated online courses are presented in fewer than the conventional number of instructional contact hours and for a shorter duration (Ginsberg and Wlodkowski, 2017).

Barriers: Barriers are in-class or out-of-class obstacles that impact student persistence toward graduation (Cruwys et al., 2015).

Generation Z: College students aged 18–24 years at the time of this study are considered to belong to Generation Z (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Generation Z students were born between 1995 and 2010. At the time of this study, these students ranged in age from 10 to 25 years.

In-class barriers: In-class barriers are obstacles that arise from student interactions in class with instructors or student peers.

Nontraditional students: Nontraditional students are college students who are aged 25 years or older.

Out-of-class barriers: Out-of-class barriers are obstacles that arise from student interactions outside class with faculty, advisors, other student affairs staff members, student peers, family, or friends.

Persist: Students who persist return to college the next semester (Barnett, 2011).

Persistence: "A student-centered metric focused on behaviors that indicate continued enrollment. This may or may not indicate ongoing enrollment that fulfills a program of study of the student's educational intent" (Higher Learning Commission, 2019, p.3).

A Southwest community college, the studied college, the study site: Terms used to refer to the college where this study was conducted. These terms are used to protect the anonymity of the college and study participants.

Traditional-age students: Traditional-age students are college students who are 18–24 years of age.

Assumptions

The Southwest community college study site was chosen because of the institution's interest in transitioning to 8-week courses, because of findings from a 2019 class scheduling survey indicating that traditional-age college students preferred 16-week courses to 8-week courses (55% to 23%), and because traditional-age (18–24 years) college students account for more than half of enrollments at the 2-year community college. The first assumption was that all participants would give honest and accurate answers to the interview questions and go out of their way to describe their experiences in detail. Participant honesty was assumed because participation was voluntary. I provided students in the study with an opportunity to review their responses for accuracy and conduct member checking (see Iivari, 2018) before using the interview responses in the study analysis. Moreover, student participants interviewed confirmed that they had the requisite experience of enrollment in 8-week and 16-week face-to-face and online

courses. Before the interviews, I built relationships with the students by sending a letter of consent via email, indicating they could end the interview at any time. During the interviews, which were conducted via the Zoom videoconferencing platform (https://zoom.us), each participant was reminded that they could complete their interview on or off camera and that they would receive a copy of the transcribed interview to ensure their responses were accurate. As a result of the students feeling at ease during the semistructured interviews, they provided in-depth responses to the interview questions and follow-up questions.

I expected that the questions regarding in-class and out-of-class barriers, drawn from Rendón's validation theory (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011), would provide a deeper dive into each student's experiences with barriers to persistence. According to Rendón and Muñoz (2011), college agents—such as faculty advisors, coaches, and counselors—are responsible for starting interactions with students both inside and outside class. Rather than expecting students to ask questions first, validating agents must actively reach out to students to offer guidance, encouragement, and support. This validation makes students stronger by helping them believe in their abilities to study, helping them gain self-worth, and boosting their motivation to persist. The interview questions were written to encourage the students to tell their stories and their experiences with college agents inside and outside 8-week classes. I assumed that the open-ended semistructured questions, derived from my review of the literature and balanced with my experience at the studied college, would be useful in understanding and analyzing student experiences without bias. Selection criteria were used to establish participant eligibility, participant interviews were professionally transcribed, and participants received these professional transcripts to

ensure accuracy before data analysis. Moreover, I do not hold other positions at the college that could have influenced the accuracy of the data collection or the analysis of the data.

Scope and Delimitations

This study took place at a Southwest community college, one of multiple colleges in a community college district in the western United States. The college is in the fastest-growing region of the county. Eight study participants, aged 18–24 years (i.e., Generation Z students), were purposefully selected to ensure that they were similar to those who participated in the 2019 course scheduling survey conducted at the study site. Each student in this study was enrolled at the studied college at the time of the interview. Each student was registered between 2017–2018 and 2018–2019, close to when the class scheduling survey was conducted (during the spring 2019 academic semester) to investigate alternative scheduling modalities. The 2019 class scheduling survey questions provided student feedback to inform college leadership discussions regarding a possible transition from primarily 16-week courses to primarily 8-week courses to improve student persistence and completion.

The class scheduling survey revealed that only 23% of traditional-age college students prefer accelerated 8-week courses. Therefore, the scope of this study was focused on exploring traditional-age student experiences with barriers to persistence inside and outside online and face-to-face accelerated 8-week courses. This focus was deemed important and chosen because college administrators are responsible for identifying barriers to persistence and offering potential solutions to address student needs (Hope, 2017; Krug et al., 2016; Mills-Senn, 2016; S. D. Wilson, 2016).

According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), qualitative researchers should aim for saturation, and they recommend five to 25 study participants. Eight students, four male and four female, participated in this study and shared their experiences with barriers to persistence in accelerated 8-week courses. An audit trail of the traditional-age college students' experiences in 8-week courses was provided to maintain the content's continuity from one participant to another. The audit trail consisted of automated data collection, audio recordings of participant interviews, third party transcription of the recorded interviews, and interview notes.

Because of a lack of the time and resources needed to collect additional data, focus groups, nontraditional students, and dual enrollment students were not included in this study. Focus groups were not required for this study because the students provided detailed responses to the interview questions and follow-up questions. Nontraditional student preferences for 8-week courses were favorable (37.5%) in the original class scheduling survey, whereas traditional-age students were only 23% favorable in their preference for 8-week courses, and 55% instead preferred 16-week courses. Dual enrollment students at the study site are enrolled in college and completing high school courses simultaneously; many are under 18 years of age and would have required parental consent to participate. According to Ross (2020), researchers must secure parental consent for students under the age of 18 years to participate in human research projects. Time and resources did not allow for the additional step of securing parental consent; therefore, dual enrollment students were not included in this study.

Limitations

Study limitations refer to the design or methodology characteristics that impact how study findings will be interpreted (Price & Murnan, 2004). The limitations of this study relate to the validity and reliability of the study, including how the findings can be used at the study site, applied generally, and applied to a gap in practice. The limitations of this study included the following.

Researcher Bias

As a faculty member at the studied college, I am often updated regarding student equity achievement gaps related to low student completion rates. I developed preconceived ideas about what the student participants would name as barriers to persistence (e.g., lack of technology and academic advisor availability). Some of the study participants' responses to the interview questions differed from what I expected. To mitigate this professional bias, I reviewed the interview transcripts, reviewed and reflected on my notes, and used automated data analysis.

Participant Selection

Only traditional-age college students (aged 18–24 years) were included in this study. This student population had shown a lesser preference for 8-week courses.

This study did not include dual enrollment students, many aged 17 years or younger. This was not a limitation that impacted this study. The study goal was to explore barriers to persistence for traditional-age students because they had shown less of a preference for the 8-week course modality in the college's course scheduling preference survey.

Nontraditional college students (age 25 years or order) were not included in this study. This was not a limitation that impacted this study. The study goal was to explore barriers to persistence for traditional-age students, given their low preference for the 8-week course modality.

Generalizability

A potential limitation of the study is its focus on a particular population of students at one particular Southwest community college. However, in as much as the role of community colleges, both public and private, is to meet the academic, financial, and social needs of local communities, the findings of this study are generalizable to all of these colleges that have an additional need to address barriers to persistence in 8-week online and face-to-face courses for traditional-age students.

Data Interpretation

I only examined accelerated 8-week online and face-to-face formats. The findings may provide limited insights for other accelerated course offerings (e.g., 5-week courses offered in the summer or during the regular semester).

Significance

This study addressed a local problem by focusing specifically on the barriers to persistence that exist for traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college. This study provides insight into the experiences of traditional-age students who are enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college, and this insight may be informative to other community colleges.

Carlson (2019) discussed the need for colleges to conduct audits of their operations, including course schedules, and recommended using data about student

persistence, completion, and outcomes to adjust course schedules to offer courses that support student graduation. To this end, insights from the study may enrich the collaboration between senior college leaders, college course schedulers, and faculty as they evaluate the effectiveness of course schedules in supporting student progress toward graduation.

Supporting student persistence to graduation by granting access to alternative course delivery modalities has strong positive implications for social change. Students, students' families, and society benefit when students obtain higher education degrees (Wladis et al., 2018). Students with 2-year degrees tend to earn more than high school graduates, and students with 4-year degrees tend to earn more than those who have only an associate degree (Horowitz, 2018). Furthermore, students with degrees tend to pay more taxes and are more likely to be employed than those with only high school diplomas. For most Americans, earning a college degree is necessary because of economic changes and is a pathway to the middle class (Fischer, 2019; Levin & Garcia, 2018).

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of this study and discussed its purpose. Using a basic qualitative research design, I investigated the in-class and out-of-class barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college. The chapter detailed the problem statement; relevant definitions; the limitations, assumptions, and delimitations of the study; and the significance of the study. Chapter 2 provides a detailed review and analysis of relevant academic, governmental, and professional literature to identify what scholars know about

barriers to persistence for traditional-age students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses and what future researchers still need to address.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This literature review presents the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses. Persistence results from an alignment between a student's motivation, drive, and inspiration and their college's academic qualities and attributes (Bettinger & Long, 2006). The greatest contributing factors to persistence are flexible class schedules and varied delivery methods. When students can enroll in the courses necessary for graduation, they are less vulnerable to attrition. Literature supports the need for college administrators to offer flexible course delivery methods, including 16-week and accelerated 8-week courses (Blackburn, 2019; Hanover Research, 2018a; Huff, 2017).

Moreover, flexible course modalities can ease the burden on students juggling multiple outside commitments as they register for required courses for graduation (Krug et al., 2016; Mills-Senn, 2016). College students must balance their college plans with common commitments, such as work schedules and family responsibilities. Many 1st-year students work in addition to going to school (Choi, 2018). Students work for several reasons; some work to pay tuition and other school-related costs, whereas more advantaged students may choose to work to build future job skills (St. Amour, 2019).

To address the growing number of students who work, researchers have investigated the implementation of accelerated learning, nontraditional course offerings, and flexible programs (Blackburn, 2019; S. D. Wilson, 2016). This literature review examines accelerated courses, defined as 8-week courses, which offer flexibility to support college students' persistence (Jenkins, 2021; Jenkins et al., 2018). Other barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-

week courses are also explored. This literature review examines traditional-age college students, who at the time of this study were also members of Generation Z.

Literature Review Search Strategy

I used a variety of research methods to identify major factors that contribute to persistence and barriers to successful college completion. First, I conducted an in-depth examination of existing scholarly resources, such as ERIC, EBSCOhost, SAGE, Academic Search Premier, ProQuest, Google Scholar, and Education Source. Searching for sources published in the past 5 years prompted a review of content from resources such as *Education Week*, *Community College Enterprise*, *Inside Higher Education*, *Diverse Issues in Higher Education*, *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, *University Business*, the *ASHE Higher Education Report Series*, the *Journal of Higher Education*, the *Journal of College Student Retention*, the *Journal of Educational Psychology*, the *Review of Educational Research*, and the *Community College Review*. In addition, my workforce colleagues recommended that I look at state and national government and nonprofit resources for additional data regarding traditional-age community college students, projections, and policy regarding community college student graduation and success rates. Research within the government and nonprofit spheres led me to also look at websites such as the U.S. Department of Education, National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (and their *Persistence and Retention Report*), American Association of Collegiate Registrars and Admissions Officers, Higher Learning Commission, and Council of Economic Advisers, among others. For example, the U.S. Department of Education data revealed that between 2000 and 2017, 23% of traditional-age college

students were high school completers who enrolled in 2-year institutions within 1 year of graduating high school. The National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) reported that higher education officials are concerned about the 36,000,000 Americans who have attended some college but have not earned a degree. In addition, their annual *Persistence and Retention Report* series examines 1st-year persistence and retention rates for beginning postsecondary students in the United States.

Key Search Terms and Combinations

I used several key terms to ensure a thorough search on persistence as defined in this literature review. I used the following keywords and phrases to identify literature on traditional learners: "traditional-age adult learners," "traditional-age college students," "Generation Z," "post-millennials," and "young adults." I used the following key phrases to identify obstacles to persistence: "barriers to persistence for traditional-age adult learners," "barriers to persistence for traditional-age college students," and "barriers to persistence for Generation Z." I used these key phrases to search for information on adult learning styles: "learning styles of traditional-age adult learners," learning styles of traditional-age college students," and "learning styles of Generation Z."

While seeking more information on flexible course offerings, I used the following key phrases to locate literature related to accelerated learning environments: "8-week courses," "accelerated," "compressed," and "8-week mini-semesters." To identify literature on vulnerability in college attrition, I used the following key phrases: "barriers to persistence for traditional-age adult learners in accelerated learning environments," "barriers to persistence for traditional-age adult learners in accelerated courses," "barriers to persistence for Generation Z in accelerated learning environments," "barriers to

persistence for traditional-age college students in 8-week courses," "barriers to persistence for traditional-age adult learners in 8-week courses," "barriers to persistence for Generation Z students in 8-week courses," "barriers to persistence for traditional-age young adults in compressed college courses," and "barriers to persistence for Generation Z in compressed college courses."

I also reviewed the historical aspects of accelerated courses and their impact on persistence using key phrases such as "the history of accelerated learning and the history of accelerated learning in the United States" to locate literature on this subject. To gain a better understanding of policies, practices, and protocols in higher education, I searched for literature using the following key phrases: "Higher Learning Commission," "standards for college scheduling," "student graduation," "persistence," and "completion."

Lastly, I searched for theorists and theories supporting persistence in higher education using the following key phrases: "persistence theorists and theories," "Rendón, L.," "Sentipensante (Seeing/Thinking) Pedagogy: Educating for Wholeness, Social Justice, and Liberation" (Rendón, 2008), and "Tinto, college student retention theory." These key phrases provided an inclusive, widespread review of existing literature on persistence based on validation theory.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this research project was based on validation theory. Validation theory supports student success by encouraging those who are traditionally marginalized and at risk of attrition. Validation theory was introduced by Rendón (1994) and is defined as "an enabling, confirming, and supportive process

initiated by in- and out-of-class agents that foster academic and interpersonal development" (p. 46). This theory is used to guide research that investigates the experiences of community college students. Validation theory is especially important for low-income, first-generation, and immigrant students; students of color; and international students (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Many traditional-age students at the studied college are first-generation community college students (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Additionally, 75% of students at the studied college are U.S. Pell Grant recipients and are considered low income.

In the almost 3 decades since validation theory was introduced, this theory has been cited in other research studies regarding student retention, transfer, and academic success (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). Validation theory has been widely used by researchers seeking a better understanding of the experiences of college students. For example, Tinto (1997) found that low-income, first-generation students require validating support in and out of class (King et al., 2017; Terenzini et al., 1996). Tinto (1997) also discussed validating support strategies, such as communities comprised of caring faculty, counselors, advisors, family, peers, and professionals. Validation theory places the responsibility of contacting and supporting students on institutional agents such as faculty, advisors, coaches, lab assistants, and counselors. These agents are encouraged to take the initiative to reach out to vulnerable students who may lack the confidence to initiate contact (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011).

Student knowledge and experience can also be used as a learning resource (Fischer, 2019). Funds of knowledge and students' lived experiences should be validated in the curriculum, including students' identities and prior knowledge (Tegos &

Demetriadis, 2017). Using conversational agents, a validating faculty team can provide students with care, encouragement, and support to enhance students' understanding of course content and their overall success. Faculty teams can also provide the information students need to transfer to a 4-year institution and can teach students the academic, emotional, and social skills needed to succeed in and after college (Schreiner and Tobolowsky. 2018; Tinto, 2006). Traditional-age students, who currently consist of members of Generation Z, come to college believing they can change the world and desiring to do so (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Colleges must support these students' can-do attitudes to help students overcome the barriers they may experience (Baber, 2018).

From 2016 to 2021, scholars and practitioners have used validation theory to investigate the experiences of diverse groups of college students. For instance, T. O. Allen (2016) found that Latinx students enrolled in historically Black colleges and universities in Texas benefited from the validating outreach of faculty, advisors, and other college agents. These students were motivated to continue their education when college agents took the initiative and connected with students inside and outside the classroom. This connection was especially helpful during critical incidents and observed behaviors that could have hindered academic and interpersonal validation (T. O. Allen, 2016). Similarly, Zhang (2016) noted that international students enrolled in a community college in Texas benefited from academic advising that was timely and accurate; however, these students struggled to adjust to the community college environment when academic advisor information was not timely or accurate. Corradi et al. (2019) found that minority students in a European higher education setting benefited from a growth mindset and overcame barriers that resulted from students' perceptions that they were at risk and

unable to complete academic work. Institutional agents taught these students the growth mindset concept to help them recognize their potential. The practice of a growth mindset in a validating academic environment enabled students to overcome perceived barriers to academic success.

Other researchers have used validation theory in studies of college students who are English learners (ELs). Garza et al. (2021) explored the linkage between validation and persistence of EL community college students. This research about culturally diverse students in higher education, including ELs Generation 1.5, indicated that validations from college agents make such students feel capable of learning (Rendón, 1994, as cited in Garza et al., 2021, p. 43). Garza et al. found that motivation could come from within or without the school setting. In terms of U.S. higher education norms, both ELs with prior experience in the United States (ELs Generation 1.5) and ELs who are new to the United States (ELs International) face cultural and social contrasts (Bergey, 2018). These students attended high schools in the United States but were born outside the country. Validation is a type of positive relationship that can help EL students achieve their academic pursuits.

Retention theory builds on validation theory by focusing on students' decisions to depart from or persist in college (Tinto, 2008). Retention theory assesses how students' financial resources and academic and emotional skills impact their decisions to persist in college. Retention theory also assesses the readiness level of a college to integrate a student as a valued member and contributor to the campus community (Tinto, 2016). Retention theory preceded validation theory and was used to encourage further research toward an expanded understanding of persistence among low-income and minority

students (Tinto, 2006). Tinto (2006) contended that there was more to learn about student experiences in 2- and 4-year institutions and what colleges and universities are doing to help students overcome barriers to success in higher education. Tinto (2006) cited Rendón and others to expand his findings regarding 1st-year college students' contact with faculty outside the classroom. Tinto (2006) gained information regarding student attrition and drop-out rates primarily through quantitative studies.

Rendón's (1994) research included qualitative methods that emphasized engagement with faculty and other institutional agents inside and outside the classroom as critical for students' sense of belonging. Other researchers echoed the critical need for higher education to support students' sense of belonging (Blackburn, 2019; Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018) by studying students of different genders, races, ethnicities, and income levels who attended both 2- and 4-year institutions. Other research regarding higher education institutions' efforts to retain students focused on the student-focused goal of persisting (Tinto, 2016). In the current study, I primarily used validation theory to highlight invalidating experiences that contribute to barriers to persistence among traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college.

In addition to researchers finding a link between college students' sense of belonging and persistence, researchers found that programming for college students that was structured to instill a sense of hope into the student experience helped students to persist. Baber (2018) stated that traditional-age community college students participating in One Million Degrees, a college and community-sponsored program, found support to persist through barriers and progress toward completion. One Million Degrees is an

emerging nonprofit, community-based program designed to support college students from entrance to completion. The One Million Degrees program presents hope as a critical component of the educational experience that supports college students' growth and development (Baber, 2018). When academic advisors, counselors, tutors, academic coaches, and other college agents displayed initiative and expressed genuine interest in students' success, the students who participated in One Million Degrees could stay on track and focus on academics.

Through this study, I sought to understand the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students and understand what the studied college can do to support the needs of students enrolled in 8-week accelerated courses. This study may provide college agents with more information regarding this student group and the challenges they face in and out of class, and it may highlight the motivating factors that lead to retention and persistence toward graduation (Tinto, 2016).

Literature Review Related to Key Concepts

History and Background of Community Colleges

Community colleges are an American invention arising out of 20th-century economic competition, global competition, and other challenges (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). The first community college, Joliet Junior College, was established in 1901 in Illinois. These colleges are usually publicly funded and exist in communities where potential students live. The mission of community colleges is to be an inclusive place where all who want to learn may do so regardless of wealth, heritage, or previous academic experience (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019).

The purpose of community colleges is to enhance the quality of living for all communities (Fong et al., 2017). Historically, these higher education institutions were positioned to influence their surrounding communities. These institutions aim to provide an inclusive culture of learning, attract the underserved citizens of the community, and provide access and opportunity for the pursuit of postsecondary education (Baber, 2018). Students can gain entrance to community colleges regardless of financial status, academic preparation, or family and work responsibilities. Additionally, access, equity, and diversity are critical to the mission of the community college system for full-time- and part-time-working students of all ages (McPherson & Arbelo Marrero, 2021). The success of community college students is critical when considering issues of equity and diversity in higher education.

Community colleges started as an extension of public high schools (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). These colleges evolved from programs based in high schools, such as teacher institutes, manual and vocational education divisions, and citizenship schools (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019; The Community College Research Center, n.d.). At the same time, small private colleges and university leaders created a higher education model of smaller class sizes and enhanced student–faculty relationships. These private institutions included academics and extracurricular activities (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). The combined models of small private colleges and early community colleges resulted in the community college model of today. These programs meet the academic, financial, and social needs of local communities.

Currently, community colleges offer academics and a variety of student activities. These activities may include athletic teams, student newspapers, government, thespian societies, and orchestras (American Association of Community Colleges, 2019). Community colleges create opportunities to make higher education available to the maximum number of people at more than 1,000 colleges in the United States. Each year, community colleges prepare at least 12,000,000 students for pathways that lead to transfer to a 4-year institution or the workforce (Jenkins et al., 2018). In addition to smaller classes, the increased engagement with instructors, affordability, and flexibility in course offerings within community colleges attract many college students. The ability to take classes aligned with one's schedule appeals to many students who have work and family responsibilities (S. D. Wilson, 2016). Community colleges appear to be ideal for today's needs, providing local pipelines to 4-year universities for more predictable time frames. These reasons explain increased enrollment and completion at community colleges (Juszkiewicz, 2020; Pennamon, 2019).

History and Background of Accelerated Courses

Demographic changes and the diversity of the student population prompted colleges and universities to explore and eventually expand course offerings (Scott & Conrad, 1992). This led to the expansion of accelerated courses, or intensive courses, based on research regarding effective educational outcomes and faculty–student engagement in existing course delivery formats. Research explored course delivery formats in terms of (a) time and learning values, (b) course requirements and practices in a traditional format, (c) course requirements and practices in intensive formats, (d) student attitudes toward intensive formats, and (e) faculty members' attitudes toward

intensive formats (Scott & Conrad, 1992). Scott and Conrad (1992) concluded that there is no significant difference between learning in an intensive course and learning in a traditional-length course; however, the authors posited that additional study is needed to determine (a) how students experience intensive courses differently than courses in traditional scheduling formats and (b) the factors that contribute to high-quality intensive course experiences.

St. Amour (2020) found that, generally, increased learning time could lead to increased learning; however, other factors must be considered. These factors include quality of instruction, student college readiness, amount of productive classroom time, and the environment both in class and at home. In addition, St. Amour's (2020) research revealed differences in course requirements and practices in accelerated versus traditional modalities. St. Amour (2020) found that faculty were less likely to cover material in depth, lecture, use a standard textbook, assign term papers, and use tests and quizzes to determine semester grades in an accelerated course. Instead, faculty teaching accelerated courses were more likely to use group discussions, individual and small-group projects, experiential learning, and off-campus activities and assignments.

In other studies, student attitudes toward intensive courses were both favorable and unfavorable (Colclasure et al., 2018; Scott & Conrad, 1992). Students were favorable toward intensive courses in terms of convenience and efficiency, concentrated and uninterrupted study, and the interest and motivation these courses inspire. In contrast, students expressed less favorable attitudes toward intensive courses due to the time constraints, stress, and fatigue they experienced. Moreover, Scott and Conrad (1992) provided insights into faculty as contributors to students' favorable or unfavorable

attitudes toward accelerated courses. They found that faculty attitudes toward accelerated courses often conflict. Most faculty are committed to supporting student demand for accelerated courses, yet they are reluctant to volunteer to teach the labor-intensive accelerated courses. Scott and Conrad concluded by listing more areas that must be explored regarding ongoing accelerated versus traditional course delivery.

Walsh et al. (2019) reviewed 21 empirical studies that were (a) conducted in higher education, (b) focused on traditional undergraduate or graduate students, and (c) contrasted full-semester versus condensed courses in some way. The data revealed several considerations that help to explain the mixed research findings that some teachers and students prefer condensed (summer/5-week) courses, but other teachers and students prefer traditional courses. These considerations are divided into three categories: course length, course logistics (e.g., teacher, class size, academic period, etc.), and the metrics used to compare the two formats (Walsh et al., 2019). This study concluded with recommendations for additional exploration regarding ongoing teacher and student perspectives and experiences regarding condensed/accelerated versus traditional course delivery.

In another study, Daniel (2000, as cited in M. G. Allen & Voytek, 2017) examined the benefits and drawbacks of shortened courses across disciplines in a comprehensive assessment. The research revealed that compressed courses help students and professors alike by providing convenience while retaining high-quality learning. M. G. Allen and Voytek (2017) added to the existing research and explored the perceptions of occupational therapy students and faculty regarding compressed format courses. This study concluded that it is worth looking at the following items when

considering the compressed course format: (a) determining what curricula content is most suited, (b) identifying ways to ensure that students are not “short-changed” in their contact hours and content, and (c) making sure that faculty are experienced instructors who have previously taught the topic and are the best candidates to teach in the condensed course format.

Leaders of some colleges and universities have engaged in ensuring that compressed courses provide necessary instructional minutes or credit hours, also known as Carnegie units (McMillan & Barber, 2020). Higher education leaders used federal, state, and Higher Learning Commission policies and definitions of standard Carnegie units of contact time needed for traditional courses to comply with seat-time requirements. Additionally, some colleges have transitioned their academic calendars from traditional semesters to accelerated minisemester to support student progress toward degree completion (Krug et al., 2016). The minisemester model allows full-time students to take two accelerated courses each 7-week minisemester instead of four or five courses during a traditional semester (Blackburn, 2019).

The demand for flexible and shorter degree pathways and decreased costs to attend and complete college continues to provide a critical need. Accelerated courses are one way this need is being met (Blackburn, 2019; Krug et al., 2016; Mintz, 2020). Faculty and administrators are encouraged to transform the college experience into a new normal that could increase access to and reduce the cost of higher education (Carey, 2015). As colleges transform the student experience and meet demands for accelerated course options, colleges find themselves competing for student enrollment (Juszkiewicz, 2017). Colleges and universities will need to meet the needs of students by offering

compressed courses that are consistent with Higher Learning Commission guidelines. According to the Higher Learning Commission (n.d.), colleges and universities must be able to match student learning experiences with semesters. Colleges using the semester system and semester credit hours must align the lengths of their courses and programs to those of similar programs found in accredited higher education institutions (McMillan & Barber, 2020). Tuition and program-specific costs, length, and objectives must also be justified and consistent with those of other accredited institutions. Lastly, credit hours assigned to accelerated courses must be consistent with higher education best practices so that institutions receiving federal financial aid (Title IV) meet the federal definition of the credit hour, as written in federal regulations and included in the Higher Learning Commission's guidebook.

Institutional Practices

Students who cannot access courses are highly likely to drop out. Higher education scholars are concerned about the 36,000,000 Americans who have attended some college but have not earned a degree and are no longer enrolled at any institution (National Student Clearinghouse Research Center, 2017). The magnitude of this loss of potential students points to barriers related to student persistence (Rendón, 2011). Colleges have been cautioned to consider internal barriers to student success and identify institutional barriers to retention. There are multiple institutional barriers to student success. Some of the barriers include: (a) institutions are unprepared for the diverse student populations, (b)degree requirements poorly described, (c) not offering needed courses, (d) unnecessary registration holds, (e) inappropriate placement of transfer credits, and (f) not recommending students complete 30 hours a year (Abele, 2021; Donnachie, 2017). A

National Student Clearinghouse Research Center (2017) report on term enrollments identified institutional barriers to student success that result in students' decisions to drop out of college. Some students drop out because of financial issues, such as losing parental support after job loss. Other students leave college because of pregnancy, because of need to care for a loved one, or because they never really wanted to attend college in the first place (Bailey, 2017; Irwin et al., 2021). Faculty and college staff members who can support student success inside and outside class may help students overcome these barriers to persistence.

Many college students enter college with confidence; however, students who encounter barriers experience weakened resolve that impacts their success, particularly in their 1st year. To increase student motivation, colleges must provide effective support to meet the needs of students from enrollment to graduation (Bailey, 2017; Tinto, 2016). When 1st-year students need to make persistence decisions, college agents—such as faculty, advisors, counselors, mentors, and coaches—are needed to offer support (Carlson, 2018; Bailey, 2017). It is important to note that FTE increases when support is offered. Although institutions may have planned for the additional tuition revenue of growing enrollments, they may not have prepared for the increased diversity of the student body and these students' unique needs (Casanova et al., 2018).

Academic Bottlenecks

Academic bottlenecks are barriers to student persistence that impede progress toward graduation. Academic bottlenecks include educational credentials, test scores, and broad-based introductory or general education course requirements. Bottlenecks can also include highly enrolled lower division and undergraduate courses (Cruwys et al., 2015).

Academic bottlenecks result in additional costs to institutions. These costs may include expenses to accommodate increased enrollment, such as paying for additional instructors and classroom space (Cruwys et al., 2015). Bottlenecks change with every shift in student demographics, degree requirements, enrollment numbers, and trends in students' majors and career interests (Cruwys et al., 2015).

Bottlenecks often occur when a student must take a developmental course to gain access to college-level courses. Some of the most detrimental bottlenecks are remedial course requirements that students must fulfill before enrolling in credit-bearing classes, thus preventing students from progressing as planned (Smith, 2016). The fact that low-income students, the majority of whom are students of color, are more likely to be enrolled in remedial courses does not help matters. Because remedial education classes do not contribute toward the credits required for graduation, they may discourage rather than promote graduation (Banks & Dohy, 2019). Furthermore, students are frequently stalled by a sequence of developmental education courses, and many community college students are tested and advised into development courses (Bailey, 2017). Too many students do not complete the assigned sequence of courses, leading them to drop out when they do not achieve other desired outcomes (S. D. Wilson, 2016). Another common academic bottleneck occurs when a student enrolls 1–2 days before the 1st day of class or even after the first class meets. Research shows that these students are not likely to persist from term to term (S. D. Wilson, 2016). Identifying and resolving bottlenecks could alleviate barriers to student persistence and degree completion.

Benefits and Drawbacks of Accelerated Courses

The rationale for presenting accelerated courses and flexibility in course offerings is so that students can persist and make progress toward graduation (Holzweiss et al., 2019). However, the literature reveals both support for and objections against accelerated courses. Scholars who advocate for accelerated courses posit that students who can take accelerated courses procrastinate less, exhibit better concentration, and are less likely to be absent or withdraw from courses. Scholars who object to compressed courses contend that (a) students are somewhat apprehensive about the amount of material covered in a shorter time, (b) students and faculty can become fatigued both mentally and physically, (c) students may think they do not have enough time to master the material, (d) students feel they have less study time, and € students are concerned about falling behind in class (Holzweiss et al., 2019).

A faculty focus group at the studied college was conducted to better understand faculty perceptions of teaching in condensed courses (Walsh et al., 2019). In the focus group, professors compared the two course models, accelerated and traditional, with respect to the challenges and possibilities they provide, the stress levels connected with them, and the precise changes faculty members made to their courses. Focus group instructors generally perceived condensed summer courses positively. They shared that the benefits of the condensed summer courses included increased student–instructor interaction, increased student time on task (Karweit, 1984), fewer competing distractions for faculty and students, and reduced stress levels during the summer semester as a result of fewer non-teaching-related commitments. On the other hand, faculty from the focus group responded that the challenges of the condensed summer courses versus the 16-

week fall semester courses included increased time pressure for instructors to give assessments, factor grades, and prepare for class. Interestingly, in another study, Thornton et al. (2017) posited that there may be a slight increase in learning associated with accelerated classes, which might improve overall graduation rates.

In 2018, the average college graduation rate after 3 years of enrollment was 30% in 2-year institutions in the United States (Fulton, 2019). This percentage may result from students taking courses they do not need and starting college without a chosen degree or career path, which can derail or delay students from completing a college credential (Fulton, 2019; Thornton et al., 2017). In response, some states have implemented or considered implementing a guided pathways strategy to help students complete degree programs. Guided pathways usually include structured course plans that limit debt, and the model provides intensive support services that could help to minimize obstacles to degree completion (Fulton, 2019). For example, states have passed legislation establishing guided pathways as a comprehensive approach to improving timely completion at 2- and 4-year higher education institutions. The guided pathways program should include majors organized by semester to foster on-time completion. Additionally, higher education institutions should prioritize proactive advising and guarantee that required courses will be available when students need them (Dumke et al., 2018). Accelerated courses are a viable option for ensuring timely graduation and should be considered as a guided pathways program component.

All students may be more successful in an 8-week accelerated course if they possess the emotional intelligence needed to succeed (Fong et al., 2017; A. W. Lo et al., 2016). High school students who enter college courses with socioemotional skills are

more likely to successfully meet the challenges of college and much more likely to make decisions to continue enrollment (Fong et al., 2017). Students' skill sets for accelerated online classes may also support persistence and progress toward degree completion. This is true for students of any age in accelerated and traditional course formats (Taylor, 2015).

Administrators have discussed the benefits of offering compressed courses delivered in fewer than 16 weeks but no less than 3 or 4 weeks; however, Krug et al.'s (2016) survey of 966 students revealed potential barriers to persistence in the 8-week course model. The identified barriers included the amount of material covered in the courses with fewer weeks and not having time to understand and then apply material. Students also cited a lack of discipline and an absence of motivation to complete work promptly. In another study, students noted mental and physical fatigue and stress resulting from the amount of time required to master the material with less study time, which led them to fall behind in class (Holzweiss et al., 2019). Students enrolled in accelerated courses were shown to experience barriers to persistence if they could not overcome the pressure that accompanies multiple time commitments.

Course Scheduling

Some of the greatest barriers to persistence are inflexible course offerings and rigid class schedules. The course scheduling process at the studied college results from synchronization between students, faculty, and administrators. However, the scheduling process is manual and began more than 20 years ago. The current schedule, as noted in the studied college's 2019 class scheduling survey, rolls over from fall to fall, spring to spring, and summer to summer with limited variation. Flexible course modalities are a

critical part of the studied college's AST discussion on best practices to meet students' needs.

Colleges and universities across the nation are establishing or enhancing best practices for support of student persistence and retention (Hanover Research, 2018b). Some institutions use administrative systems and data analysis tools to orchestrate the needs of students, the preferences of faculty, and the availability of campus classrooms and labs to create course schedules (Mills-Senn, 2016). This method is used more by registrars and schedulers to add flexibility to the college course schedule (Smith, 2016).

Community colleges are assessing ways to implement flexible structural techniques to change course sequencing, and using accelerated courses is one of the modalities being considered (Reed, 2017; Mills-Senn, 2016). Accelerated, compact, abbreviated, intense, condensed, or short-term courses help students who must work and attend college (Barhoum, 2018). Students who face barriers to degree completion benefit from these types of accelerated options to help manage their busy lives. Course scheduling applications can be programmed to choose both 16-week and 8-week courses for a single semester schedule (Hanover Research, 2018a). The software schedules courses, but it also helps identify academic scheduling bottlenecks. Moreover, scheduling software is more efficient than a manual system, thus decreasing the time registrars spend using a manual system (Blackburn, 2019; Mills-Senn, 2016; Smith, 2016).

Colleges across the country are considering changing their course offerings to include accelerated courses (McMurtrie, 2020; Krug et al., 2016), a change that would be especially helpful for students required to take developmental courses before taking classes for college credit. The accelerated 8-week format helps reduce the time students

need to complete developmental courses and begin the courses needed to complete their degree programs.

Institutional Supports—Student Success Programs

General

Colleges evaluate policies to support students' progress toward their academic goals (A. W. Lo et al., 2016; Tinto, 2012). Colleges and universities impact student success by implementing programming, policies, practices, and factors that support persistence. Some factors that support persistence include expectations, support, involvement, and feedback (A. W. Lo et al., 2016). By improving these four college-environment conditions, colleges can influence students' experiences and decisions to remain enrolled.

Academic Advising

Expectations for degree completion are developed in cooperation with higher education academic advisors. Academic advisors play a crucial role in helping students to participate in particular activities that improve engagement with the academic setting. The objective of intrusive outreach programs is to see a considerable improvement in 1st-year student retention as a result of intrusive academic advising interventions (Helm et al., 2018), Timely and accurate information from academic advisors is critical to student success (Bailey, 2017; Uddin & Johnson, 2019). Limited resources have contributed to community colleges' inability to provide comprehensive advising to all students. Thus, students may have difficulty navigating higher education institutions (Bailey, 2017). High advisor–student ratios can hinder persistence, especially when students do not meet regularly with their advisors or only meet for brief periods (Gordon, 2019). Decreased

time with an advisor can lead to deficient information and lack of encouragement, decreasing a student's motivation. Conversely, high engagement between academic advisors and students can provide college students with hope and help them achieve their goals.

Advisors' perceptions of traditional-age college students may lead to validation or invalidation of students' experiences. Expressing doubt and predicting deficiency to a student before enrolling them in an accelerated 8-week course could impede the student's progress toward graduation. Prior research has confirmed the role of academic advisors in continued enrollment and drop-out prevention (Jenkins et al., 2018; Vianden, 2016).

Colleges recognize the need for additional student guides to help students meet their academic and career goals. Many colleges have applied for grants to hire student success coaches and advisors to meet this need (Bailey, 2017). Academic advisors and coaches can also help monitor students from registration to graduation, which may support persistence and success. Without these critical staff members, students are left to navigate college independently, which could be a barrier to persistence (Bailey, 2017). College students need the help of academic advisors to persist and graduate (Zarges et al., 2018) because advisors can provide timely and accurate information and support student success. Without the support of their advisors, students may become disillusioned, which could become a barrier to persistence.

Advisors are responsible for developing the whole student intellectually, personally, and socially; this is a stated goal of many higher education institutions (Gordon, 2019). Some colleges have been slow to implement this advising model, and this failure may explain student dissatisfaction with academic advising at the studied

college (Gordon, 2019). When advisor loads are unrealistic, the root of the problem must be addressed. Advice given in a crowded environment is not advice at all; it is a clerical task. Both students and advisors may find this to be a frustrating experience (Gordon, 2019). When student unhappiness and attrition data point to the necessity and usefulness of increased one-on-one student engagement and lighter advising loads, administrators are frequently persuaded to take decisive action (Gordon, 2019).

College mentoring programs may include advisors and are always a part of a college's student affairs organization. Advisors within mentoring programs are also referred to as "mentors," "coaches," or "student-success coaches" (Jenkins et al., 2018). The advisors want to ensure college students persist and complete their degree programs. Some colleges have reengineered their student advising systems to ensure advisors engage with students before students attend their first college courses. Once a student has selected a program of study, they are assigned a student-success coach to keep them on the path to completion (Waiwaiole & Elston, 2017). This form of student engagement is intended to positively impact the student experience. Student-success coaches and advisors monitor student progress from before students enter college until they complete their selected programs of study. It is believed that advisor support can mitigate the negative impacts of unforeseen barriers and may help students decide to persist toward degree completion.

Barriers to Student Persistence

A barrier to persistence is set in motion each time a community college student completes fewer than 15 credits per semester. Completing less than 15 credits in a semester places a student at risk of not earning an associate degree within 2 years

(Cruwys et al., 2015). Since 2013, reformers, state leaders, and the academic advising community have partnered to create campus-wide, on-time completion campaigns such as 15 to Finish (Waiwaiole & Elston, 2017). According to the National Student Clearinghouse Research Center's (2022) update on transfer students in the spring of 2021, national data reveals that after 4 years of stability, the 1st-year persistence rate dropped dramatically in 2020. The overall persistence rate for college students beginning in fall 2019 fell 2 percentage points to 73.9%, the lowest level since 2012. Of all the institution sectors, community colleges saw the largest fall in persistence rates over the previous year, a decrease of 3.5 percentage points, down to 58.5%. Because of these concerning trends, academic advisors share the 15 to Finish information with students so that students will remain on track to complete their degrees as planned for graduation.

The research implications highlight the need for more targeted and situated assessments of power and practice in relation to college readiness and hurdles. Making practices explicit in higher education classrooms is one of the consequences of practice and policy (Convertino & Mein, 2020). For example, faculty development, 1st-year programming, and other types of institutional support for Latinx students can address explicit practices. Given the importance of the college transition process, such interventions can play an important and necessary role in extending the modest rise in Latinx students,' and all students,' college enrollment to degree completion.

Students experience barriers to persistence in accelerated courses when they lack the motivation to study independently without being directed to do so by instructors (M. A. Lo et al., 2018). Students may also decide not to persist if they lack time management skills (M. A. Lo et al., 2018). Barriers exist for students without the skills

needed to complete an accelerated course; these skills include time management, intrinsic motivation, and the ability to seek help when needed (M. A. Lo et al., 2018). Faculty and student engagement are important for traditional-age students and using synchronous sessions in accelerated course design and delivery enhances student success (M. A. Lo et al., 2018).

Barriers to Persistence in Accelerated Courses

Eight week face-to-face and online courses are not preferred by traditional aged students, but are preferred by student 25 years as revealed in the 2019 course scheduling survey conducted at the study college. Similar to the findings in the study college survey, Cruwys et al. (2015) found that older students were more willing to enroll in compressed and online courses. students were more confident that they could successfully manage their time and complete 100- and 200-level courses. These students were less confident that they would be successful in 8-week compressed formatted courses at the 300-level courses and above due to the rigor of the courses (Cruwys et al., 2015).

Researchers identify three impacts on student persistence for students transitioning to accelerated college courses: financial aid, faculty engagement, and fear of failure (Cruwys et al., 2015). Regarding financial aid, one advantage of 8-week courses in the course schedule is that it allows a student to drop a course in the first 8-week session and enroll in another course in the second 8-week session. The option to complete two compressed sessions during a traditional 16-week semester helps students avoid negative impacts on veterans' benefits or other financial aid (Pell Grant Guide, 2020).

Consistent and planned instructor engagement with students is another important aspect of a traditional college course and is more critical in an accelerated course. Due to

the time constraints in 8-week courses, instructors must intentionally deepen connections and overall engagement with students. Lack of faculty–student engagement and students' lack of confidence about their ability to master the material in the compressed 8-week course could lead students to doubt their ability to persist. Students concerned with failing accelerated courses because of the pace, time constraints, or content could face barriers to persistence (Blackburn, 2019). One of the most critical factors that creates barriers to degree completion is the readiness of students to take college-level courses.

Precollege Readiness—Developmental Courses

Students tend to drop out of college because they lack readiness for college-level classes and need to complete developmental courses (S. D. Wilson, 2016). Prior studies revealed that multicourse and multisemester developmental education sequences undermine student success (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). To mitigate the barriers to persistence posed by the need to take developmental courses, colleges have experimented with ensuring that students enroll in at least one credit-level course in their degree pathway in the first semester of college. Barnett (2018) asserted that high school graduation standards are not aligned with college entry standards, and many students who are 18–19 years of age are not college ready. These high school graduates must complete developmental courses upon entry into community college.

Students face multiple opportunities to drop out, known as "exponential attrition" (Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018; Rodriguez-Muñiz et al., 2019). The irony of exponential attrition is that developmental education courses may benefit students; however, the required development courses tend to negate the intended benefit (Coalition of Urban Serving Universities & Association of Public Land-Grant Universities, 2016).

The result is that students become discouraged and consider the benefit of being enrolled in college against dropping out of college and entering the workforce (Casanova et al., 2018). Some institutions have developed transitional courses to help students new to college build the skills needed to prepare for college-level, credit-bearing courses before entering college. New college students, parents, college administrators, and faculty are keenly aware of the tragedy of underprepared students. Mardock-Uman (2018) found that community colleges are moving away from traditional placement testing for developmental education and toward assessing college preparedness using high school data. A critical element to the integration of this process shift is faculty acceptance.

Faculty

A college's faculty is a pivotal resource around which the process and outcomes of postsecondary education revolve (Busteed, 2019; St. Amour, 2020). It is the faculty that often determines curriculum content, student performance standards, and the quality of students' preparation for careers. Faculty members perform research and development work upon which U.S. technological and economic advancement depends (Morris, 2016). Through their public service activities, faculty contribute to society; thus, it is essential to understand who faculty are and what they do.

A comprehensive study of postsecondary faculty is published annually: The National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (2018) reported that faculty are predominately White men; many are privileged, and most are committed to the concept of giving back. As time goes on, faculty members' experiences tend to be increasingly different from those of the students in their classes. Given that racial and ethnic minorities will make up the majority of the U.S. population by the 2050s (Alba, 2018), faculty and staff members

must develop a level of cultural competence to effectively provide all students with a well-rounded classroom learning experience suitable for an increasingly diverse workforce (Hutchins & Goldstein Hode, 2021).

Some faculty continue to be critical to higher education efforts to increase retention and support persistence (Tinto, 2016). Most college agents, faculty, staff members, and administrators are fully engaged in ensuring they are doing everything possible to retain students and increase persistence. Faculty must understand the characteristics of all students and their generational characteristics.

Because online educational settings lack face-to-face interactions, faculty presence and caring behaviors are barriers in such settings. Moreover, faculty teaching accelerated online courses of 8 weeks or less may encounter extra challenges resulting from the abbreviated period (Zajac & Lane, 2020). For example, the Zajac and Lane (2020) study of post licensure nursing students' perceptions of faculty presence and caring behaviors in accelerated online nursing courses developed suggestions and implementation techniques to improve the social presence and caring behaviors of instructors teaching accelerated online courses.

Generation Z—Characteristics, Learning Preferences, and Skills

Generation Z students are those born between 1995 and 2010. Between 2000 and 2017, 23% of traditional-age college students were high school completers who enrolled in 2-year institutions within 1 year of graduating high school (Mohr & Mohr, 2017). Generation Z students currently make up the largest generational group of community college students at the studied college.

Generation Z students tend to be intrinsically motivated, be driven to succeed (Seemiller et al., 2019), and prefer logic-based learning. These students also prefer intrapersonal learning (Seemiller et al., 2019), applied and hands-on experiences, and learning through words and recognition. Generation Z students are known to be loyal, honest, kind, fair, and open-minded. They want to positively impact others and possess good judgment (Parker & Ifielnik, 2020; Seemiller et al., 2019). Generation Z students do not want to let anyone down, and they advocate for what they believe. These students are tolerant of, thoughtful about, compassionate toward, and cooperative with those from diverse backgrounds (Higher Education Research Institute, 2017). Generation Z students are digital natives, meaning they grew up with swipe screens, video messaging, and texting. These students grew up online, where information is always available. Most Generation Z students have immediate access to information through mobile and tablet devices. Generation Z students are also masters of social media and are known for expressing themselves in their own style (Hanover Research, 2018a; Parker & Ifielnik, 2020).

Generation Z students describe themselves as lacking vision, inspiration, and creativity, and they do not prefer to take the lead in groups. However, Generation Z students also have a strong desire to do well on projects and tasks and must feel accomplished (Seemiller et al., 2019). To accommodate Generation Z students, faculty can adapt larger assignments into smaller parts so that students experience success as they progress. Generation Z students have an intrapersonal approach to learning, which differs drastically from the teamwork-oriented and collaborative approach of millennials, yet Generation Z students do value collaborative group work with other students.

Instructors must consider Generation Z students' preference for intrapersonal learning when designing group experiences. Generation Z students view peers and instructors as valuable resources and enjoy having the option to collaborate with them on their own terms, often after they have had a chance to think through a concept, problem, or project on their own (Seemiller and Grace, 2017).

To meet the needs of Generation Z students, college agents should know who these students are and what motivates them to persist. At the studied college, the leadership team is considering transitioning to predominantly 8-week online and face-to-face courses. The leadership team believes, based on the 2019 class scheduling survey, that 8-week courses will provide a faster path to credential completion for Generation Z students. On the surface, accelerated courses could allow students to complete degrees in less time than required for traditional courses; however, persistence and completion rates in accelerated courses remain low. Fifty-five percent of Generation Z students at the studied college responded in the class scheduling survey that they preferred traditional-length courses.

Summary

Chapter 2 provided a concise summary of the major themes related to barriers to persistence in accelerated 8-week courses for traditional-age students. This chapter summarized literature related to Rendón's (1994) validation theory, influenced by earlier student development and persistence research from Tinto (2006, 2012, 2016). More recent researchers—such as T. O. Allen (2016), Zhang (2016), Corradi et al. (2019), and Garcia and Okhidoi (2015)—have studied the in-class and out-of-class application of

validation theory to help diverse student populations both nationally and internationally to overcome barriers to persistence.

More recent researchers, such as Baber (2018), explored the impact of validating experiences of underrepresented high school students transitioning to higher education institutions. For example, Corradi et al. (2019) found that minority students enrolled in a European higher education setting overcame barriers and benefited from a growth mindset (Hallett et al., 2020). Corradi et al. used validation theory to investigate how comprehensive college transition programs might provide academically validating experiences for underprivileged students, many of whom are first-generation and racially minoritized (King et al., 2017). The chapter presented student and institutional issues that are barriers to student persistence and some options to overcome those barriers. Chapter 3 presents this basic qualitative study's research design, methodology, and data collection and analysis methods.

Chapter 3: Research Method

This basic qualitative study aimed to explore the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses offered at a Southwest community college (the study site). This chapter describes the research and design, the role of the researcher, the methodology, and the procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection. The final sections of this chapter address the study's data analysis methods, trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

Research Design and Rationale

I used a qualitative research design method to respond to the following research questions:

1. What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
2. What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
3. What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

I used semistructured interviews and open-ended interview questions to understand how traditional-age students interpret and attribute meaning to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Specifically, I used interview questions to explore the experiences of student participants in their environment. Merriam (2012) supported the usefulness of a basic qualitative design for investigation and understanding of the views of study participants. In this study, I used a qualitative research design to identify experiences that support or do not support the needs of traditional-age students at

the studied college. The study site is a local community college at which students enroll in and attend accelerated 8-week courses.

Role of the Researcher

As the researcher conducting this qualitative study, I collected student participants' voluntary and informed consent to participate. I protected confidentiality and accurately recorded and analyzed interview participants' experiences regarding barriers to persistence while enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college. To understand the student experience, it was critical to gain the trust and respect of the interview participants (Karagiozis, 2018). I treated the interview participants with respect rather than as only subjects of a study, which increased participants' trust in the interview process and allowed participants to share more in-depth experiences of barriers to persistence. I am a faculty member at the studied college; however, to minimize bias and risk, I used the selection criteria to determine participant eligibility, professionally transcribed the interview transcripts, and asked participants to review the transcripts of their interviews for accuracy before data analysis. I did not hold other positions at the college that would impact the validity of the data collection or data analysis processes.

Methodology

Qualitative research provides an in-depth, intricate, and detailed understanding of meanings, actions, nonobservable and observable phenomena, attitudes, intentions, and behaviors, which are well served by naturalistic inquiry (Cohen et al., 2018). Basic qualitative studies are the most common kind in education because the qualitative research method provides the structure needed to determine how students interpret their experiences and the meaning they assign to each experience (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

Qualitative research is a dynamic, systematic, and engaged process of planning for depth, rigor, and the contextualization of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The following sections describe the method and design details of this study: (a) Participant Selection; (b) Instrumentation; (c) Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection; (d) Data Analysis; and (e) Data Management.

Participant Selection

Population and Selection Criteria

Traditional-age students made up the study population because the aim of the study was to explore the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students. Participants were purposefully selected from the studied college and met the selection criteria by being: (a) traditional-age college students (ages 18–24 years), (b) students enrolled at the studied college between 2017–2018 and 2018–2019, (c) students who enrolled in 8-week online and face-to-face courses, and (d) students who enrolled in 16-week online and face-to-face courses. The student participant pool for this research consisted of eight traditional-age students (four male and four female students) who had enrolled in both traditional 16-week courses and accelerated 8-week courses delivered in face-to-face and online formats. Each participant received a $10 Visa gift card after completing the face-to-face interview.

Setting

The study was conducted at a Southwest community college that is one of multiple colleges in a community college district in the western United States. Since opening in 1992, the studied college has, according to its website, worked to create a sense of place that expresses the historical and cultural values of the surrounding

communities while providing students with meaningful and engaging learning environments. Located in the fastest-growing region of the county, the studied college enrolls approximately 9,000 students annually. The studied college is also a Hispanic-serving institution and minority-serving institution, which means the student population is made up of at least 25% Hispanic students and 25% minority students, respectively. The local college demographics—such as the FTE, ages, and other data regarding the student body—include the following: 75% are traditional-age students (ages 18–24 years), 69% of students are first-generation, 66% of students attend part time, 34% of students attend full time, 52% of students are Pell Grant recipients, 59% of students are female, 55% of students are Hispanic (Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2018), 48% of students are university transfers, and 22% of students are workforce transfers. According to the college's online dashboard at the time of the study, the average age of students at the studied college is 23 years. These students belong to Generation Z.

Sampling Strategy

I used a purposeful sampling strategy to select participants for the study. Other names for this sampling method are "purposive sampling" and "selective sampling." Purposeful sampling was advantageous because it allowed me to recruit participants who could provide (a) more information about their experiences with barriers to persistence in 8-week accelerated classes and (b) in-depth and detailed information about this phenomenon overall.

Relationship Between Saturation and Sample Size

The relationship between the desired sample size and saturation can be viewed in a cultural context. The participants provided their experiences regarding barriers to persistence when enrolled in accelerated 8-week classes at the studied college. Saturation can be achieved with a smaller sample size because of the participants' shared experiences (Creswell, 1998; Levitt et al., 2018; Ravitch & Carl, 2015). According to Creswell (1998) and Levitt et al. (2018), qualitative research can be conducted with between five and 30 interviews, especially for grounded theory studies. Marshall (1996), states, "An appropriate sample size for a qualitative study is one that adequately answers the research question". More recently, Weller et al. (2018), finds that saturation may be achieved when the in-depth meaning from participant experiences is identified. Saturation was achieved based on the study participants' salient ideas and common themes.

Instrumentation

I used semistructured interviews as the instrumentation for this study (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The semistructured interviews involved asking predetermined and written questions (see Appendix A and Appendix B) during each interview to capture data and yield content-rich responses from the participants. In addition to the written interview questions, I used prewritten follow-up probing questions to ensure uniformity in order to better understand responses to common themes during data analysis (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The intent of the interview questions was to uncover rich responses regarding barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week classes at the studied college.

The interview questions (see Appendix A and Appendix B) were developed in collaboration with a panel of experts who have experience with the study population in the higher education environment. Ravitch and Carl (2015) referred to a panel of experts as "peer debriefers," "critical friends," or "critical inquiry groups." The panel of experts I consulted consisted of (a) a PhD in public administration, (b) a PhD in special education, and (c) an EdD in organizational leadership with an emphasis in higher education leadership. In addition, two of the three panelists taught at the university level for over 10 years. The EdD expert, for the past 8 years, has served as the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics dual enrollment instructor on the campus of a community college. The panel members and I engaged in dialogue (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The experts also reviewed codes, categories, and common themes manually identified in the transcribed and member checked interview transcripts. The panel also reviewed the themes that emerged from the NVivo (Version 12) coding analysis software and asked questions regarding the themes from participant experiences to reveal and mitigate social bias.

Each interview was scheduled to last 60 min. The audio of the interviews was recorded; the recordings were professionally transcribed, and member checked to ensure accuracy. State-mandated COVID-19 pandemic restrictions restricted campus access; therefore, I conducted the interviews using internet-based Zoom meeting rooms. I used the Zoom application to record the interview audio and used Rev to transcribe the interviews (https://www.rev.com). Each transcript was assigned a pseudonym to protect the confidentiality of the participant.

According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), listening is just as important as asking in-depth and open-ended questions. I listened intently to the participants' stories about their experiences, which resulted in the participants sharing greater detail related to their experiences.

For each interview, I used the same interview protocol, which included the following steps:

1. I welcomed the participant, thanked them for their time, and stated my name and the purpose of the research study.
2. I reminded the participant of the signed voluntary informed consent form, reviewed the form's contents, and advised the participant of my commitment to participant confidentiality. I also explained that participants' names would not be shared, according to the human subjects' guidelines established by the National Institutes of Health.
3. I stated that the participants' names would change on all final documents to keep their identities confidential.
4. I shared the 14 interview questions and confirmed that I would use Zoom to record the 60-min interview.
5. I reminded the participant of the 60-min interview length and asked the participant to take time to reflect on the questions before responding.
6. I stated that note-taking necessitated a lack of eye contact but would not impact active listening.
7. I reminded the participant that participation in the study was voluntary and could be stopped at any time.

Finally, each interview participant received a $10 Visa gift card as a thank-you for participating. After the interviews, the research participants reviewed the transcripts for accuracy and returned them to me for data analysis.

Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

The study was conducted at a Southwest community college. To mitigate potential bias, the college faculty assisted with participant recruitment and sent the invitation to participate to students in their classes and clubs. Faculty distributed the invitation using the Canvas learning management system. Students emailed me to express their interest in participating in the study, and I responded with the informed consent form for them to complete and return.

Upon receiving each study participant's email confirming voluntary informed consent to participate in the study, I emailed the student participant to set up the semistructured interview using Zoom. The interview schedule procedure included the following steps: (a) I emailed the day and time for the interview, (b) the participant selected an alternative day and time if needed, and (c) I sent the participant the Zoom password required to enter the online interview room. The email to schedule the interview included reminders of the items listed in the email containing the invitation to participate. I established the Zoom interview dates and conducted interviews between March 2021 and May 2021.

I used purposeful random sampling to identify participants enrolled at the studied college during the 2017–2018 and 2018–2019 academic years who met the other selection criteria. Eight participants consented to be interviewed. This small homogenous group provided data that helped identify the barriers to persistence faced by traditional-

age college students in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college. Creswell (1998) contended that qualitative research could be used to assess participants' subjective experiences and recommended that qualitative researchers conduct five to 25 study interviews. Hagaman and Wutich (2017) concluded that 16 or fewer interviews are enough to identify common themes from sites with homogeneous groups.

The informed consent form confirmed that

- the student had read the purpose of the study and the risks and the responsibilities,
- the participant understood that participation in the study was voluntary and that they could withdraw at any time,
- the student understood the confidential handling of all identifying information and the assurance that the information would not be released or disclosed except as specifically required by law,
- the participant gave consent to participate in the interview using the free Zoom internet application,
- the participant gave consent to recording of the audio of the interview, which was erased once transcribed, and
- the participant would affix their signature to the document and return the document to me via email within 7 business days of receipt.

Data Analysis

Data analysis is a major part of a qualitative research study. I conducted data analysis manually and used the NVivo (Version 12) qualitative research analysis application to identify patterns and themes from the interviews. I carefully reviewed the

notes taken during the interviews, the transcribed interview data, and the automated coding available using NVivo to obtain meaningful analytical units of information. This process was repeated until the data analysis was complete. Reflexivity is a qualitative approach researchers use to check the rigor and trustworthiness of qualitative analysis (Berger, 2015; Kalu, 2019). Kalu (2019) explained reflexivity as unmasking hidden conflicts to reduce a researcher's bias and preconceived ideas or beliefs related to research participants. To address questions regarding my subjectivity within the qualitative research approach, I used a reflexivity strategy to reduce bias during the interview data analysis process.

I also used member checking to ensure the credibility of participant interview data. Member checking is a participant validation strategy (Iivari, 2018; Rubin & Rubin, 2015) in which a researcher asks study participants to review transcribed interviews for accuracy. Each participant received a copy of their transcribed video to review for accuracy following the Zoom interviews. Participants had 7 business days to review the transcript, make edits as needed, and return the document to me.

To ensure triangulation (Santos et al., 2020), I used a systematic process of sorting through the data to find common themes. The data-triangulation process included data from (a) the interviews, including the researcher notes taken during interviews, the Zoom interview recording, and the Rev interview transcription; (b) member checking; and (c) debriefing sessions with the panel of experts. The panel of experts consisted of three higher education experts who have worked with the traditional-age student population, are familiar with the research, and are familiar with the phenomenon studied (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The panel reviewed the codes, categories, and emerging themes

identified in the interview data. The panel asked “what” and “why” questions during the development of the interview questions and the data analysis. I closely collaborated with the panel of experts throughout the study, which supported study credibility. The panel was helpful during the selection of appropriate interview questions. Additionally, the panel discussed and reviewed themes throughout the data analysis.

Data Management

The collection and storage of all documents are required in research, and the ability to retrieve the documents when needed is critical for good data management. An effective way to safeguard quality data collection is to promptly record data to avoid memory lapses and ensure accurate recording. Thus, I wrote legible notes in ink, and any changes to the original notes were dated and initialed. In addition, I will save the information collected for this study on a password-protected external hard drive for 5 years. I also saved backup final versions of the dissertation and related documents on a stand-alone hard drive. The hard drive is locked in a filing cabinet in my office, and my office is locked when I am not present. After 5 years, I will delete electronic data and destroy paper data.

Trustworthiness

The terms “trustworthiness” and “validity” are used interchangeably in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I used a step-by-step process to ensure credibility and rigor and to accurately interpret the research participants’ experiences. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), there are three participants in each qualitative research study: the researcher, the study participant, and people outside the study. Triangulation is a

validity procedure that applies the researcher's lens and uses a step-by-step process to sort the data, find common themes, and eliminate overlapping data.

Four key concepts are used to establish rigor using a triangulation procedure: credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Kalu, 2019). Credibility is the confidence that the research findings are plausible and credible information is drawn from the participants' original data (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Credibility refers to the design phase of the qualitative research process. During the design phase of the current study, I acknowledged my personal bias. I used bracketing methods and epoche practices to minimize the invalidating impact of my internal ideas, values, perceptions, and prejudgments related to the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses (Butler, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). I used semistructured interviews, prewritten questions, and follow-up questions vetted by the panel of experts to ensure the credibility of the interviews and minimize bias during data collection. In addition, study participants were engaged to member check their transcribed interviews for accuracy before I proceeded with data analysis.

Transferability provides information about the research process and participants and allows anyone reading a study to determine whether the research findings are transferable or relevant to other settings (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). To increase transferability, I provided an audit trail of the traditional-age college students' experiences in 8-week courses using automated data collection, audio recordings of participant interviews, third-party transcription of the recorded interviews, and interview notes to maintain continuity of the content from one participant to the next.

The data collection process included dependability through collaboration with college faculty liaisons to purposefully select a pool of participants using the participant eligibility criteria. Any student meeting the criteria was eligible to participate in the study. In addition to dependability, the data collection criterion used to confirm rigor in a qualitative study is confirmability, which involves confirming that the data are neutral and free from researcher bias (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

Confirmability is sometimes described as the qualitative equivalent of objectivity in quantitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). Even though the very nature of qualitative research is to uncover the individual experiences of study participants, as analyzed by the researcher, the participants' voices shape the findings. The subjective analysis was consistent and confirmed through participant interviews. I used purposeful participant selection, recorded the audio of the interviews, and had the recordings transcribed by a third party to ensure confirmability. Another aspect of confirmability is intentionally identifying bias, which can be minimized through researcher reflexivity. Reflexivity occurs when a researcher engages in critical self-reflection, including reflecting on their biases, preferences, and preconceptions (Korstjens & Moser, 2018). Self-reflection guided me through challenging myself and seeking out a panel of experts, colleagues, and peers to challenge me to create the best interview questions to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I also preformatted an interview observation sheet to capture subjective notes; however, I found it easier to add the notes about the interview content on the interview question sheet. Nevertheless, the recording of the Zoom audio and video of the student interviews allowed me to review each participant interview several times while waiting for the transcript and the member checked

transcript. The noted observations shared with the panel of experts during data analysis (a) supported a deeper understanding of student experiences in 8-week accelerated courses, and (b) supported common themes regarding barriers to persistence.

Ethical Procedures

In this research study, I made every effort to follow the ethical standards of confidentiality, federal government guidelines, institutional review board (IRB) guidelines, and participant privacy requirements. I received approval to conduct this study from Walden University (2021.01.15 19:18:56’06'00’) and the study site’s IRB. Data collected for this study included (a) the signed informed consent forms, (b) recordings of the interview audio, (c) confidential transcribed interviews, and (d) interview notes and observations. To ensure confidentiality, participant names were changed so that the actual study participants could not be identified. These documents will be saved on a password-protected external hard drive for 5 years.

During the interview, I respected the rights and responsibilities of the participants to help make them more comfortable. I treated the participants like assistant researchers and nothing less. The respect and sensitivity I showed before and throughout the 60-min interview session encouraged the participants to allow me to enter into their world (Park et al., 2016).

The emailed informed consent forms confirmed that study participants understood the research purpose and that participation was voluntary. To ensure confidentiality, each participant was identified by a fictitious name and an alphanumeric identifier. After the interview, I protected participant confidentiality using the alphanumeric identifier so that student names were not provided to the third-party transcription company.

Summary

Chapter 3 provided the rationale and research processes for the current study. Chapter 4 defines my role as the researcher and provides the study results. In addition, Chapter 4 details the study setting, data collection, data analysis, evidence of trustworthiness, and the study findings. I also discuss the data gathered from face-to-face interviews, the transcribed interviews, and the common themes identified in the data.

Chapter 4: Results

This basic qualitative study aimed to explore the barriers to persistence for traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses offered at a Southwest community college. I used a basic qualitative lens to uncover the experiences of traditional-age college students and the meaning the students attributed to their experiences at the studied college. The population for this research consisted of traditional-age students who had completed both 16-week courses and accelerated 8-week courses delivered in a face-to-face and online format. The actual sample for this study included four traditional-age male students and four traditional-age female students. I purposefully selected students from the studied college's main campus.

The research questions are related to Rendón's (1994) validation theory. Validation theory provided the conceptual framework for this study and put forth the premise. Rendón (1994) contended that faculty and college staff validation of students is critical to student success inside and outside the classroom. The current study data supported Rendón's (1994) assertion. The study data provide examples of faculty and college staff actions that increase and decrease motivation (i.e., validation) of 18–24-year-old students faced with barriers to persistence while enrolled in accelerated 8-week face-to-face and online courses. The responses to the open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) highlighted participants' experiences with barriers to persistence and provided a deeper understanding of the participants' experiences inside and outside class and participants' connections to faculty and peers, which were the foundation for discovering the emerging themes in this study.

Moreover, validation theory refers to the intentional and proactive affirmation of students inside and outside class. Affirmation supports student success by valuing students and the assets they bring to the classroom. Using the validation lens, I identified barriers to persistence and motivators, which correspond to actions that can be taken to help students overcome barriers to persistence at the studied college (Rendón & Muñoz, 2011). The following research questions anchored the data collection and data analysis for this study:

1. What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
2. What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
3. What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

Qualitative research is a dynamic, systematic, and engaged process of planning for depth, rigor, and the contextualization of data (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I used a basic qualitative research method in this study, which provided the structure to determine how students interpreted their experiences and the meaning they assigned to their experiences (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). This chapter provides a detailed review and analysis of the data collected and the themes revealed through data analysis. This chapter contains the following sections: (a) Research Setting, (b) Demographics, (c) Data Collection, (d) Data Analysis, (e) Interview Results, (f) Research Question Results, (g) Evidence of Trustworthiness, and (h) Summary.

Research Setting

This study took place at a Southwest community college, one of multiple colleges in a college district in the western United States. Since its beginning, the studied college has expressed the historical and cultural values of the surrounding communities while providing students with meaningful and engaging learning environments. Located in the fastest-growing region of the county, the studied college enrolls approximately 9,000 students annually.

Demographics

Twenty-six students responded with interest in participating in the study. Nine students consented to be interviewed, and eight students met the eligibility criteria to participate in the study. I emailed these eight participants the information needed to establish the 60-min interviews using the Zoom online platform. According to Bryman (2013, as cited in van Rijnsoever, 2017) and Coyne (1997, as cited in van Rijnsoever, 2017), inductive qualitative research continues until new codes or categories are exhausted. A qualitative research method is essential to better understand the deeper or underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations of study participants (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). This study, like other qualitative studies, used purposive sampling procedures to achieve theoretical saturation (van Rijnsoever, 2017). That where empirical research comes in, showing that the rate at which new information emerges slows with time and that the most common and essential themes emerge first, given that the interview questions, sample characteristics, and other study parameters remain consistent (Guest et al., 2020). The decision to use the eight interviews in this study was based on basic

qualitative theory and reflection on the rich content collected using a consistent data collection process.

Data Collection

Four women and four men participated in the study. Each student was enrolled at the studied college at the time of the interview, each student was between the ages of 18 and 24 years, and each student was registered between 2017 and 2019. Data collection began with an initial and then a revised recruitment strategy. I received IRB approval to collaborate with the college liaison from the Office of Institutional Development to recruit students to participate in this study from October 2020 to December 2020. Hundreds of unduplicated and eligible students were sent emails requesting their voluntary participation, and two students responded to this invitation to participate. This first attempt to recruit participants did not result in student interviews, and no data were collected. This may have occurred because Generation Z students prefer to communicate using social media and phone text messages rather than email. The students may not have received the email sent to their college-issued email addresses.

After receiving IRB approval, I planned and implemented a revised participant recruitment effort from February 2021 to April 2021. Study site faculty and college liaisons recruited students using the Canvas learning management system to participate in this study. Twenty-six students responded to the invitation to participate. A total of four female students and four male students participated in the interviews. The study participants' fictitious names are shown in Table 1.

Table 1

Research Study Student Participants

Participant	Gender	Fictitious name
1	Female	Alfie
2	Female	Emma
3	Male	Frankie
4	Male	Billy
5	Female	Keesha
6	Male	Manny
7	Female	Hanna
8	Male	Henry

The student participants were purposefully selected to ensure that they were similar to those who participated in the 2019 class scheduling survey conducted at the study site. The Office of Institutional Development at the studied college conducted this survey during the spring 2019 academic semester to investigate alternative scheduling modalities. The scheduling survey questions provided student feedback to college leaders discussing a possible transition from primarily 16-week courses to 8-week courses with the goal of increasing student persistence and completion. College leadership received data about student preferences regarding core scheduling by age group. The survey asked traditional-age students aged 24 years and under (i.e., Generation Z at the time of the study) and nontraditional-age students aged 25 years and over (i.e., millennials, Generation X, and Generation Y) about their preferences regarding enrollment in traditional 16-week courses and accelerated 8-week courses. The survey findings indicated that 55% of traditional-age students preferred the traditional course modality of

16-week courses, 37.5% of nontraditional-age students preferred 8-week courses, and 18% of nontraditional-age students preferred a 5-week course modality. The combined percentage of nontraditional-age students who preferred 5- and 8-week courses was equal to the percentage of traditional-age students who preferred the 16-week course modality (55%). This research study provides a deeper understanding of how traditional-age college students experience accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college.

The in-depth student experiences revealed in this research inform elements of a successful strategy that addresses both the barriers and motivators that traditional-age students experience inside and outside class while enrolled in 8-week accelerated courses at the studied college. The strategy to mitigate persistence barriers and intentionally implement instructor and college staff motivators for persistence should be considered by college leadership as the studied college considers transitioning to blocks of accelerated 8-week courses to support student success.

In this research study, eight students from the studied college, each having enrolled in 8-week and 16-week courses, were purposefully selected and interviewed. The selection criteria ensured that every student could participate in the study and complete a 60-min semistructured interview if they met the four eligibility requirements. Students responded to 14 open-ended interview questions (see Appendix A) about their experiences inside and outside the 8-week class. Each interview was recorded and professionally transcribed. I conducted data analysis manually, and I used qualitative research data analysis software, NVivo (Version 12), to identify words, patterns, meaning, and themes from the interviews. Multiple codes and code categories emerged from the collected data.

Each semistructured interview was scheduled for 60 min, and each interview was recorded and transcribed. According to Rubin and Rubin (2011), listening is as important as asking in-depth and open-ended questions. I listened intently to the participants' stories about their experiences, which helped build trust during the interviews. The students responded to the interview questions with detailed accounts of their experiences, which gave me a better understanding of their stories and how they interpreted their experiences in accelerated 8-week face-to-face and online classes. I asked the participants follow-up questions to clarify their responses and ensure the accuracy of their stories. For students who elected to turn on their cameras during their interviews, I reviewed each interview recording a second time to note the students' nonverbal reactions to the interview questions, such as facial expressions and nonverbal cues.

Before the interviews, I connected with each student to send the informed consent form and set up an interview time that worked for their schedule. The preinterview interaction helped to build trust between the student participants and me. Student verbal and nonverbal responses indicated a relaxed manner that supported detailed and thick responses to the interview questions. In addition, each student participant reviewed a copy of their professionally transcribed interview transcript, transcribed by Rev, and were asked to make revisions as needed. This phase of the data collection process is known as member checking. According to Rubin and Rubin (2015) and Iivari (2018), member checking is a participant validation strategy. Each participant was given 7 business days to review the transcript, make edits as needed, and return the document to me for analysis. After the interview process, I sent each student participant a $10 Visa gift card to thank them for participating in the interviews.

Triangulation is the systematic use of multiple data sources to increase a study's validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). I used the following data sources to support triangulation: interviews, interview notes, interview transcripts, member checking, and debriefing with a panel of experts. The panel of experts asked "what" and "why" questions during interview question development, and they reviewed the anonymous interview data with me during data analysis. Credibility was established in collaboration with the panel of experts throughout the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). The panel was helpful during the development of the interview questions. The panel members also asked questions that helped narrow the subthemes identified during data analysis. The panel helped me fulfill my responsibility to ensure validity during the data analysis stage of the study.

Data Analysis

I conducted data analysis manually and used NVivo (Version 12) qualitative research analysis software to identify words, patterns, meaning, and themes from the interviews (Nowell et al., 2017). I used iterative inductive coding, or open coding, to manually code and categorize the interview data. This analytical process helped to capture the deep meaning provided by the student participants. During manual data analysis and coding, I highlighted and extracted phrases from the data that represented participant experiences in context (e.g., "8-week face-to-face," "8-week online," "motivation increase," "motivation decrease," "barriers to persistence in class," and "barriers to persistence outside class"). In this manual coding cycle, 14 codes were created to correspond to each of the 14 interview questions asked of the eight student participants.

Next, I conducted axial coding by grouping the open codes into categories. I reviewed and coded each transcript and the 14 interview questions using the same process. The responses to the interview questions from the eight study participants who enrolled in 8-week online and face-to-face courses revealed similar and different experiences related to (a) their favorite and least favorite experiences, (b) barriers to persisting in 8-week courses, and (c) the actions and attitudes of instructors and college staff members that either increased or decreased their motivation to complete 8-week courses. Emerging themes from the manual coding and categorizing process included the following barriers to persistence: (a) allocated time and learning, (b) faculty–student engagement, (c) peer–peer engagement, and (d) technology.

The data were further analyzed by importing the eight transcribed interview files into the qualitative research analysis software NVivo (Version 12). The software analysis resulted in code reports that helped organize the data, analyze patterns, and confirm categories and themes identified during manual analysis and coding. Emerging themes identified from NVivo included the following barriers to persistence: (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and lack of student readiness.

After establishing the key themes, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggested, I shared the themes with a panel of experts who served as my content experts and were familiar with the study topic. The panel of experts asked challenging questions regarding the data analysis, interpretations, and key themes. Intentional use of these methods (e.g., manual coding; using NVivo, Version 12, to confirm categories and themes from manual coding analysis; and considering the feedback from the panel of experts) to analyze the data

allowed me to overcome the bias that could have occurred if I had used a single method to analyze student experiences in 8-week courses (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Multiple methods of evaluating the data also provided me with a deeper understanding of the students' experiences.

Interview Results

Four themes were developed from the experiences related to barriers to persistence of the eight study participants enrolled in 8-week accelerated courses. The themes were consistent with the perceptions of each of the traditional-age college students participating in this study. I compared and contrasted the meaning each participant ascribed to their 8-week course experience and gathered data on students' experiences by asking participants about their favorite and least favorite experiences in the 8-week courses. When asked, "What are your favorite and least favorite experiences in an 8-week course?" study participants shared that because 8-week accelerated courses supported education–work–life balance, the fast pace of the course was a necessary barrier to mitigate in order to achieve their personal goals. I also asked the study participants, "What motivating aspect of the 16-week course, that if added to the 8-week course, would motivate you to enroll in and complete the 8-week course?" The Generation Z study participants shared that in addition to liking the pace of the 16-week course, they were motivated to enroll in and complete 16-week courses because of the connections with instructors, students, and support services they made within these courses. A key finding from this study was that students lacked confidence in their ability to manage the allocated time and learning in the 8-week class; however, study participants were confident they could manage the pace of the 16-week course.

Study participants were asked in Interview Question 2, “How would you rank each of the following class formats, if 1 is most liked (preferred) and 4 is least liked (preferred)?” Fifty percent of the study participants preferred 16-week face-to-face courses, whereas 38% of participants preferred 8-week online courses. Sixteen-week online and 8-week face-to-face course modalities were tied in third place support from 13% of participants each. The data from this study indicate that the 18–24-year-old participants were less resistant and more open to enrolling in 8-week courses than were the 18–24-year-old students who responded to the 2019 class scheduling survey conducted at the studied college during the spring 2019 semester. Participants in the research study identified faculty flexibility as a factor that motivated them to persist in accelerated 8-week courses, regardless of whether courses were online or face to face. Faculty flexibility was another key finding in this study. The significance of this finding as it pertains to traditional-age college students becoming less resistant to enrolling and persisting in accelerated 8-week courses will be discussed in Chapter 5. The following sections detail the four themes identified as barriers by the participants in this study.

Lack of Allocated Time and Learning

The first theme is lack of allocated time and learning. This theme emerged from the combination of barriers shared by the study participants and corresponds to the pace of the course and time management. Allocated time and learning are concepts that put primary responsibility on instructors to structure courses such that course content and assignments are manageable in a compressed/accelerated course modality. Moreover, perceived lack of time to complete assignments, feeling behind, and trying to catch up in the 8-week courses are issues that represent the lived experiences of the participants in

this study. I studied the students' perceived lack of time to comprehend the content and complete assignments by the due dates using the concepts of allocated time and learning.

Participants were asked, "What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?" Participants responded that the greatest barrier to persistence experienced in the 8-week face-to-face class was the fast pace of this course modality. However, the pace of the class and time management were barriers to persistence in some courses but not others. For example, study participants experienced pacing and time management as barriers in biology lab courses. On the other hand, they thought that they could manage the pace and time management required to be successful in nonlaboratory courses such as English, communication, and sociology. The study participants described class pace and time management as barriers in terms of not being able to (a) comprehend, process, and grasp the content being presented in class and (b) keep up with content or reading. In addition, they shared that they felt they were always behind and playing catch up. One student, Manny, shared his experience:

> The speed of it. When you go into an 8-week class, you expect everything to go faster, but that's kind of. … It sucks because everything is fast paced. So, it is kind of a blessing and a curse, I guess you could say, [this is just how the 8-week course works, it is fast moving] but just how the work is just so rampant in terms of getting things done. I was just trying to keep up with everything.

Similarly, study participant Frankie reported:

> Face-to-face 8-week classes, which is very rapidly paced. Essentially once you truncate the semester or a lot of time for the class to have, I have a harder time keeping up. I do not think there are many barriers outside of my life. I usually try

> to focus primarily on school life. So, when I am face-to-face with an instructor in a classroom setting that, well, I guess we have mostly been Zoom right now, but I tend to zone out the information given to me verbally. It is harder for me to process; I don't know why.

Another student, Alfie, shared the following:

> I want to say the speed of it, because 16-weeks, I feel like it is speed-wise, time management stuff. I feel like that is a barrier kind of inside the classroom. Because I feel like [in an 8-week class] we are doing everything so quickly, I cannot comprehend what's going around or what's happening at the moment.

Depending on the course subject matter (e.g., English and sociology versus biology with labs), some students thought they could manage the content, assignments, and pace of an 8-week course. Other participants indicated that their favorite experiences in 8-week courses included (a) the quick pace of the course, because it fit with their learning style of self-paced and self-regulated learning; (b) timely responses from the instructor to provide help to students when they needed it; and (c) engaging in a relationship with the instructor and the other students in the class. Emma, one of the participants, stated, "I took an 8-week course, face-to-face, and it was fun because we got kind of close, fast." Another study participant, Keesha, shared, "With the 8-week class [she distinguished both online and face-to-face], you get to know your classmates and your teacher well because it is sped up, so you make those connections quickly and [build] that trust." Conversely, some students' least favorite experiences in 8-week courses included (a) the quick pace of the accelerated 8-week courses, because it did not fit their learning style or their perceived ability to comprehend the content; (b) difficulty

keeping up with the number of assignments; and (c) lack of a relationship with the instructor and the other students in the class. One of the participants, Hanna, stated:

> My least favorite part about it [8-week courses] is that it's a lot more work, and it's a lot of extra assignments that they [instructors] have to put in there to make sure that you're getting all of your learning experience done in a short amount of time, so that is a bad thing because then you have to make sure that you're applying yourself for those 8 weeks.

Participants also shared that they recognized that students must be disciplined to succeed in an 8-week course. In addition, study participants discussed how they needed time needed to comprehend assignment content and time to work with other students to be successful in an 8-week course. Participant Henry stated:

> Eight-week face-to-face classes, [in] my experience is they tend to be more stressful for me just because everything's so high pace in a given class. I am [seeking] an engineering degree so there's a lot of heavy math and physics involved. … I'm with other people [in the 8-week class]. So, we're kind of all bearing the burden together. Still stressful, though, because everything is going. ... It's really fast. Double the pace.

Participants experienced more barriers to persistence in 8-week courses such as engineering and fewer barriers to persistence in other 8-week courses such as psychology. Students also advised that they needed more time to manage the rigor of math and science courses based on their 8-week course experiences thus far. The studied college students connected the pace of a 16-week course with adequate time to comprehend course content and complete assignments.

Lack of Faculty–Student Engagement

The second theme to emerge from the study data was the lack of faculty engagement, support, and timely responses in 8-week courses. Instructor engagement worked well pre-COVID-19 and face to face. Participant Alfie stated:

> When we were face to face, before COVID, I liked how the instructors were hands-on with you. I did like how they would sit down and help you if you felt stuck, or if you needed more clarification. They are always there for you. And I guess that was just my favorite part of it because in my recent experience with high school and stuff, I never really got that one-on-one with my instructor. So, it was a whole new type of environment for me. That helped me feel like, "Okay, I can pass this course."

Alfie continued:

> Online is just kind of different because I've always been the face-to-face type of person. So, when COVID hit, I just felt like my world came crashing down because I felt like I was just staring at a screen and not learning anything.

Hanna discussed the timeframe of the 8-week classes as it pertains to instructor engagement:

> In an 8-week face-to-face class, I guess the in-class barrier is the timeframe within the class itself is very limited when it comes to speaking with the teacher after class because a lot of times, with teachers they have a lot of classes that they're taking, so my experience, I've had teachers where they're like, "I only have 5 minutes in between classes, so ask your question quick, and I got to go," so it's

like with it already being 8 weeks, you're not having a lot of time to squeeze everything in.

Hanna added:

> You have to also make sure that you have time for your students when it comes to in-class time, making sure that they can get their questions answered, so when they're trying to squeeze all of their information into that one class period, it gives less time for us as students to ask our questions and get our questions clarified because we're so cramped for time. Sometimes a lot of teachers, especially now, who aren't prepared to be teaching these classes in short timeframes, too, with things switching around, it can be more difficult because they are not exactly used to having such a limited amount of time to teach all their content, so that can also be an issue.

Interview Question 4 was "What in-class barriers have you experienced in 8-week online classes?" In response, participant Hanna shared:

> In an online class, it is similar, I would say, just with getting your questions answered by the instructor, just like in an in-person class, it all falls back on that where there is just not a lot of time. Within the online class, you cannot get the materials that you need as you would get in an in-person class. In one of my classes, my teacher's always saying, "If we were in person, we would have this," so when we are online, it's a lot harder because we don't have all the materials to get, and then we also, with textbooks and stuff, it's just a lot different because it's not right in front of us. We are getting all this information, but we're not able to put it firsthand in class.

Emma, another study participant, shared the following response:

> Sometimes the link [to an article] does not work. So, I email my professor … sometimes it might take a professor a week to email back.

Billy, a student participant, shared,

> I guess first and foremost would be the lack of face-to-face connection with the professor.

Similarly, Henry stated,

> The lack of interaction when it comes between students and teachers. … I would say the biggest drawback is the lack of interaction.

Students said that they lacked time with their instructors to ask questions in the 8-week face-to-face courses. Moreover, students shared that their instructors did not have adequate time to respond to their questions or provide all the materials needed in the 8-week online courses. Participants also shared that the 8-week courses did not provide them with enough time with instructors, which prevented the participants from understanding certain concepts and thus prevented them from completing the course successfully. The students experienced success, or at least fewer barriers to persistence, in 16-week in-person classes because these instructors provided all the materials needed for the class. In 8-week courses, whether online or face to face, students experienced some downtime between needing access to materials and gaining access to the materials.

Lack of Peer–Peer Engagement

The third theme to emerge from the study data was the lack of peer–peer engagement and planned access to peers online in 8-week courses. In response to interview questions, study participants indicated that they experienced a lack of

relationships with other students as a barrier to persistence in 8-week courses. Participant Billy stated:

> I would have to say being able to collaborate with others in an environment because while college is a great way to learn and gain higher education, it's the collaborative spirit and working with others [students] that really, I feel prepares you for whatever job field or workforce you're jumping into. So, being able to work with others is I think a key factor in getting the whole [college] experience.

Interview Question 6 asked, "What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?" In response to this question, Henry shared the following:

> Again, with that, it kind of just varies from class to class because I did an 8-week online coding class. The workload was not that insane. It was still a good amount, nothing too surprising that wasn't doable. But again, I guess the biggest outside barrier is not being able to create group studies with classmates if the class is purely online with no interaction. So same thing outside of class, no interaction. It's like we can't take any fellow students' phone numbers during class and then text them class outside of class to have a group study if it's purely online. Again, if it's Zoom call, that's a different story because it's easier to do that, but purely online, again, lack of communication with students outside to create group study.

Participant Billy shared a similar experience:

> I feel that in 8-week courses, as I stated before, there were a lot fewer opportunities for collaboration with other fellow students. There was a lot less team building I would say. At the end of a 16-week course, you had a feel for your group if you were to work in a group or with your fellow students. You

> knew what their strengths and weaknesses were, and you all fed off each other. And there was a camaraderie that was built. But in 8 weeks, that gets cut in half. So, by the end of it, you still might feel like you're more or less alone as you were. But alone it's as if I enrolled in the course to complete it, and after the course is completed after 8 weeks, we go our separate ways. I continue without really having gained much more knowledge of myself or others in a collaborative sense.

Additionally, in response to this theme of lack of peer–peer engagement, participant Hanna stated:

> We don't have our peers to help us, too, because our peers are also a very big part of our learning. We all feed off of each other's minds and we all collaborate, which helps a lot, so when you're online, especially in a short timeframe, it can get challenging to be just completely on your own.

When asked "What motivating aspect of the 16-week course, that if we added it to the 8-week course, would motivate you to enroll and complete an 8-week course?" Hanna continued:

> If the online 8-week course, if they incorporated more of working with your classmates, I think that would help a lot. I think that if I had the opportunity to work [with classmates], because they tell you, "Oh, email your classmates," but most students don't do that, so I think honestly, if they offered more … live online 8-week courses, I think if they did that, that would be a lot more helpful because you're able to collaborate and do breakout rooms. All the online courses that I'm in, are live online, which I like, well, most of them are, because I can

> collaborate with my teammates. I know who's in my class. That's when I get to ask questions.

Participants explained that they could not engage with each other in online courses because they did not have the means to contact their peers (e.g., phone numbers) to create study groups to help them understand the material. However, in 16-week face-to-face classes, the students could create study groups. I did not expect this feedback from Generation Z students because they are considered digital natives, meaning that they grew up with technology and social media. Moreover, communication of this barrier indicated students' reluctance to initiate a connection with students they had never met before. Seemiller and Grace (2017) found that Generation Z students are willing to work with other students; however, the 8-week online experience lacked instructor assistance to facilitate initial student connections.

Lack of Student Support and Readiness

The fourth theme to emerge from the study data was lack of student support and readiness. Participants responded regarding things that college agents said or did that resulted in decreased student motivation to persist in 8-week classes. Another word for motivation is "persistence," or its verb counterpart, "to persist." It is the capacity that enables someone to carry on in the face of obstacles when pursuing a goal. In order to make significant effort, a student must be motivated to keep going until they earn their degree. Therefore, colleges should consider how they may affect a student's motivation to stay, persist, and finish their degree, as well as how they might increase student retention (Tinto, 2017).

Participant responses to interview questions provided additional insight into this theme. The data revealed that instructors increased student motivation outside class when they (a) gave positive encouragement, (b) were accessible when students needed them, and (c) shared information about resources (e.g., tutors, videos, and textbooks on reserve) that students could use to complete assignments and understand content. On the other hand, students indicated that instructors decreased student motivation outside class if the instructors (a) had limited time to answer questions and (b) were unavailable to students when needed.

Regarding college staff (counselors, advisors, mentors, coaches, financial aid staff members, tutors, and other college staff members), study participants were asked Interview Question 12: "Outside of class, what two things did college staffers (not the instructor), say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?" Interview Question 13 asked, "Outside of class, what two things did college staffers (not the instructor), say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?" The data showed that college staff members (advisors, counselors, tutors, and others) commonly increased student motivation to complete an 8-week course when they (a) provided positive encouragement and advice and (b) established a supportive relationship with students. Students commonly shared that college staff members did not say or do anything that decreased their motivation to complete an 8-week course.

Research Question Results

The findings of this qualitative research study tell the story of eight traditional-age college students who have experienced barriers to persistence in accelerated 8-week

courses at a Southwest community college. Four themes emerged from this study: (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness. I referenced these four themes to answer Research Questions 1, 2, and 3.

Research Question 1

Research Question 1 was as follows: What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college? Student responses to Interview Questions 1, 2, and 14 (see Appendix A and Appendix B) addressed traditional-age college students' favorite and least favorite experiences when enrolled in 8-week courses. The students also ranked their preferences for the 16-week versus 8-week course modality and shared experiences from the 16-week classes that differed from their experiences in the 8-week classes.

Students liked the pace of 16-week courses because it provided time to understand content and complete and submit assignments by their due dates. Moreover, students described easy engagement with instructors, more peer engagement and group work, and time to access tutors for help while taking 16-week courses. In the 16-week courses, study participants had access to and used tutors, and instructors were available both inside and outside class to respond to student questions.

Study participants indicated that their favorite experiences in 8-week courses included (a) the quick pace of the course, because it fit with their learning style of self-pacing and self-regulating; (b) timely responses from instructors to provide help to students when they needed it; and (c) engaging in relationships with the instructors and the other students in the classes. Emma, one of the participants, stated, "I took an 8-week

course, face-to-face, and it was fun because we got kind of close, fast." Another student, Keesha, shared, "I feel like the 8-week class teachers, they're there for you because they know it's a faster pace."

Students were also asked to share their least favorite experiences in 8-week courses. Participants shared barriers to persistence that they experienced when enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses, including (a) course pace, (b) faculty–student engagement, (c) peer–peer engagement, (d) time management, and (e) technology issues. Some students shared that the quick pace of the accelerated 8-week courses did not fit their learning style and perceived ability to comprehend the content. Some students also shared that they struggled to keep up with the number of assignments in the 8-week courses and lacked relationships with the instructors and the other students in their classes. One of the study participants, Hanna, stated:

> My least favorite part about it is that it's a lot more work, and it's a lot of extra assignments that they have to put in there to make sure that you're getting all of your learning experience done in a short amount of time, so that is a bad thing because then you have to make sure that you're applying yourself for those 8 weeks.

The study data revealed that the study participants are more open to enrolling in courses delivered in the 8-week course modality than students were at the time of the 2019 course scheduling survey conducted at the studied college. Study participant Keesha said:

> The motivation to enroll in more 8-week courses is the time management.

> When I take 8-week courses, they help out when … I know I can get some of the easier classes [sociology and psychology] done faster and then I'll have more time to get the 16-week lab [biology] classes done.

However, traditional-age students in the study continue to prefer the 16-week course modality. Study participant Henry said:

> The reason I like the 16-week face-to face classes is just that there are a lot more connections I can make with my professor and also my classmates. It's easier to work as a team and have people in your classroom work with you and understand how to get the work [assignments] done. I find that to be the best way actually to learn a subject.

The last interview question to address Research Question 1 was Interview Question 14: "Is there anything you would like me to know about your experience in 8-week courses that differs from your experience in the 16-week course?" Students' responses further illuminated the difference between their experiences in 16-week classes and 8-week classes. Students discussed the pace of the courses and shared that 16-week courses are more suitable for subjects such as math and science and that 8-week courses are more suitable for nonlaboratory courses such as English, psychology, and communications. Participants also shared that students must be disciplined to succeed in an 8-week course. Lastly, participants discussed the time needed to comprehend assignment content and the time needed to work with other students to be successful in a course. Students shared that 16-week courses provided the time; however, they struggled to keep up with assignments and engage with peers in 8-week courses.

Research Question 2

Research Question 2 was as follows: What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college? Interview Questions 3 and 4 addressed Research Question 2. In this study, in-class barriers are defined as any roadblocks or obstacles arising from a student's interactions with in-class technology, instructors, other students, or others.

Interview Question 3 asked, "What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?" The data indicated that the greatest barrier students faced in 8-week face-to-face classes was this modality's fast pace. The quick pace of classes was a barrier to students in terms of (a) comprehending, processing, and grasping the content being presented; (b) keeping up with content; and (c) students feeling they were always behind and playing catch up. One student, Manny, shared his experience:

> The speed of it. When you go into an 8-week class, you expect everything to go faster, but that's kind of. … It sucks because everything's fast paced. So, it's kind of a blessing and a curse, I guess you could say, but just how the work is just so rampant in terms of getting things done. … I was just trying to keep up with everything.

Another student, Alfie, shared the following:

> I want to say the speed of it, because 16 weeks, I feel like it's speed-wise, time management stuff. I feel like that's a barrier kind of inside the classroom. Because I feel like [in an 8-week class] we're doing everything so quickly. I can't comprehend what's going around or what's happening at the moment.

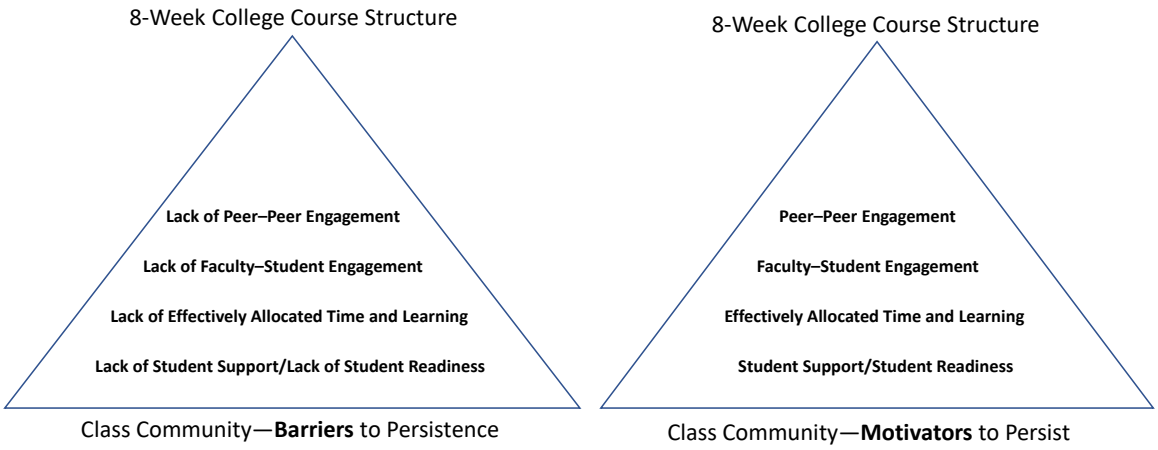
Interview Question 4 asked, “What in-class barriers have you experienced in 8-week online classes?” The data indicated the barriers that most students encountered in 8-week online classes were (a) time management, (b) lack of relationships with instructors, (c) lack of relationships with other students, and (d) slow response of technology. One of the study participants, Emma, responded to Interview Question 4 with this comment: “Sometimes the link [to an article] doesn’t work. So, I email my professor … sometimes it might take a professor a week to email back.” Billy, another student participant, shared, “I guess first and foremost would be the lack of face-to-face connection with the professor.” Similarly, Henry stated, “The lack of interaction when it comes to students and teachers. … I would say the biggest drawback is the lack of interaction.”

Two additional questions were asked of the study participants to learn more about the barriers to persistence they experienced inside the 8-week classes and to identify the motivators to persistence that mitigate the barriers to persistence in class. Interview Question 8 asked, “In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?” Interview Question 9 asked, “In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?” The data revealed that instructors increased participant motivation in online classes when they (a) expressed flexible expectations regarding assignment due dates, (b) provided positive encouragement, and (c) provided timely feedback and monitoring or checked in with students. On the other hand, students indicated that instructors decreased their motivation to complete an 8-week online class when the instructors did not build in time to (a) comprehend content, (b) complete assignments, (c) access and build relationships with

instructors, and (d) build relationships with other students for support to be successful in the course. Participant responses to two things instructors said or did to decrease student motivation to complete 8-week online classes provided additional insight into the fourth emerging theme of time management. Figure 1 illustrates the barriers to persistence in 8-week courses.

Figure 1

Themes: Barriers to Persistence in 8-Week Courses



Research Question 3

Research Question 3 was as follows: What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college? Participant responses to Interview Questions 5 and 6 addressed Research Question 3. In this study, out-of-class barriers are defined as any obstacles arising from student interactions with instructors, counselors, advisors, mentors, coaches, members of the financial aid staff members, tutors, other college staff members,

and other students. Even though technology was mentioned as a barrier, students were quick to indicate the limited and temporary impact of technology issues.

Interview Question 5 asked, “What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in 8-week face-to-face classes?” Students stated the following as the most common out-of-class barriers: (a) time management, (b) instructor access, and (c) assignment comprehension. Student participant Hanna stated:

> I have to work, and then I have extracurricular activities, I have other things that get in the way of my schoolwork, so it makes it hard to prioritize my time in that way, especially if the class is live online, too.

The other interview question that addressed Research Question 3 was Interview Question 6: “What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?” The data indicated that students often experience the following barriers in 8-week online courses: (a) lack of relationships with instructors, (b) lack relationships with other students, (c) time management skills, and (d) limited instructor access when instructors are needed to respond to questions. Additional barriers were listed for both 8-week online and 8-week face-to-face classes; however, the barriers listed above were most commonly shared by the study participants.

I asked participants four additional questions to learn more about the barriers to persistence that students experienced outside 8-week classes. These additional questions also highlighted motivators that mitigate the barriers to persistence outside class. Regarding instructors, Interview Question 10 asked: “Outside of class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?” Interview Question 11 asked: “Outside of class, what two things did

the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?" The data revealed that instructors increased participant motivation when they (a) expressed flexible expectations regarding assignment due dates, (b) provided positive encouragement, and (c) provided timely feedback and monitoring or checked in with students. On the other hand, students indicated that instructors decreased their motivation to complete an 8-week online class when instructors did not build in time to (a) comprehend content, (b) complete assignments, (c) access and build relationships with instructors, and (d) time to build relationships with other students for support to be successful in the course. Table 2 summarizes motivators to support persistence in 8-week courses.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

The terms "trustworthiness" and "validity" are used interchangeably in qualitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). I maintained credibility and rigor throughout this research using multiple methods to accurately interpret the research participants' experiences. According to Creswell and Miller (2000), there are three participants in each qualitative research study: the researcher, the study participant, and other people outside of the study. I used triangulation as a validity procedure to (a) apply my lens to the data, (b) use a step-by-step process to sort the data, and (c) find common themes.

To apply triangulation—a systematic process of using multiple data sources to increase a study's validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000)—I used the notes I took during interviews, the interview transcripts, and member checking. To manually develop concepts and themes, I used an automated application for qualitative analysis and debriefed with a panel of experts.

Table 2

Motivators to Support Generation Z Student Persistence in 8-Week Courses

Category	Motivators
Positive encouragement	Use positive messages. Check in with students. Be intentional as an engaged instructor. [a]
Expectations	Set clear expectations. Show compassion. Be flexible. Ask if students need help. Initiate contact with students.
Assignment due dates	Post clear assignment due dates. Send due date reminders. Align assignment quantity with class length.
Resources	Embed videos that walk through assignments that students can review instead of contacting the instructor. Recommend resources to help with assignments when the instructor is not available (e.g., online tutor). Identify and make available reference materials to support learning inside and outside the class (e.g., reserve a copy of the textbook)
Instructor access	Post clear student support/office hours—planned times for meeting with and responding to student questions. Invite students to meet with you during student support hours for checking in, monitoring, and sharing progress.

Note. Motivators in all categories are appropriate for use with both online and face-to-face 8-week classes.

[a] Face-to-face example: Sit in a circle during class, with instructors at the table/pod interacting at student level.

The lens for establishing credibility is that the panel of experts closely collaborated with me from the beginning of this research study (Creswell & Miller, 2000). One of my critical responsibilities as a qualitative researcher was to ensure a sense

of validity during the data analysis stage of the study. I was aware of personal bias during this phase of the research process, so I took notes during student interviews and again on the transcript of each study participant's interview. This note-taking allowed me to capture the study participants' ideas, values, and perceptions rather than my prejudgments related to the barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses (Butler, 2016; Creswell and Creswell, 2018). The semistructured interview method, prewritten questions, and vetting by the panel of experts also supported the credibility of interviews and minimized bias during data collection.

Transferability is supported by the documentation of the steps followed in the research process, including information about the participants, the setting, and the recorded and transcribed participant interviews. This process captured traditional-age college students' experiences in 8-week courses. Researchers and others reading the study can determine whether the research findings are transferable or relevant to another setting (Korstjens & Moser, 2018).

Confirmability is sometimes described as the qualitative equivalent of objectivity in quantitative research (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). The current study's data are not objective; rather, the data are consistent and confirmed. I used purposeful participant selection to ensure confirmability, and the audio of the interviews was recorded and transcribed by a third party. Another aspect of confirmability is intentional identification of bias, which was used to minimize bias through researcher reflexivity. By embedding the reflexivity process into my research, I unmasked hidden conflicts to reduce bias and preconceived ideas or beliefs about the study and the study participants (Kalu, 2019).

Additionally, the data analysis was subject to multiple reviews for authenticity and accuracy. This was accomplished by conducting a line-by-line review of interview content for manual coding, writing notes in the margins of interview transcripts, and continually asking myself, "What do I know? How do I know what I know? What shapes and has shaped my perspective?" (Patton 2014, as cited in Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 118). This challenged me through self-reflection. I also sought out a panel of experts, colleagues, and peers to challenge me to create the best interview questions to answer the research questions (Ravitch & Carl, 2015).

Summary

In Chapter 4, I used a basic qualitative research method to determine (a) how students interpreted their experiences with barriers to persistence in 8-week face-to-face and online courses and (b) the meaning students assigned to their experiences with barriers to persistence. In this chapter, I answered the three research questions:

1. What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
2. What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
3. What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

The four themes detailed in this chapter capture study participants' barriers to persistence in 8-week classes. These four themes were (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness. Finally, to capture student feedback regarding

motivators that could mitigate barriers, I described the actions of instructors and college staff members that increased student motivation to persist in 8-week classes. Students also shared instructors' actions that decreased their motivation to persist in 8-week classes. Even though these instructor actions may have been unintentional, the actions decreased motivation to persist.

Chapter 5: Summary, Conclusions, Discussions, and Recommendations

Accelerated 8-week classes are being discussed at colleges and universities nationally. Specifically, scholars are studying the impact of accelerated 8-week courses on student degree completion, college enrollment, and educational funding (Krug et al., 2016). This study focused on traditional-age (Generation Z) college students and the barriers to persistence they experienced when enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses. This chapter presents the summary and conclusions derived from the data analysis and findings detailed in Chapter 4. This chapter also includes examples of the actions of instructors and college staff members that increased or decreased student motivation to persist in 8-week online and face-to-face courses.

The study participants' barriers to persistence were captured in four themes: (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness. Additionally, the traditional-age college students shared their experiences in 16-week classes and shared strategies that could increase persistence if implemented in 8-week courses. The findings from this study have the potential to unearth a better understanding of the lived experiences of traditional-age college students, who were members of Generation Z at the time of the study. Fortified with this knowledge, college leaders, instructors, and staff members could develop solutions that upend the expectation versus experience gap that impacts students' decisions to enroll in and persist through accelerated 8-week courses.

The data presented goes beyond student preference for course-taking modality and confirms that traditional-age students will enroll in 8-week courses and persist amid barriers to persistence. Faculty have had a part in both the barriers to persistence and the

motivators that affect students' decisions to persist in 8-week courses. Furthermore, faculty have had and continue to have a more critical role in the motivators that increase students' likelihood to persist in 8-week classes. Providing a supportive class structure and connection with faculty, peers, and college staff members will disrupt the existing barriers to persistence in 8-week courses for Generation Z students.

Basic qualitative research is related to social constructivism, according to which knowledge is constructed through human interaction, and individuals create learning through their interactions (Ravitch & Carl, 2015). In this study, I used the basic qualitative research method to better understand the deeper or underlying reasons, opinions, and experiences of traditional-age students. This qualitative research study was grounded in the lives and experiences of the research participants (Rubin & Rubin, 2011), and I used semistructured interviews and open-ended interview questions to collect data regarding these student experiences. This chapter includes an interpretation of the findings related to validation theory and the existing literature discussed in Chapters 1 and 2. Additionally, this study is not without limitations. I will address the study's limitations, describe recommendations for further research, and detail the potential implications for positive social change.

In this study, the problem investigated was barriers to persistence for traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at a Southwest community college. The three research questions that anchored this study were as follows:

1. What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

2. What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?
3. What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?

Summary of Findings

The key findings identified during data analysis are categorized based on research question. The following sections describe the findings related to Research Questions 1–3, in that order.

Research Question 1

Study participants indicated that their least favorite experiences as persisting traditional-age college students in 8-week courses included (a) allocated time and learning, described as the quick pace of the accelerated 8-week courses; (b) lack of faculty–student engagement; (c) lack of peer–peer engagement; (d) lack of confidence in their time management skills to manage the workload; and (e) technology issues. It is interesting to emphasize that while the study participants noted technology issues as a least favorite experience, they did not report them as a barrier to persistence. Participants explained that they were more confident about managing the course assignments in the 16-week course modality than in the 8-week course modality.

Students who needed to learn at a slower pace because of work, family, or assignments in other courses stated that the quick pace of the 8-week courses was their least favorite aspect of those courses. Participants said they felt lost and discussed their perception that instructors were attempting to teach too much content in the 8-week courses. Participants also said that they found themselves just staring at their computer

screens in 8-week online courses and not learning anything without the instructors there to provide instruction. However, students—sometimes the same student—stated that the fast pace of the 8-week courses was their favorite aspect because the fast pace supported their school–life balance and allowed them to build relationships with the faculty and other students in the classes.

A similar dichotomy was experienced regarding faculty–student engagement. Instructor support was a favorable experience when instructors responded to student inquiries promptly and provided assistance when students needed them. Participants described instructor engagement as a favorite experience when the instructors tried to get to know the students. Students stated that getting to know instructors and instructors getting to know students helped build trusting relationships. In contrast, participants described lack of instructor support and lack of instructor engagement as barriers experienced in the 8-week courses. A Generation Z student in the Seemiller and Grace (2017) research said,

> This attitude of "if we don't do it, nobody will, and I want to be the one to" … seems to drive many of the people in my generation to make a difference in the world and accomplish individual greatness. I believe coming from this place of enthusiasm for greater perception, variation, and progression will allow my generation to improve the world in all ways it needs to be improved better than any generation has before.

Higher education faculty, staff members, and administrators and other college agents must engage this generation of students and mitigate barriers to persistence using ideologies and methods that educate, mobilize, empower, and prepare Generation Z to

tackle the problems facing the globe, or they will pass up the chance to have a big impact on the brilliant minds of the next great generation. Students gave the following reasons for not establishing connections with their instructors in 8-week face-to-face classes: (a) instructors were not available to students promptly and (b) unlike in 16-week face-to-face classes, instructors did not make time to respond to student questions in class because they had so much to cover during class or because they were off to other classes.

Participants described peer–peer engagement as a least favorite experience when there was a lack of peer–peer engagement facilitated by instructors. The students asserted that working with peers on class assignments was necessary to succeed in the class. When peer–peer engagement was built into courses, participants identified working with peers as a favorite experience within the 8-week courses. According to Seemiller and Grace (2017), Generation Z's intrapersonal approach to learning differs drastically from millennials' teamwork-oriented and collaborative nature; however, Generation Z students value collaborative group work with other students, and instructors must structure courses to meet the needs of these students (Dimock, 2019). Additionally, Generation Z students view peers and instructors as valuable resources. They like to have the option to work with peers and instructors on their own terms, often after they have had a chance to think through a concept, problem, or project (Seemiller & Grace, 2017).

The participants in this study were asked this question, similar to a question asked in the 2019 class scheduling survey conducted at the studied college: "How would you rank each of the following class formats?" The formats listed were (a) "16-week face-to-face classes," (b) "16-week online classes," (c) "8-week face-to-face classes," and (d) "8-week online classes."

Participants were asked to rank the items on 4-point scales that ranged from 1 (*most liked*) to 4 (*least liked*). Four of the eight participants in this study selected 16-week face-to-face classes as the course modality they most liked or preferred. Seven of the eight participants selected the 8-week course option as either their first or second most liked course modality. Although traditional-age (18–24-year-old) college students still preferred the 16-week face-to-face course modality, there was growing interest in the 8-week course modality, which is a shift from the views expressed in the 2019 class scheduling survey conducted by the studied college. In the current study, students expressed the same expectation for faculty and student engagement and support in both 16-week and 8-week face-to-face classes, but that was not their experience. This expectation versus experience gap resulted in the unintended barriers to persistence for students.

Students candidly shared that English, psychology, communications, and other nonlaboratory courses were good candidates for 8-week online classes. The students shared the benefit of securing the credits for the nonlaboratory course in 8 weeks (halfway through a traditional 16-week semester), which allowed students to focus more time and energy on 16-week laboratory (e.g., math and science) courses for the remainder of the semester.

Research Question 1 was answered in this study through the participants' favorite experiences and ranking of preferred course modalities. Participants' least favorite experiences were the first indicators of barriers to persistence. Study participant responses related to Research Questions 2 and 3 provide a deeper dive into the barriers to persistence inside and outside 8-week classes.

Research Question 2

Student participants identified course pace, instructor engagement and support, student engagement, time management, and technology issues as barriers to persistence in 8-week classes. Student experiences with barriers to persistence in 8-week face-to-face classes were similar to student experiences with barriers to persistence in 8-week online classes and similar to the least favorite experiences in 8-week courses generally. One of the study participants described the pace of 8-week classes as a "smack of reality." Study participants also discussed becoming aware of the number of assignments and their due dates for the first time. Participants perceived assignment lists and due dates as challenging and were not confident that they would have successful outcomes in the courses.

Participants related the pace of the 16-week courses to that of the 8-week courses and concluded that they needed a slower pace in the 8-week courses to digest the course content as presented. The lack of faculty–student engagement resulted in little to no opportunity to build trusting relationships, which students said were essential to the success experienced in 16-week courses. Students expect every 8-week course to include the favorite experiences of structure (e.g., allocated time and learning) and community (e.g., faculty–student engagement, peer–peer engagement, and student support as needed for their readiness level to persist in accelerated 8-week courses). For traditional-age/Generation Z students to experience persistent success, similar to that they experience in the 16-week courses, college agents must be intentional in their efforts to deliver the course structure and community required to support students' in-class needs.

Students stated that instructors' actions decreased their motivation to persist in 8-week face-to-face courses. Instructors decreased motivation when they did not provide students with adequate time to comprehend assignment instructions and content, which impacted the time students had to complete assignments and students' ability to submit by the posted due dates. Furthermore, student motivation decreased when time to ask questions of instructors and get prompt responses was limited. Student motivation was decreased when the course structure did not provide students with time to work with peers for group work and assignments. Generation Z students deem peer group work essential to their success in their courses and their future workplaces (Pavao, 2020).

Research Question 2

Student participants identified two key reasons they experienced barriers to persistence in class within online 8-week courses. The barriers included lack of time management skills and instructors' lack of engagement with and support for students.

Students' responses regarding the barriers to persistence in 8-week online courses included (a) instructors having inadequate time to respond to student questions and (b) limited or no time for student interaction or group work. I was surprised that only one student mentioned technology as an in-class barrier in 8-week online courses. Participants listed a couple of other barriers in the 8-week online format, such as personal lack of focus and limited access to resource materials because of campus closures during COVID-19. During the campus closures, the study site's library was only available online, and the computer commons were closed to students when students were interviewed for this study.

Participants mentioned a lack of instructor support when responding to questions about what instructors did or said to increase or decrease motivation to persist. The most common experience of lack of support was explained as a lack of instructor flexibility. Students shared that they expected instructors to maintain an 8-week online classroom environment that provided students with time to comprehend course content and submit assignments beyond the posted due dates when needed. When considering barriers to persistence, it is important to recognize that Generation Z students may need more support than millennials regarding personal development. According to Selingo (2018), Generation Z students expect a high tech educational and campus experience but do not want to live entirely in the virtual world.

Research Question 3

Participants cited two reasons they experienced out-of-class barriers in both 8-week face-to-face and 8-week online classes. These two reasons were (a) lack of readiness regarding time management skills and (b) lack of instructors' engagement with and support for students. The participants shared two aspects of time management: time to comprehend the content and time to complete assignments by their due dates. Study participants also shared that they wanted the ability to connect with their class peers by joining study groups outside class. Participant Henry stated:

> The workload. Again, with that, it kind of just varies from the class to class because I did an 8-week online coding class. The workload wasn't that insane. It was still a good amount, nothing too surprising that wasn't doable. But again, I guess the biggest outside barrier is not being able to create group studies with classmates if the class is purely online with no interaction. So same thing outside

> of class, no interaction. It's like we can't take any fellow students' phone numbers during class and then text them outside of class to have a group study if it's purely online. Again, if it's Zoom call, that's a different story because it's easier to do that, but purely online, again, lack of communication with students outside to create group study.

Additionally, participants stated that timely responses from instructors were inextricably linked to completion of some assignments by the due dates. Moreover, participants described an increased motivation to persist when instructors were flexible regarding submission of assignments after their due dates. Conversely, participants shared that group work engagement with their classroom peers supported their understanding of the content and the likelihood that they would complete assignments promptly in the 8-week face-to-face courses. When students were asked about the out-of-class barriers they experienced, one study participant listed financial aid (book vouchers) as a barrier. Conversely, when asked about what college staff members (not instructors) did or said to increase or decrease their motivation, the same student stated that they were motivated by financial aid staff members' quick work to provide book vouchers in 8-week online classes.

Although the studied college experienced a 2-week outage of all online access due to a cybersecurity issue, technology was not stated as a common out-of-class barrier in the 8-week face-to-face or online courses. As in colleges and universities across the nation, leaders of the studied college have discussed the impact of accelerated 8-week classes on student persistence and degree completion; however, it is clear that identifying barriers to persistence and completion is not enough. Motivating students to persist in 8-

week courses is critical to increasing college enrollment. Increased enrollment and degree completion meet the expectations of communities, local governments, and departments of education alike. Furthermore, student success could result in more education funding for the college.

Motivators: Students' Experience Versus Expectation Gap

The most common motivators cited by participants in this study were (a) instructor flexibility, (b) one-on-one time with instructors, (c) peer collaboration, and (d) time management. Participants stated that these key elements of 16-week courses motivated them to persist in the 16-week courses. Students shared that if the element of time management were added to the 8-week accelerated courses, it would motivate them to enroll in and persist in 8-week courses. In the 16-week courses, students were confident about managing course content and completing assignments. Additionally, in the 16-week courses, students had time and access to instructors, which allowed them to build relationships with the instructors and with students in their classes. Lastly, students had access to tutors in the 16-week classes, which contributed to their success in those courses. Participants said that if instructors would replicate the 16-week course learning experience within the 8-week face-to-face or online courses, students would be more likely to persist in the 8-week courses. The motivating elements of the 16-week courses included instructor engagement and support that validated students' confidence in their ability to be successful in the courses.

In-Class Instructor Motivators Students Experienced in 8-Week Courses

Study participants responded to Interview Question 8: "In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week

face-to-face class?" Similarly, Interview Question 9 asked, "In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?" Study respondents shared that instructors who motivated them to persist in 8-week courses (a) were flexible, (b) provided clear semester assignments and posted due dates, and (c) provided positive encouragement. Students in the face-to-face 8-week courses also shared that instructors motivated them to persist by being compassionate, personal, supportive, connected, and engaging with students. Additionally, students in the 8-week online courses were motivated when instructors provided (a) timely feedback and (b) monitoring (check-ins) with students regarding progress on assignments and grades. Participants' responses about what instructors and college staff members did to decrease student motivation to persist in accelerated 8-week courses represented barriers.

Out-of-Class Instructor Motivators Students Experienced in 8-Week Courses

Study participants revealed that instructors increased students' out-of-class motivation in 8-week face-to-face and online courses when they provided students with support in class. Instructor support for success included (a) creating study groups to support student engagement outside class, (b) providing positive encouragement, (c) recommending tutors, (d) being available when students needed them, and (e) increasing students' awareness of available resources and materials that students could use to supplement their understanding of course content. Again, participants' responses about what instructors and college staff members did to decrease student motivation outside class represented barriers.

Motivators: Students' Experiences of College Staff Members in 8-Week Courses

Study participants described college staff members as advisors, counselors, and tutors; however, college staff could also include financial aid staff members, coaches, and other college staff members. Students said that college staff members increased their motivation to complete 8-week face-to-face and online courses when they (a) provided positive encouragement and advice and (b) built relationships with students and could also provide support to meet student needs. On the other hand, students experienced decreased motivation to persist when advisors provided negative encouragement. Negative encouragement was described as an advisor sharing information that a student needed to know but was hard to hear, thus decreasing student motivation. Just one participant commented on instances of college staff members decreasing motivation. No other study participants discussed examples of how college staff members decreased their motivation to persist in 8-week courses.

Interpretation of the Findings

The literature review presented in Chapter 2 detailed barriers to persistence experienced by traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses. Additionally, the literature review presented data on accelerated courses, which are course modalities of 8 weeks or less that offer flexibility to support college students with competing priorities (Jenkins et al., 2018).

Participants in the current study shared four barriers to persistence: (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness. I was surprised that technology issues were not mentioned as a common barrier to persistence because of the

abrupt move to online courses resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, which coincided with the time of data collection. The following is a discussion of the study findings confirmed by the literature and the study findings not confirmed by the literature, followed by a discussion of how the current study findings contribute to the extant literature described in Chapter 2.

Findings and the Literature: Confirmed

The current study confirmed the literature regarding how the allocated time of 8-week courses serves as a barrier to persistence for traditional-age Generation Z students. Early adopters of intensive courses explored course delivery formats in terms of (a) time and learning values, (b) course requirements and practices in traditional formats, (c) course requirements and practices in intensive formats, (d) the literature regarding student attitudes toward intensive formats, and (e) the literature regarding faculty members' attitudes toward intensive formats (Scott & Conrad, 1992). According to Scott and Conrad (1992), there are no significant differences between learning in an intensive course and learning in a traditional-length course; however, the authors posited that more research is needed to determine the differences between these two course modalities. Not all faculty agree that there is no significant difference between the two modalities; some believe that more time means more learning. Scholars who object to compressed courses argue that allocated time and learning in compressed courses can result in (a) students being somewhat apprehensive about the amount of material covered in a shorter time, (b) students and faculty becoming fatigued both mentally and physically, (c) students thinking they do not have enough time to master the material, (d) students feeling they

have less study time, and (e) students feeling concerned about falling behind in class (Holzweiss et al., 2019).

Consistent with scholars who raise concerns about compressed courses, the participants in this study experienced differences between 16-week and 8-week classes concerning the courses' allocated time and learning structure (pace and assignments). Study participants contended that 16-week courses work better for courses with labs, such as science and math, and advised that in their experience, 8-week courses are more suitable for nonlaboratory courses, such as psychology, communications, and English. In this study, participants experienced apprehension regarding whether they had enough time to digest the course content in the 8-week format, and they found it challenging to keep up with assignments. This was especially true for courses that had labs, such as science and math. Integral to allocated time and learning structure, instructor engagement plays a significant role in students' ability to persist.

Generation Z students value both faculty and student engagement as necessary to their success in college courses. Students who value instructor engagement as part of the college experience are willing to enroll in both traditional courses and 8-week courses, especially when the instructor engagement typically found in traditional courses is built into the 8-week course structure. Participants stated that allocated time and learning (or pace) were effective when other factors were also present, such as faculty–student engagement, timely responses from instructors, peer–peer engagement, and adequate time management skills. Scott (2003) studied students who had experienced both intensive and 16-week courses, and the participants in Scott's study identified instructors as pivotal in increasing or decreasing their preference for intensive courses over traditional courses.

The current study's findings confirmed the literature regarding how traditional-age Generation Z students experience a lack of faculty–student engagement in 8-week classes, which influences students' decisions to persist. Additionally, students listed faculty inflexibility in relation to deadlines as a least favorite experience in 8-week courses. Study participants stated that faculty could increase student motivation by using the favorite practices that students experienced in 16-week courses. These faculty high impact practices included providing (a) time to comprehend course content, (b) time to complete assignments, (c) time and access needed to build relationships with instructors, and (d) time and access needed to build relationships with class peers, which provided students with the support they needed to be successful in the courses. Blackburn (2019) found that because of the time constraints in 8-week courses, instructors must intentionally deepen connections and overall engagement with their students. Blackburn also found that lack of faculty engagement and students' inability to master material in compressed 8-week courses could lead students to doubt their ability to persist.

Student participants in this study expected instructors to structure the courses to give students time to engage with instructors, time to work with other students, time to comprehend assignment content, and time to receive instructors' responses to inquiries. On the other hand, the students acknowledged the readiness level they needed to persist despite the barriers faced in the 8-week courses. Specifically, students understood that they needed to practice discipline, use time management skills, and request assistance from tutors early in courses. Study participant Hanna's advice to other students was as follows: "If you enroll in an 8-week class you have to really apply yourself."

Many college students enter college with confidence; however, students who encounter barriers experience a weakened resolve that impacts their success, particularly in their 1st year. To increase student motivation, colleges must provide effective support to meet the needs of students from enrollment to graduation (Bailey, 2017; Tinto, 2016). The rationale for presenting compressed (accelerated) courses and flexibility in course offerings is so that students can persist and progress toward graduation (Holzweiss et al., 2019, Huff, 2017). However, the literature reveals both support for and objections to accelerated courses. Scholars who advocate for accelerated courses posit that students who can take accelerated courses are less likely to be absent or withdraw from courses. Students also tend to procrastinate less, exhibit better concentration, and demonstrate increased engagement in classroom activities (M. G. Allen & Voytek, 2017). Those who object to compressed courses contend that allocated time and learning in 8-week courses can be a source of barriers to persistence (Holzweiss et al., 2019).

This study confirmed the literature that students experienced barriers to persistence related to a lack of student support and readiness in 8-week courses. According to Blackburn (2019), one of the most critical factors creating barriers to degree completion is students' readiness to take college-level courses. Low-income, first-generation students require both in- and out-of-class validating support. Support services and student readiness are inextricably linked; no matter the skill-readiness level of the college student, some level of student support will be needed. Where student skills are sufficient to overcome persistence barriers, fewer support services may be needed.

This study confirmed the need for validating support strategies such as communities comprised of caring faculty, college staff members, and family.

This study confirmed findings reported in the literature that students experience barriers to persistence in accelerated courses when they lack the motivation to study independently without being directed to do so by instructors (M. A. Lo et al., 2018). Participants look to faculty for support through instructors checking in, monitoring student progress, providing timely responses to student inquiries, and being flexible. Concerning motivation, students in this study had more confidence that their time management skills were sufficient to meet the workload of the 16-week courses and had less confidence that their time management skills were enough to be successful in an accelerated 8-week course. Yet students recognized that they could procrastinate more in a 16-week course. Students will be challenged to persist in accelerated courses if they lack time management skills (M. A. Lo et al., 2018). Lack of intrinsic motivation and the ability to seek help when needed are additional barriers identified in the literature.

Fong et al. (2017) asserted that 17 factors are barriers to persistence and achievement among community college students. The findings in this study are similar to some of the 17 factors from the Fong et al. study. For example, this study found that decreased motivation, required self-regulated learning, and lack of faculty–student engagement are barriers that influence students' decisions to persist from one semester to the next.

Findings and the Literature: Disconfirmed

Precollege readiness was assessed in this study; however, the tendency to drop out of college because of the need to complete developmental courses (A. Wilson, 2016) was not confirmed as a barrier to persistence. Prior studies have revealed that multicourse and multisemester developmental education sequences undermine student success

(Edgecombe & Bickerstaff, 2018). Instead, students' perceived inability to manage coursework in the time provided for a course was identified as a precollege readiness barrier.

Findings and the Literature: Contribution

The themes identified in this study add knowledge to the existing literature regarding the barriers to persistence for traditional-age Generation Z students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses. The four themes that emerged regarding barriers to persistence were (a) lack of allocated time and learning, (b) lack of faculty–student engagement, (c) lack of peer–peer engagement, and (d) lack of student support and readiness. The study findings highlight the class modality structures that are barriers to persistence (i.e., lack of allocated time and learning and lack of student support and readiness) and detail the lack of class connectedness that serves as a barrier to persistence in 8-week courses (i.e., lack of faculty–student engagement and lack of peer–peer engagement). Fortified with this awareness, college leaders, faculty, and staff members can disrupt barriers to persistence for traditional-age Generation Z students. Generation Z students come to college believing they can do anything (Seemiller & Grace, 2017). Colleges and universities can support student persistence in 8-week courses by disrupting barriers and providing students with the support needed to persist, graduate, and experience success in the classroom, workplace, and world.

Conceptual Framework

The study findings indicated that faculty and college staff members engaged in activities that raised (validated) and lowered (invalidated) student motivation to stay in accelerated 8-week courses. Rendón's (1994) validation theory illuminates the nature of

the problem addressed in this study. Validation was originally defined as the deliberate, proactive affirmation of students by in- and out-of-class college agents. Instructors or student peers may act as in-class agents, while advisors, counselors, other student affairs staff members, family, friends, and student peers may function as out-of-class agents (Rendón, 1994).

Moreover, validation theory refers to students receiving purposeful and proactive affirmation both in and out of class. Affirmation contributes to student success by valuing students and the assets they bring to the classroom. Thus, instructor interaction that is consistent and organized is another crucial feature of 16-week college courses and is much more critical in accelerated courses. Because of the time constraints associated with 8-week courses, instructors must be deliberate in their efforts to strengthen connections and overall engagement.

As the studied college's administration explores transitioning to blocks of accelerated 8-week courses to support student success, the strategy to lessen persistence barriers and purposefully include instructor and college staff member motivators for persistence should be examined. Faculty and college staff members who validate students as creators of knowledge and valuable members of the college learning community contribute to students' personal growth and social adjustment (Rendón, 1994).

One way faculty and college staff members validate students as creators of knowledge and valuable members of the college learning community is by engaging with students' personal development and social adjustment through facilitation of peer–peer engagement. Learning material with classmates produces a sense of confidence and

connectedness. Study participants contended that 16-week classes foster a sense of community and connectedness that is lacking in 8-week classes.

Initially, validation theory (Rendón, 1994) was developed to give instructors and staff members a framework for empowering female students to develop agency, affirmation, self-worth, and emancipation from previous barriers (invalidations). Validation is beneficial in student success, pedagogical improvement, and student growth studies. More recently, Rendón and Muñoz (2011) found that the pedagogy and practice of this theory are also beneficial to the most vulnerable students, including low-income students, first-generation students, immigrant students, and students of color. In this study of traditional-age Generation Z students, participants reported instructors to affirm both male and female students through in- and out-of-class motivators. Participants identified motivators such as instructor engagement, timely responses to students' questions, and assistance with time to manage course requirements as validating experiences that empowered them to persist in 8-week courses. Additionally, study participants experienced validation through instructor engagement and peer–peer engagement. Engaging with their classmates to learn course materials produced a sense of confidence, connectedness, and community among students, similar to the 16-week course experience.

This study confirms the initial findings of validation theory, which provided a framework that faculty and staff members could implement to empower female students to build agency and liberation from past invalidation (Rendón, 1994). Later research determined that even the most vulnerable students would benefit from external validation. Garcia and Okhidoi's (2015) study found that external affirmation and internal

acknowledgments from faculty increased student confidence and success. These findings were echoed in this study by the participants, who shared their favorite and least favorite experiences in 8-week courses. Moreover, according to Baber (2018), validation theory provided a better understanding of the validating experiences of underrepresented high school students transitioning to higher education institutions. The students shared that the positive experience of recognizing their existing strengths motivated them to persist in community college. In this study, participants listed several actions of faculty and staff members that affected their motivation to persist in 8-week courses both positively (e.g., positive messages, checking in with students, intentional instructor engagement, and being flexible) and negatively (e.g., unclear expectations, lack of compassion, and waiting for students to ask for help instead of asking students if they need help). Additionally, Fong et al. (2017) identified five categories of existing psychological theories: self-perception, motivation, attribution, self-regulated learning, and anxiety, and their study results revealed a relationship linking motivation and self-perception to student engagement with college faculty and staff members. The current study also identified that lack of faculty engagement is a barrier to persistence, just as faculty and staff engagement in 8-week courses motivates students to pass from one semester to the next successfully.

Limitations of the Study

This study had certain limitations. For example, this study's design or methodology may impact how the study findings are interpreted (Price & Murnan, 2004). The study's limitations relate to the validity and reliability of the study and how the

findings can be used at the studied college, applied generally, or applied to a gap in practice. The limitations of this study include the following.

Sample Size

Use of a smaller sample for face-to-face interviews means the results may not be generalizable to other populations.

Participant Selection

The participant sample consisted of traditional-age college students aged 18–24 years, which meant that 17-year-old and dual-enrollment students were not included in this study. Moreover, this study did not include nontraditional-age students aged 25 years or older.

Generalizability

The study findings may not apply to other colleges because the data collection was based on semistructured interviews with local college participants who shared their experiences of the studied college. The participants' experiences may not be reliable commentary regarding the experiences of traditional-age college students at other colleges.

Recommendations

The study findings indicated that traditional-age Generation Z students are less resistant to enrolling in 8-week courses than the 18–24-year-old students who responded to the 2019 class scheduling survey conducted at the studied college. This change in preferred course modality is significant because the studied college is discussing transitioning from a predominately 16-week course schedule to a predominately 8-week course schedule to support increased graduation rates. Carlson (2019) discussed the need

for college leaders to conduct audits of college operations, including course schedules, and recommended using data about student persistence, completion, and outcomes to adjust course schedules and offer courses that support student graduation. To this end, insights from the study may enrich the collaboration between senior college leaders, college course schedulers, and faculty as they evaluate the effectiveness of course schedules to understand and take steps to support students as they progress toward graduation.

The following are recommendations for future study regarding the barriers to persistence for traditional-age Generation Z college students at the studied college. These recommendations should be used to develop solutions to mitigate barriers to persistence and increase support for degree completion.

- Instructors should pilot teaching practices listed in Table 2 to increase the motivation of Generation Z students and encourage them to overcome barriers to persistence.
- College leaders should provide incentives to faculty to encourage them to invest time in assisting traditional-age and underserved students.
- College leaders should (a) share data with faculty regarding faculty and staff members' impact on student persistence and (b) provide a community of faculty to implement intentional actions to support the needs of students in 8-week courses.
- College leaders should redefine faculty roles and responsibilities to explicitly include validation of students in ways that research suggests may be especially powerful.

- Instructors should acknowledge the strengths of Generation Z students who come to college with the confidence to change the world and provide these students with the support needed to reach that goal.
- Instructors should provide vehicles for consistent communication with students enrolled in 8-week courses so students can use them to ask for help with assignments and so instructors can provide consistent, timely feedback.
- Instead of condensing a traditional 16-week course's assignments and content into 8 weeks without implementing alternative teaching practices that support success for traditional-age Generation Z students, instructors should structure 8-week online and face-to-face courses with allocated time and learning balanced to support student success.
- Instructors of 8-week face-to-face courses should provide clear expectations for question-and-answer sessions during class time and then consistently provide those sessions as stated.
- Instructors of 8-week courses should include time management and successful study habits modules and assessments to support the development of the skills students need to manage accelerated courses. Instructors should teach the following modules: (a) how to comprehend content; (b) how to plan to complete assignments by their due dates; (c) how to request and prepare to attend student support meetings with instructors, tutors, advisors, financial aid staff members, and others; (d) how to access and use outside sources and supplemental materials to help comprehension of course content; and (e) how

to engage with peers in class to set up free group meetings to support success in courses and build a sense of community.

- College leaders should increase 8-week course options as a strategy to facilitate persistence and on-time degree completion.
- Scholars should research the impacts of COVID-19 as a barrier to persistence for Generation Z students.
- Instructors should commit to intentional engagement (getting to know students) to support persistence in 8-week courses.
- Scholars should research the impact of internet access as a barrier to persistence for traditional-age Generation Z students. There were a few mentions of technology impacts, but they did not rise to the level of a barrier to persistence, perhaps because the students grew up with the internet and various mobile, computer tablet, watch, and laptop devices.

Implications

The current study results emphasize the importance of using nontraditional instructional practices when teaching 8-week courses; however, not all instructors use nontraditional methods in 8-week face-to-face classes (Allen and Voytek, 2017). Higher median earnings increase as rates of educational attainment increase (Irwin et al., 2021), and accelerated courses have provided the flexibility for students to make progress toward graduation while juggling commitments between home, work, and education. College leaders expanding the accelerated 8-week course modality must adopt pedagogy and practice methods and strategies that support student success. Instructors and

institutions should consider the students' shared experiences in this study regarding what motivates them to persist in accelerated 8-week courses, both inside and outside class.

Conclusion

The data revealed that students prefer courses in which they can be successful. To be successful, students need to build a sense of community with their instructors. Instructors must engage with students, provide timely responses to students' questions, and teach students how to manage their time. Additionally, students must have the ability to engage with their classmates, because learning the material with classmates produces a sense of confidence. The 16-week classes, according to study participants, generate a sense of community and togetherness that is lacking in 8-week classes.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

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1. Since we are focused on 8-week classes both online and face-to-face, what was your favorite experience or least favorite experience?

2. How would you rank each of the following class formats? Rank the items 1–4. 1 = most liked and 4 = least liked.
   __ A. 16-week face-to-face classes? __ B. 16-week online classes?
   __ C. 8-week face-to-face classes? __ D. 8-week online classes?

3. What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?

4. What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?

5. What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?

6. What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?

7. What motivating aspect of the 16-week course, if added to the 8-week course would motivate you to enroll and complete the 8-week course?

8. In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?

9. In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?

10. Outside of class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?

11. Outside of class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an online class?

12. What 2 things did college staffers (not the instructor) say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?

13. What 2 things did college staffers (not the instructor) say or do to decrease/increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?

14. Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience in 8-week courses that differs from your experience in the 16-week courses?

Appendix B: Research Questions and Related Interview Questions

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ1: What are the experiences of persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?	Q1: Since we are focused on 8-week classes both online and face-to-face, what was your favorite experience or least favorite experience?
	Q2: How would you rank each of the following class formats? Rank the items 1-4. 1 = most liked and 4 = least liked. __ A. 16-week face-to-face classes? __ B. 16-week online classes? __ C. 8-week face-to-face classes? __ D. 8-week online classes?
	Q14: Is there anything else you would like me to know about your experience in 8-week courses that differs from your experience in the 16-week courses?
RQ2: What are the in-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?	Q3: What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?
	Q4: What in-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?
	Q5: What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week face-to-face class?
	Q6: What out-of-class barriers have you experienced in an 8-week online class?

Research Question	Interview Questions
RQ3: What are the out-of-class barriers experienced by persisting traditional-age college students enrolled in accelerated 8-week courses at the studied college?	Q7: What motivating aspect of the 16-week course, if added to the 8-week course would motivate you to enroll and complete the 8-week course?
	Q8: In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?
	Q9: In class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?
	Q10: Outside of class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?
	Q11: Outside of class, what two things did the instructor say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?
	Q12: What 2 things did college staffers (not the instructor) say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week face-to-face class?
	Q13: What 2 things did college staffers (not the instructor) say or do to decrease/ increase your motivation to complete an 8-week online class?