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Barriers to Completing Bachelor's Degrees for Nontraditional Nebraska Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Abstract

Nontraditional students in Nebraska colleges have lower graduation rates than traditional students. Approximately 40% of nontraditional students at a private college withdraw before completing a degree. The purpose of this qualitative study was to discover barriers preventing nontraditional students from completing a degree. The conceptual frameworks were Tinto's student integration model and Bean's student attrition model, which involve financial, social, and academic completion resources. Research questions involve financial, social, and academic challenges preventing nontraditional students from completing a degree. The sample consisted of eight nontraditional undergraduate students between the ages of 25 to 65, an undergraduate administrator, and a focus group with seven academic advisors. Data analysis included conventional qualitative content analysis to examine data. Findings indicated students were experiencing financial, social, and academic barriers. The major themes that emerged were, a) financial needs, b) costs of education, c) managing personal life, school, and work, d) personalized services, community, and school support, e) academic knowledge and skills, and f) lacking e-learning. A position paper was created to help leaders and educators contribute to social change by developing programs and services to assist nontraditional students in terms of achieving their bachelor's degrees and contributing to the growth of the US economy.

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to various individuals who have been by my side throughout the process of a long journey.

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Section 1: The Problem

Introduction

Receiving a college degree is essential for securing advancement in employment (Clarke, 2018). Completing education and getting employment that pays a sustainable salary to cover personal financial responsibilities is legitimate for nontraditional students. However, students often encounter barriers to education due to their particular commitments. Today's students are often family providers, full-time or part-time workers, or pensioners (Hittepole, 2019). The Consortium of Local Authorities Special Programme (CLASP) stated that nontraditional students make up 40% of the student population (CLASP, 2015; Hittepole, 2015). Therefore, educational administrators may need to design programs and services to assist growing nontraditional learners in terms of completing their undergraduate studies. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) suggested that nontraditional students possess common attributes preventing them from achieving their bachelor's degrees Campbell et al., 2017; NCE.2017). Iloh (2018) defined nontraditional students as adults who were 25 years old and over and seeking a part-time or full-time degree.

Furthermore, nontraditional students are more likely to be economically self-reliant. To be successful, they must master balancing their lives around work, family, and other activities throughout their education. As a result, nontraditional students usually look for alternative scheduling opportunities involving evening or online programs and scheduling work, family, and tasks around their educational obligations (van Rhijn et al., 2016).

Definition of the Problem

During the last 20 years, community colleges and universities reported low retention rates at educational institutions in the US (McFarland et al., 2017a). The six year completion rate was 59% in the United States (United States Department of Education, 2015), 46% to 80% in Europe (Quinn, 2013), and 67% in Australia (Edwards & McMillan, 2015). There is a need to persuade nontraditional students to persist until degree completion.

 The NCED (2019) stated that nationwide, nontraditional students' six-year graduation rate for first-time full-time undergraduates who started at a four-year institution in fall 2013, was 63% for students who achieved a bachelor's degree (NCED, 2019; Snyder, 2018). In 2019, 63% of students completed a four-year degree at the same university they started in 2013. for two-year degree institutions, 33% of first time full-time undergraduate students pusued an associate's degree in fall 2016 (Snyder, 2018). During 2019, again 33% of students received an associate's degree.

Roughly in the US, 32,266,000 adults between the ages of 25 and 64 did not complete a college education. Shapiro et al. (2015) said 40% of learners who do not graduate left after their second college year. Graduation rates for undergraduates are significantly lower for Hispanics, Native Americans, black non-Hispanics, and multiracial students compared to White non-Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate students (CCPE, 2017).

The nontraditional student population in higher education is experiencing changes. Kena et al. (2016) said by 2024, the number of students who are 25 years and over will increase by 18%. The 2016 report from the U. S. Department of Education projected an increase of 14% of

students between the ages of 25 to 65. U. S. Department of Education, 2016; Kena et al., 2016).

This increase in population may require collaborators and practitioners to focus on nontraditional

students' retention and program completion strategies. Educational institutions, administrators,

and personnel can become involved in guiding and counseling nontraditional students during

their college experience and at the beginning of their careers to help them succeed.

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Nontraditional students at a private college in Nebraska may face financial, social, and

academic barriers preventing them from completing their undergraduate education. A policy

paper was written to propose recommendations addressing potential obstacles to achieving

bachelor's degrees for nontraditional Nebraska students. Although more nontraditional students

enroll in higher education, fewer registered nontraditional learners complete a degree (Thorne,

2016). As a result, nontraditional students are not meeting their educational goals of completing

a degree (Kahu & Nelson, 2018).

Nebraska's graduation goal by 2020 was 71% to fulfill the needs of the region

(MacDonald, 2018). The graduation rate includes the amount of time it takes a student to

complete a degree and the number who finish in a 4 to 6-year term (MacDonald, 2018). The

graduation rate at the participant university for nontraditional students was 46.7% (Ginder,

2016). Data showed that the participant university is not meeting completion requirements.

According to the participating university website, the school runs a four-year graduation program

to motivate students to receive a degree within 2 to 4 years. The program allows the studentsif a

student keeps up with curriculum requirements and who does not graduate within 4 years, the

institution will cover 100% of tuition and fees until they receive their degree. It is possible that with the support of collaborators and practitioner institutions, nontraditional students could overcome barriers they encounter in completing their higher education.

The retention rate is another success measure. Student retention means students persist at their institution's program (Bean, 2010; Vocino, 2017). The participating university's retention for first-time and full-time degree-seeking undergraduate students was 64% (Ginder, 2016). Nebraska's university 4-year average was 77% (IPEDS, 2016). Nationwide, the average first-year to second-year attendance was 25%, and the retention rate was 72% (Vocino, 2017). The participant's university retention rate is lower than the Nebraska state rate and national rates.

 In Nebraska, students need to graduate from postsecondary education, and having bachelor's level employees will further support the economy. Nontraditional students are an essential part of the economy of Nebraska. In the 13 years, many nontraditional students have been registering in higher education, but only a tiny number have been graduating (McFarlan, 2019). Therefore, increasing the number of educated adults in Nebraska is vital for developing the economy (Martínez-Cerdá et al., 2020). Generally, nontraditional students do not attend college after graduating from high school. Instead, they go directly to employment opportunities. Later in their lives, they return to college when they want to advance in a position at work or change their careers (Rubin et al., 2014). It is essential to encourage individuals to complete their education.

Furthermore, the 4-year graduation rate in 2020 for nontraditional students at the participating university was 40%. The national graduation rate in 2020 was 45.57% at the

baccalaureate level. The participating university graduation rate was lower when compared with comparable colleges in the nation. It is essential to continue motivating nontraditional students to complete bachelor's degrees (College Tuition Compare, 2020).

 According to the NCES (2019), for students who started at public 2-year institutions in 2009, completion rates 8 years after entry were higher among full-time students (30% for first-time and 38% for non-first-time students) compared to part-time learners (16% for first-time students and 21% for nonfirst-time). Also, at public 2-year institutions, transfer rates 8 years after entry were higher among nonfirst-time students (37% for part-time students and 30% for full-time) compared to among first-time students (24% for both full-time and parttime students; McFarlan, 2019).

Rationale

The majority of nontraditional students at the participating university are working adults or active-duty military. Therefore, nontraditional students' other responsibilities may hinder them from remaining in school until graduation. Rabourn et al. (2018) said students expressed reasons for not continuing undergraduate studies, including struggling to pay tuition, time constraints, being too busy, family issues, unmet special needs, and work conflicts. Nontraditional students are active individuals juggling between jobs, school, and personal responsibilities to improve their lifestyle.

Therefore, I explored potential financial, social, and academic barriers that may prevent nontraditional students at a private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees. Exploring obstacles nontraditional students encounter when completing their degree may help

more students receive an education and influence the US economy. Findings from this study resulted in a white paper that offers suggestions for improving nontraditional students' graduation rates. Findings may help educators and leaders develop and implement strategic programs and services to help Nebraska's nontraditional students achieve bachelor's degrees. Study results revealed current academic, financial, and social barriers preventing nontraditional students in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees. Findings from the research will be shared with the participating institution.

Definitions of Terms

Attrition: Loss of nontraditional learners before carrying out educational goals (Bean, 2010; Manyanga et al., 2017;).

College achievement: Successfully graduating from college even if they do not stay in the same school (Tinto, 1999).

College readiness: Amount of preparedness a student needs to register in higher education (Lane et al., 2020).

Disadvantaged students: People in financial, social, or family situations which obstruct their learning at school; usually, these individuals cannot afford their education (Lewis, 2019).

Engagement: Effort toward completing a task or the active component of school motivation (Jung et al., 2018).

Graduation rate: Measure of the amount of time it takes a student to complete a degree (MacDonald, 2018).

Motivation: Motivation is the psychological process underlining the energy, purpose, and durability of activities such as homework completion, class participation, and social interactions with classmates, instructors, and personnel from their institution (Skinner et al., 2009).

Nontraditional students: Nontraditional students are classified as adults 25 years old or over who hold a full-time job and have family responsibilities and continue formal secondary education (Giles, 2012).

Sense of belonging: Strayhorn (2018) described a sense of belonging as the positive ways students feel when their educational institution cares about their wants and needs (Hajrasouliha & Ewing, 2016). Hajrasouliha and Ewing (2016) explained a sense of belonging as:

Students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and essential to the campus community or others on-campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (p. 4).

Significance of the Study

The Nebraska CCPE (2015) said although more nontraditional students enroll in higher education, fewer registered learners complete a degree. It is essential to develop a knowledgeable labor force to expand Nebraska's economy (Sagiyeva et al., 2018). Individuals could improve their lifestyles through education. Education is a commodity because it allows people to have a job and earn a higher salary and chances for career advancement (Wlodkowski et al., 2017). Knowledgeable people share their skills and abilities with communities.

Moreover, educated individuals generally hold leadership and administrative positions in the workplace. When people develop their knowledge and skills, they can improve their

lifestyles and fulfill their essential needs. However, nontraditional students in Nebraska may face financial, social, and academic barriers preventing them from completing their undergraduate studies. More research is necessary to explore financial, social, and academic barriers preventing nontraditional students in Nebraska from completing their undergraduate education.

Education concerns multiple stakeholders in communities. Educated people can share their knowledge and skills with districts. They also can motivate individuals to prepare themselves academically and become financially independent, which allows other people to expand their abilities helps the nation's growth (Huda et al., 2018). Findings could help leaders and educators from Nebraska create programs and services that are beneficial to nontraditional students' success. The study may benefit nontraditional students from Nebraska because it allows them to express their feelings, ideas, and opinions concerning their institution's current program. Nontraditional students had the opportunity to reveal their distinct desires and needs. I analyzed findings and offered recommendations to program administrators and decision-makers. Finally, leaders will have the opportunity to learn about students' points of view, which will help administrators and program leaders improve their initiatives by applying nontraditional students' perspectives.

Research Questions

Many nontraditional students depart school before receiving a degree (MacDonald, 2018). Students experience financial, academic, and social barriers in college (Cross et al., 2018). There was a gap in previous research concerning students' confidence in completing their degree, sentiments about the present situation at college, and their sense of connection with other

students and staff academically and socially that may feed into barriers to completion. Therefore, I addressed nontraditional students' experience with financial, academic, and social barriers in college which prevented them from achieving their bachelor's degrees at a private college in Nebraska. I used inferential or inductive analysis in the study to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the potential financial challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree?

RQ2: What are the potential social challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree?

RQ3: What are the potential academic challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree?

A qualitative approach was applied to conduct the investigation. Interviews and focus groups were held to collect data. These were recorded and I took additional notes throughout the process, in addition to member checking and triangulation after interviews were applied. The conventional qualitative content analysis method was used to examine data. Data analysis included hand content analysis and coded themes.

Review of Literature

An extensive literature review reveals what scholars know about the topic and what needs further investigation. An analysis was conducted of scholarly literature on the following subjects: *education*, *higher adult education*, *nontraditional learners*, *barriers and challenges*, *college completion rates*, *college success*, *theories of retention*, *integration theory*, *attrition theory*,

motivation and engagement, *conceptual framework*, *nontraditional students*, *low-income college students*, *financial barriers*, *social barriers*, and *academic barriers*. The conceptual framework was incorporated, including the history of education in the US and a general research topic review. Literature for research was obtained from peer-reviewed books and articles, reports, and journals, using EBSCO library databases, ScienceDirect, Google, and Internet source materials. While academic writers widely discuss the subject of higher education, Nebraska's nontraditional students' financial, social, and academic barriers require more research. After discussing the conceptual framework, I explored literature on barriers facing nontraditional students from Nebraska seeking a bachelor's degree. Themes outlined for the literature review are financial, social, and academic barriers which impede nontraditional students' completion rates.

Conceptual Frameworks

The conceptual framework "explains either graphically or in a narrative form, the main things to be studied, the key factors, concepts or variables, and the presumed relationships among them" (Miles et al., 2014, p. 18). Tinto's student integration model (SIM) and Beans' student attrition model (SAM) are two such conceptual frameworks (Mabel & Britton, 2018; Siu et al., 2014). Therefore, during the investigation, Tinto's SIM and Bean's SAM were used to explain the phenomenon studied in the research.

Institutional commitment is an essential factor in terms of attaining student success. Tinto (1999) commented that "learning institutions dedicated to improving student success, in particular for low-income and under-represented students usually can meet their student

achievement goals" (p. 5). For instance, they offer internal financial aid, on-campus social activities, and academic support to fulfill learners' needs. These organizations expend capital on resources to increase students' favorable outcome**s** (Arik & Dunne, 2014; Collings et al., 2014; Quaye & Harper, 2014; Tinto, 1999**;** Zheng et al., 2015). Institutional collaboration could have a positive impact on student retention. Fulfilling learners' needs could benefit students as well as institutions.

SIM

In 1975, Tinto created the nontraditional undergraduate SAM, where analysts developed a hypothesis to describe and measure circumstances causing learners to leave college before graduation (Morrow & Ackermann, 2012). Tinto (1975) defined retention as a continuing process comprising students' academic capabilities and accomplishments. Thus, this model is a measure of social power that impacts academic completion. Social integration is one of the theories involving student departure. Tinto's framework explains internal factors affecting students' withdrawal based on internal situations such as money problems, intellectual limitations, or social issues.

SAM

In 1980, Bean created a nontraditional undergraduate conceptual SAM involving nontraditional students' behavior. The model represents external characteristics affecting students' persistence such as sense of wellbeing, resources, and time (Bloemer et al., 2017; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Knack & Keefler, 1997; Mabel & Britton, 2018; Mertes, 2015; Rovai, 2003; Rovai & Downey, 2010). Furthermore, when learners enroll in an institution, they have in mind

some expectations. Combining learners' interactions and integration with personal evaluations such as college academic procedures and knowledge indirectly affects satisfaction and influences intentions to persist (Bean & Metler, 1985; Strayhorn 2012, 2018). Bean's model represents the outer aspects of learners' attrition based on their intuitive feelings and opinions.

Tinto and Bean Models Comparison

Tinto and Bean's models show a relationship between student persistence and financial, academic, and social factors. Social integration variables affecting traditional student departure is the main difference between the two attrition methods of traditional and nontraditional learners (Bean & Metzner, 1985; Vandekerckhove et al., 2015). Tinto and Bean's theoretical frameworks explain nontraditional students' barriers in higher education. A qualitative approach was used for this empirical case study. Students' college collaboration is crucial to their success while learning (Bean & Metzner, 1995; Tinto, 1975).

Tinto articulated the developmental theory based on students' involvement in college. Astin (1984) defined participation as "the amount of psychological and physical energy students devote to the experience" (p. 297), meaning the amount of time a student spends working in academics versus socializing. The more learners participate in college activities and interact with professors and school organizations, the better chances they have to succeed (Astin, 1992; Tinto, 1993). Sometimes, organizations neglect getting students involved (Astin, 1992; Braskamp et al., 2016; Pace, 1980, Rogoff et al., 2016). Educational institutions' involvement is essential when learners are in school (Austin et al., 1992; Tinto, 1993). Students' college collaboration is crucial to their success while attending school.

Barriers to Nontraditional Student Completion Rates

Existing barriers are impeding nontraditional students from graduating, and universities have problems retaining students. Tinto (1993), McKinney and Novak (2013), and Jayaprakash et al. (2014) described the principle of college education using Tinto's theory to explain reasons students withdraw from particular colleges and never return. Possible causes include financial, academic, and social barriers. However, Tinto (1993) and McKinney and Novak (2013) revealed that the primary factor of student attrition is intercommunication between faculty-learners and students' relationship with the institution. Thus, the relationship between institutions and students can impact their college success positively. Steen-Utheim and Foldnes (2018) suggested that establishing a rapport with students when they start their first year contributes to students' engagement. Therefore, institutions' priority should be to connect with students during their first year.

A growing number of nontraditional students enroll in higher education. This high enrollment presents an issue when many mature students do not persist in college (Remenick, 2019). Flynn et al. (2011) and Martinez et al. (2021) suggested that learners' barriers could be classified as dispositional (financial barriers), situational (social barriers), or institutional (academic barriers). This study follows the general framework for financial, social, and academic barriers.

Financial Barriers

Different life conditions and backgrounds may be causing nontraditional students to experience economic struggles (Martinez et al., 2021; Rust & Ikard, 2016). One of the barriers is

related to financial circumstances (Cowan, 2017; Osam et al, 2017). Nontraditional learners generally are financially responsible for themselves or a family with dependents, childcare costs, and other personal expenses besides school (Remenick, 2019). Grants and loans are two alternatives nontraditional students choose to finance their education.

Situational factors include socioeconomic and work issues, family life, cost of education, health conditions, and lack of transportation (Flynn et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2021). The first situational barrier is socioeconomic; many nontraditional students cannot afford to pay for their college training. In 2015, 82% of high school graduates from families with incomes over $100,110 enrolled promptly in postsecondary studies. By contrast, only 62% of students from families with incomes under $37,000 to $60,000 engaged in higher education (Ma, et al., 2016). Thus, as determined by economics, social class is an essential indicator of college access and attendance. Mi and Howard (2020) stated that while students expressed receiving some support, they seldom felt appreciated. I investigate the topic of sense of belonging and contributions of the working class while offering additional organizational support for learners.

Furthermore, social differentiation influences the way people see themselves and their determination (Ball et al., 2020). Ball et al. (2020) said nontraditional learners from low-income backgrounds demonstrated self-doubt and a lack of confidence. Ball et al. (2020) explained that nontraditional learners consulted with individuals from similar circumstances to justify their decision to pursue an education in medicine. Students' insecurities present an issue in the medical profession because administrators extend enrollment opportunities to individuals from

different social classes. Nevertheless, if learners do not feel confident about themselves, they might not persist in college.

Another barrier is the need to work and go to school. Bettencourt (2021) said students from working class backgrounds seldom complete a bachelor's degree. Working students feel less appreciated, perceive themselves as less welcome at colleges, and participate less in social affairs than their peers. Working class learners' struggles could affect their persistence in college. Todman (2021) investigated the effects of White working women attempting to enroll in a UK Russell Group institution. Nontraditional studens have unmet demands and are encountering barriers. Todman (2021) suggested that educational institutions should reinforce and encourage students' participation.

A self-reported open-ended online survey was administered to 348 tertiary-level final-year undergraduate distance students in the UK (Todman, 2021). Respondents were asked how they integrate roles (work, family, and school) and their viewpoints of university support. Findings suggested that adults need to receive more support from the university. They proposed the university should offer concrete guidance and planning tools to manage their roles jointly with the school.

Another situational barrier suggested by research is family life. Hunter-Johnson (2017) found that mature students pursued education to support their families financially. Adults hope to obtain suitable employment once they graduate to fulfill their responsibilities as family providers. Nevertheless, frequently nontraditional students find themselves having to choose between completing their education or taking care of responsibilities such as family duties,

personal needs, and work. Family income may have a direct impact on nontraditional students'

success. Hunter-Johnson (2017) said adults persist in college when they receive support from

their families and school. Nontraditional students rely upon family support. Nontraditional

students and their families make many sacrifices while adults are attending school. Some

students and their families stop going on vacations, visiting with friends and family, or practicing

their hobbies. Occasionally, nontraditional students may face resistance from their spouses who

may feel intimidated by their partner's profession. Hunter-Johnson (2017) suggested that lack of

support from family could prevent students from being successful.

Still further, another situational factor is cost of education. Educational costs are high and

continue to rise (Amani & Kim, 2018; Sutin & Jacob, 2016). Paying for college includes tuition,

fees, books, incidentals, transportation, and opportunity costs. According to Clarke (2018),

average tuition and fees in public four-year institutions grew by $300 (3.1%), from $9,670 in

2016-2017 to $9,970 in 2017-18. Average total charges are $36,420. Standard costs for out-of-

state resident enrollment attending a public university increased by $800 (3.2%), or from 24,820

to $25,620. Average for private nonprofit four-year colleges grew $1,220 (3.6 %) from $3,470 in

2016-2017 to $3,570 in 2017- 2018. In-district tuitions and fees at public two-year colleges

increased by $100 (2.9%), from $3,470 in 2016-2017 to $3,570 in 2017-2018. Enrollment

charges for full-time students in for-profit institutions were $16,000 in 2016-2017.

Employers need applicants to have advanced degrees (Rosendale, 2017). Stark and

Poppler (2016) stated that employers demand job candidates have a baccalaureate degree for

low-skilled jobs. In previous years, employers only required a high school diploma to apply for

an open position. Nevertheless, with changes in the economy, employers now need a skilled

workforce. Education costs could prevent an individual from going to college and finding

suitable employment (Boatman et al., 2017). To meet the new industry expectations, a higher

number of individuals may be returning to school. Employers need applicants to have an advance

degree from college to improve their proficiency and abilities (Rsendale, 2017). Therefore,

researchers suggested academic advisors should foster the college success of working

nontraditional students. Amani and Kim (2018) proposed that institutional leaders should

identify working-class students by asking them directly to self-identify with one of the social

class groups. Amani and Kim (2018) encouraged leaders to foster support programs and services

to cater working students' needs. As well, to examine outreach programs based on parents'

education or income level.

Social Barriers

Participation in social activities is another obstacle nontraditional students encounter in

college. Soria et al. (2019) suggested that students did not feel a harmonious atmosphere, did not

feel accepted on campus, became less involved in social activities than other upper-middle-class

students like them. Soria and Bultman (2014) advocated that academic advisors encourage

students' progress. Soria and Bultman (2014) also showed that nontraditional students do not feel

welcome. They also found a statistically substantial difference between working-class and

upper/middle-class and a sense of acceptance. Special social programs designed to welcome

nontraditional students and academic advisors could assist in welcoming and guiding the

students. Research results suggested that the lack of social interaction could affect students'

sense of belonging, thus, the chances to complete a degree. Bettencourt (2021) conducted another study concerning college sense of belonging with 24 working-class higher education students. Bettencourt (2021) commented that social class is related to acceptance, and working-class learners disclosed lower levels than middle-and upper-class companions. Study findings demonstrated that students create academic and non-academic associations in opposition to the college life they perceive as serving middle-and upper-class colleagues.

The next situational barrier included feelings of loneliness and isolation. Participation in social activities is another obstacle nontraditional learners encounter in college. Soria et al. (2019) studied the psychological characteristics concerning the sense of belonging in students' decision to remain in college until graduation. The researchers used a Student Experience in the Research University (SERU) survey from eight public research universities and propensity score matching to pair two students' classifications; those who participated and those who did not participate in service-learning classes. Findings proposed that in-service learning classes have more significant outcome in lower/working-class learners' sense of belonging and no consequences on middle-/upper-class learners. In-service learning research findings suggest that lower/working-class learners' did not feel an affinity atmosphere, did not feel accepted on campus, became less involved in social activities than other upper/middle-class students like them. Also, results showed that service-learning courses had a more significant positive effects on lower/working-class students' sense of belonging.

Moreover, another potential barrier is health issues. According to the U.S. National Center for Health Statistics (2016), the total population in the United States life expectanFcy is

78.8 years, 76.4 years for men, and 81.2 years for women. Thus, the average life expectancy in the nation is higher than ever before. Nevertheless, people's longevity may be shorter in the future because they eat more unhealthy foods (Department of Education, 2016; Kena et al., 2016), A healthy physical body and a strong mind are vital in students' success.

Furthermore, physiological health issues is another barrier. According to the NatioFnal Center for Health Statistics (2019) the short-term number of lossess of life in the US was 3,358,814 and a death increase of 503,976, around 17.7 % in 2020 (Ahmad et al., 2021). Ahmad et al. (2020) declared that the leading causes of death in the US were heart disease, cancer, and COVID-19. The Covid-19 pandemic was an unforeseen physical health barrier nontraditional learners encountered from 2019 to 2022. The pandemic affected many schools, particularly daycares (Cluver et al., 2020). U.S. school children under 18 years old stayed home (Cluver et al., 2021). Many parents with minor children became stressed looking for childcare. As a result, numerous individuals changed their work schedules to meet their family requirements; some quit their jobs. People experienced death anxiety and various mental health conditions as a result of the pandemic (Menzies & Menzies, 2020). Menzies and Menzies (2020) suggested that students' academic performance declined during the pandemic they lacked access to school supports and activities. Death anxiety and physiological discomfort might be interrelated, and this association might worsen with the pandemic (Menzies & Menzies, 2020). Unexpected life events could delay students' career plans.

Furthermore, mental well-being is another problem students experience. Trenz (2015) explained that college students generally are in more danger of mental and life stress, anxiety,

depression, and alcohol use among traditional and nontraditional students. According to Downs and Eisenberg (2012), nontraditional learners undergo higher mental health issues than traditional learners. Study conclusions indicated that educational institutions should evaluate the mental health problems related to nontraditional students. Chung et al. (2017) studied the degree of resilience among traditional and nontraditional learners. The investigator conducted an online mental health survey with 442 students. Study analysis showed that nontraditional students' life situations, age, employment, and parenting responsibility were stronger than traditional ones. Nevertheless, learners who consider themselves nontraditional in other aspects (e.g., house earnings, cultural background) had similar results. Study findings suggested that experienced and mature-age students may promote higher resilience together with being a caretaker. The analyst concluded that more research is necessary with a larger group of students to identify the relationship between resilience and diversified students' attributes.

Trenz (2015) researched 20,842 students from 24 universities living in nine countries. The analyst studied stress origins beyond main life areas such as financial, work and college issues, family responsibilities, health, love life, and loved one's difficulties, concerning six types of mental disorders (major depressive disorder, bipolar disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, panic disorder, alcohol, and drug use disorder). Study results revealed that stress preventive meditations might stop between 46.9 % and 80% of disorders widespread by creating stress preventive mediations to prevent the students from associating stress with these disorders. Understanding the types of stress and the origin of mental disorders can assist in early diagnoses and treatment.

The next potential barrier nontraditional learners face is a lack of transportation. Transportation Services in the nation include road, air, rail, and waterways. Kimmel et al. (2014) conducted a study related to online and in-classroom nontraditional students' barriers in college. In-classroom students reported that transportation continues to be a barrier. They also said class transportation is challenging because it involves a financial commitment. The average cost of a new car in the United States is $33,560. The average value for a second-hand car in the U.S. is $18, 00. Due to limited financial resources, nontraditional students do not have money to buy a vehicle or additional cash to pay for public transportation fees.

Martinez et al. (2021) researched 58 college students using a short survey to understand how learners define basic needs and want to understand the housing, and food insecurity experiences in higher education. The investigation's results revealed that student-informed definitions related to basic needs comprised food, housing, mental health, sleep, hygiene, and transportation. Students expressed that transportation is limiting their ability to receive an education. According to findings, 46% of the learners were Pell grant recipients; most of them (98%) had encountered food insecurity, and 26% had experienced homelessness. Although nearly half of the learners received the Pell grant, many students are experiencing financial struggles. The findings from this research can assist future investigations to address issues affecting housing insecurity and other basic needs in higher education, such as transportation.

The higher education population is also encountering food instability barriers. Beam (2020) researched food insecurity among nontraditional students. The researcher interviewed eight participants from one university. This investigation featured the participants' college

circumstances they go through while at the same time they struggle with food uncertainty. Findings evidence revealed that food instability is a real issue at college institutionsc and food insecurity is causing nontraditional students psychological and physiological difficulties.

Academic Barriers

Institutional barriers are policies and practices created by an institution. The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] 2018 disclosed that in 2017, 81% of part-time students and 43% of full-time students were working adults (NCES, 2018). Nontraditional students are busy with family, work, and school Carreira et al., (2021). Carreira et al. (2021) recruited 5,351 Portuguese students enrolled in higher education to conduct an extensive database in a longitudinal information research case study. The purpose of the study was to analyze the reasons nontraditional students drop out of college. The study showed that the primary reasons for students leaving college were financial circumstances (27%), work school disagreement (20%), low academic execution (11%), health reasons (8%), and migration (2%). According to findings, family background, personal characteristics, social and academic integration affect nontraditional students' educational paths. Research results also showed that first-year nontraditional students drop-off rates are higher for nontraditional students than for traditional students. Carreira et al. (2021), suggested that nontraditional learners can benefit from receiving preparatory courses or joining students in the classroom with learners possessing related attributes. Traditional students benefit from receiving alternatives for financial barriers and encouraging academic merging.

The second academic barrier includes cultural diversity. Higher education faces challenges deriving from various cultures and many student enrollments (D'Haem & Griswold, 2017; Sin & Kim, 2018). Universities offer nontraditional learners little academic support (Ginsberg, 2017). Sin and Kim (2018) surveyed 1,259 global/domestic students, using regression analysis. Research findings revealed that global/overall and domestic/global students have interchangeable needs concerning professional information and challenges. Compared to their gender and level of study, students' domestic status resulted in fewer significant differences in their needs and challenges. Although international students have more technological knowledge, there is a significant difference in information needs and experience. Findings implied that technological information issues had become less for domestic and global students. Nevertheless, international students still encounter daily information needs and experience.

The third academic barrier influencing students' attainment is academic engagement (Osam, 2017). Engagement is the dedication someone applies towards completing a task. According to Thompson and Ross Gordon (2018) suggested that engagement is the effort directed toward completing a task or the action or energy component of motivation. Wang and Degol (2014) suggested that when learners connect with adults and peers in their school, they stay engaged until graduation. Wang and Degol indicated stated that more studies should be conducted on learning-related emotions, personality, prior learning experiences, shared values, and engagement in nonacademic activities. Engaging the campus environment could meet the student's diverse needs.

College readiness is another academic issue in education. Lane et al. (2020) suggested that college readiness is one of higher education's most critical problems. Educational institutions could help prepare the workforce with new skills requirements. College readiness is defined as the preparedness a student needs to register in higher education (Lane, 2020). The analyst suggested nontraditional students lack some necessary academic skills to be successful in college. Generally, students need to take preparatory courses in English and Mathematics before starting college. In addition, some of the old skills employers required have changed. Isna (2020) stated that the economy also needs individuals in robotics, digital technology, and information, also known as 4.0.

Further, the lack of student readiness will affect nontraditional learners' ability to qualify for future work (Isna et al., 2020). The author continued by mentioning that students need to improve their new skills. According to Treinienė (2017), due to nontraditional students' time away from school, they need to receive academic support. Moreover, Isna et al. (2020) conducted a study with 233 undergraduate learners from Andalas University. Research results showed that students need to enhance their skills' competence knowledge. According to Treinienė (2017), due to the time nontraditional students remain away from school, they should receive academic support. The researcher suggested educational resources could help learners be successful (Treiniene, 2017). Nontraditional students could benefit from college preparedness.

Garcia (2016) explained the term "being educated" means more than obtaining an education or a cognitive skill. Being educated also means the "acdquisition of noncognitive skill traits such as "critical thinking skills, problem solving skills, social skills, persistence, creativity,

and self-control" (p. 11). Which are the skills individuals use in their homes, work, school, and society in general (Garcia, 2016). Garcia (2016) said that noncognitive skills are also essential in the development of an individual and can help people become successful in school and life. Study results showed that cognitive and noncognitive skills are important in developing a person's identity and social interactions with others. Findings revealed that both, noncognitive and cognitive skills should be integral part of the school curriculum.

College institutions are experiencing a diverse group of learners in the classroom, including disabled students, nontraditional students, ELL (English Language Learners), first-generation students, and military students (Boothe et al., 2018). The author conducted a study using a contemporary approach to educate the new diversified student population, such as the Universal Design for Learning (UDL) method. The analyst tested the use of the UDL in the classroom; it showed favorable fulfilling the demands of the students. Sparks (2016) performed a different investigation related to learning disabilities to clarify the misconceptions about language disability (LD) and foreign language learning disability (FLLD). The purpose of the study was to inform the public about FLLD, and LD. Findings demonstrated that learners grouped as LD regularly pass FL courses. Thus, most of the secondary and postsecondary students classified as LD pass FL courses. Besides, learners' FL class grade percentages are comparable with low-achieving LD learners (Sparks, 2016). In addition, Sparks (2016) revealed that students characterized as LD and were offered course substitutions and waivers, which obtained average and sometimes even better results in native language skills, reading, spelling, writing, and vocabulary. Also, learners received average scores in their ACT (Sparks, 2016).

The findings revealed that students classified as LD and were granted course substitutions and waivers exhibited at minimum at least average, and sometimes average, native language skills in reading, spelling, writing, and vocabulary. In addition, studies with postsecondary students classified as LD and who had passed FL courses college showed that these LD students achieved the average (Sparks, 2016). Institutional leaders must explore the needs of the new diverse group of learners in the classroom.

Another academic barrier is language or learning disabilities nontraditional students experience while at school (Flynn et al., 2011; Martinez et al., 2021). Moreover, innovative teaching methods are applied to assist ELL students. For example, Boothe et al. (2018) incorporated activities to reinforce outreach and language skills through experiential, collaborative language learning. The method consists of four strategies: home visits, peer buddy programs, school-community partnerships, and field experiences. Boothe et al. (2018) suggested that the secret of the program success is instructors' engagement and involvement in the community.

Moreover, learning disabilities affects nontraditional learners' self-assurance. Jameson and Fusco (2020) said nontraditional students demonstrated less self-confidence than traditional students. The analysts conducted a study related to the mathematics subject. Jameson and Fusco (2020) reported that female students and nontraditional learners experience higher mathematic anxiety levels. The researcher conducted a study with five extremely insecure females concerning their mathematical skills. Findings advocate a previous outlook related to mathematics anxiety. Nevertheless, nontraditional students showed the same low confidence.

Nontraditional learners' academic support from instructors could alleviate students' stress, and insecurities.

Quaye and Harper (2019) suggested that higher education and the learners' needs in the United States are becoming gradually more diverse. No longer is it necessary to make institutions similar. Therefore, faculty and student affairs educators most develop programs and services that will encourage students to make the best experience while in college, both inside and outside of the classroom (Quaye & Harper, 2019) despite learners' cultural background. Engagement could help increase the chances students stay in college until they receive a degree.

The third potential social or dispositional barrier reasons nontraditional students stop attending college due to metacognitive capabilities. Metacognition is known as the human's practical understanding of knowledge. Ward and Butler (2019) conducted a study to evaluate the relationship between metacognition and academic performance. Researchers recruited 97 student volunteers, 55 female and 42 male students' volunteer. The objective of the investigation was to geralize findings to freshmen university learners. Also, to find out the importance of metacognitive instruction in first-year college students to motivate success in higher education. The investigators used a survey and a Metacognitive Awareness Inventory. Findings demonstrated a notable correlation between metacognitive and academic performance. Additionally, results showed that metacognition forecasts academic execution. The study results also imply that the level of metacognitive expands with training. Therefore, it is valuable to assist first-year college students to persist until graduation.

Nontraditional learners never entered college after high school or left college after completing one or two years. While students are away, they get a job and learn new skills from a routine employment. Although adults acquire previous work experience, the skills they know do not help adults succeed in college. Instructors need to recognize that nontraditional students are different from traditional students. Nontraditional learners require academic assistance and the support from the educational institution to graduate from college. In return, they can share with other students their experience and expertise.

Social Barriers

Dispositional or social barriers relate to psychological barriers, including fear of failure and perception about the ability to succeed. It also refers to motivation, engagement, metacognitive capabilities, the student's relations with others like friends and family, and the institution, organizations, church, political, and community involvement (Koivisto, 2019). Additionally, due to the long -time nontraditional stay away from school, they do not feel confident about their knowledge and abilities (Buchanan, 2020). Further, nontraditional students generally have various personal obligations besides school, such as work, and family which leaves them little time for a social life (Chung et al., 2017). Lack of social interaction with peers, instructors, and campus life results in isolation (Lim, 2018). Feelings of loneliness decrease learners's chances to succeed. Nontraditional learners need support from the institution and instructors to complete a degree.

The following social barrier is self-confidence. Previous research has suggested that undergraduate nontraditional students have low self-confidence (Bennet et al., 2021; Hittepole

2019; Spagnola & Yagos, 2021) According to Smith-Barrow (2018) nontraditional learners will grow to 13.3 million through 2026. Consequently, it is crucial educational leaders develop applicable strategies that will support educators to assist nontraditional students succeed in their careers. Bennett et al. (2021) explained that while nontraditional students' enrollments continue to rise, graduation rates are not as high as expected. Osam et al., (2017) explained that nontraditional learners encounter different barriers than traditional students which keep them from returning to college earlier in life such as "confidence, self-esteem, and emotions" (p. 2).

Jameson and Fusco (2020) suggested that psychological barriers relate to mathematics anxiety. The author researched five extremely anxious nontraditional female students in five individual interviews, applying Albert Bandura's Triarchic Reciprocal Causality model. The model refers to three factors: cognitive affective, biological events, and environment behavior (Jameson & Fusco, 2020). The purpose of the investigation was to derive the effects of mathematic uncertainties in nontraditional female students. Previous research demonstrated that nontraditional learners experience significant mathematical anxiety and little success (Effiom & Bassey, 2018; Lisciandro et al., 2018). Research suggested that personal constituents "(e.g., self-efficacy and perception of ability)" (p. 70) and environmental components "(family support and teaching style)" (p. 70) prompt high levels of mathematics anxiety in female adult students. Jameson and Fusco (2020) suggested that it is essential to acknowledge nontraditional students reported high anxiety levels and we should find out why this group of students feel unsure about arithmetic. They recommended that colleges should offer developmental mathematics courses only for nontraditional learners taught by educators instructed in adult instruction.

The following social barrier includes students' lack of motivation. Skinner et al. (2009), remarked that motivation is defined as the psychological processes that underline activities' energy, purpose, and durability. MacDonald (2018) discovered that nontraditional students continue to grow when they are persuaded. When students feel motivated, they persist until they finish school. There is a relationship between organizations and learner's achievement.

Sense of belonging was the next social barrier. Ahn and Davis (2020) surveyed 380 students using logistics regression. The authors aimed to search the aspects responsible for belonging by applying a qualitative procedure. Survey analysis suggested that acceptance and retention impact academic and social involvement. Further research is necessary to understand the relationship between sense of belonging and disadvantaged students. Whitten et al. (2020) also researched concerning acceptance. The study attempts to discover the factors contributing to a sense of belonging, crucial to participant students' perseverance. Data collection included 252 students enrolled in college introductory business courses. The students answered a paper survey during the final two weeks of class. Research findings revealed that the key factors of sense of belonging are caring and positive connections between students and instructors.

The national job market changed from industrial to technology, healthcare, business service, and service industries opportunities (Carnevale et al., 2019). Due to people's consumption patterns, the manufacturing market value fell from 25% to 12% between 1947 and 2017 (Carnevale et al., 2019). Market changes and the COVID-19 pandemic have caused many people to lose their jobs. The United States Department of Labor (2021) revealed that in January 2022, approximately 6.5 million individuals in the United States were unemployed, the

unemployment rate was at 4.0%. During the course of the year unemployment dropped 2.4%.

Unemployment declined by 3.7 million (Bureau of Labor Statistics, United States Department of

Labor, 2021). Most of the employment positions available include part-time or less than 35 hours

(Economic Policy Institute, 2017). Although, Nebraska unemployment rate in 2020 was only

1.9%, and in 2022 was 1.7%, it is hard to find a sustainable job in the state without having some

academic qualifications (Gallagher, 2020). The statistics above suggested job conditions are still

unstable in the United States. Undergraduate enrollments must continue to rise to prepare the

future workforce. These factors include impact on learning outcomes, level of risk in adoption,

faculty receptiveness, issues of equity and inclusion, and required level of spending. Having

fewer educated adults damages a city's economy (Brown et al., 2020). In contrast,

knowledgeable individuals contribute to the development of a community with their expertise

and abilities.

      According to EDUCAUSE (2020), in the next 10 years, higher education will experience

a breakthrough in a more diversified population of adults and remote students, online classes,

and course studies development in the next ten years (Brown et al., 2020). Further, new

technological advances will offer learners alternatives to complete education online. Some of the

advances include, artificial intelligence, more student privacy protection, next-generation and

digital leaning environment (NGDLE), analytics proficiency and students' privacy cost-benefits

inference (Brown et al., 2020). The new adult learner population could benefit from advanced

technological programs.

Nontraditional Students' Decreased Graduation Rates

The first-year enrollment rates have increased in the last twelve years, while the graduation rate has decreased (CCPE, 2017). Graduation rates for undergraduates are remarkably lower for Hispanics, Native Americans, black non-Hispanics, and multiracial students than for white non-Hispanics and Asian/Pacific Islander undergraduate students (CCPE, 2017). Therefore, it is essential to create educational programs to stimulate the adult learner minorities in Nebraska to pursue higher education. Additionally, Nebraska increased the financial aid funds available for higher education. Nevertheless, the funds available are not sufficient to cover the number of students who qualify for grants. The State Legislature Appropriations Committee distributed Financial Aid programs that have helped many students complete undergraduate studies. Still, there is a need to increase funds to assist the state's low-income and moderately-low-income students in attending college (CCPE, 2017). Despite the state efforts to support learners, nontraditional students' graduation rates are not meeting projected goals.

Higher Education New Alternative Learning Approaches

Another significant change has evolved on campus related to classroom teaching and learning techniques with technology. From 2011 through 2016, a higher adult teaching approach transformed from a classroom setting to an independent technology-learning environment (Zelihic & Reed, 2014). Around 2012 the EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative studied the effects of technologies on teaching, learning, and creative inquiry in adult education (Johnson et al., 2013). Research results showed that technology has a positive impact on adult engagement. In 2013 Apple introduced "mobile apps," and Microsoft instituted the "tablets." nontraditional students

and the public, in general, began reading books on "tablets" and downloading applications on their mobile devices for educational and personal uses (Poppens, 2020). Improvement in classroom teaching and learning techniques could facilitate students' learning.

During the years 2012 to 2016, the technology significantly impacted educational institutions. Additional inventions emerging were "game-based learning" and "learning analytics." These devices allowed adults to become engaged in learning while problem-solving (Sharples et al., 2012). Moreover, game designers created new backgrounds, and learning game strategies became more user-friendly. Technology, in general, became preferred for training methods, including online tutorials and training programs such as apprenticeship programs; and game-based learning (Brown, & Bimrose, 2018; Frania, 2014 & Johnson et al., 2013). In addion, distance learning offers an alternative to nontraditional learners' busy schedules.

<div align="center">**Implications**</div>

Various interactions influence nontraditional students' college persistence. These barriers may be preventing nontraditional students graduating. Goddard (2015) explained that Nebraska's labor force does not possess the fundamental expertise required for the jobs available in the state as 64% of the jobs in the state needed a bachelor's degree. Nevertheless McFarlan (2019) reported that graduation rates was 37% for part-time undergraduate nontraditional students. And 30% for full-time undergraduate nontraditional students. It is vital to study the obstacles nontraditional learners encounter to complete an education and assist the workforce in fulfilling the employment requirements. Six months after graduation, I will present research findings at a National Conference to a group of university educators and leaders. A white paper was

developed and presented to the enrollment management team to share the research results and recommendations for enhancing the university's retention of nontraditional students.

Summary

Nontraditional students from Nebraska encounter possible financial, academic, and social barriers which limit their opportunities to complete a career. In recent years, the US economy shifted from industrial to technology, business jobs, and healthcare. The manufacturing era is now part of history. Changes in the economy of the nation create changes in the workforce. Many businesses require job applicants to hold at least a bachelor's degree to qualify for employment. At the same time, university tuition is expensive, and costs continue rising. Fewer individuals can afford to enroll in higher education. Additionally, higher education policies, practices, and market conditions may be creating barriers and challenges, limiting individuals from completing formal education.

The literature review indicates that barriers may influence nontraditional students' college persistence. Tinto's SIM involves departure in the absence of compatibility between the learner and institution. By contrast, Bean attributes students' departure to external factors not associated with the university, such as students' beliefs, behaviors, and school experiences. Financial, social, and academic circumstances could influence persistence despite differences in perspectives. In Section 2, I address the research methodology designed to evaluate this investigation.

Section 1 of this proposal includes an introduction to the subject, evidence, the problem, and its significance. Additionally, it includes a review of literature concerning nontraditional

students from Nebraska and financial, social, and academic barriers which prevent them from completing their undergraduate education. Despite state efforts to retain nontraditional students in college, many adults have been enrolling but later drop school before receiving a bachelor's degree (Nebraska CCPE, 2016). I did a study at a local college to find out more information about current issues.

In Section 2, the research methodology was incorporated, which included my analysis. A local university in Nebraska was selected for research. The qualitative method was used to conduct the study. A systematic case study design was the approach applied to relate events. During research, participants expressed their own experiences and opinions concerning the topic. Following investigation is data analysis and the results section.

Finally, in Section 3, recommendations are shared per research analysis results. Project implications and implications for social change, possible future project development, and a white paper are discussed, in addition to a second literature review.

Section 2: The Methodology

Introduction

The research methodology involves gathering and analyzing data to make decisions and gain knowledge about a particular topic. I aimed to discover financial, social, and academic barriers preventing nontraditional students from achieving a bachelor's degree at a four-4 private college in Nebraska. Three research questions were addressed.

Research Questions

RQ1: What are potential financial challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees?

RQ2: What are potential social challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees?

RQ3: What are potential academic challenges preventing nontraditional students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees?

The qualitative research design was used to answer these research questions. Heale and Twycross (2018) said a case study design is used in social and life science research methodology. Researchers use case studies to conduct a thorough investigation of a group of individuals, units, or persons (Heale & Twycross, 2018). This section includes research methods, a description of participants, the research site, access respondents, statistical research methods, data collection strategies, ethical procedures, and a conclusion with overall study results.

Research Method

Qualitative Methodology

The qualitative case study design is the research method that was chosen for this investigation. Creswell (2016) stated that qualitative methods allow the researcher to organize and analyze data in order to gain knowledge about a participant, arrive at conclusions, or make decisions. Investigators use qualitative methods to gather data from interviews with few participants and generate themes to examine data (Bazeley, 2009; Creswell, 2016). Additionally, qualitative methods permit the researcher to describe participants' opinions and experiences (Creswell, 2016). Qualitative methods also involve considering the objective of research to capture participants' actual experiences. The qualitative research design was the most effective approach to describe affairs of

participants.

The qualitative method is inductive. Inductive research involves forming sequences and observations. Lodico et al. (2010) explained that qualitative research methods involve applying "naturalistic settings, broad questions, nonrandom participant selection methods, and data collection methods" (p. 264). Qualitative studies could also include "observation and intervening interactive research role, inductive methods of research questions, and narratives from data reporting" (Lodico et al., 2010, p. 264).

Case Study Design and Approach

A systematic case study is a qualitative approach used to investigate . A systematic case study is a comprehensive investigation of a current event (Hancock & Algozzine, 2015). A case

study permits researchers to describe experiences of individuals participating in an activity. Additionally, it allows investigators to understand limits and intricacies of research. I investigated financial, social, and academic barriers preventing nontraditional students at a private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees. During research, a qualitative method was applied.

Qualitative methods involve inductive and constant comparative analysis (Merriam, 2015). I focused on the process, meaning, and understanding of barriers to college completion. The researcher is the primary data collection instrument. I looked specifically at financial, social, and academic barriers that may prevent nontraditional students at a local university in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degrees.

The research design is a case study with a thematic approach. The thematic approach was applied to establish a case study because it enables the researcher to gather data, record, and analyze nontraditional students' views (Creswell, 2016). The qualitative method was determined to be the best method to address the problem and allow participants to express their perceptions. This allows the researcher to describe experiences of a group of people participating in an activity to achieve an end (Creswell, 2016). The narrative research design involves exploring accounts of people to describe their characteristics. Ethnographic designs involve studying the culture of a group. Therefore, a case study design method was used because it enabled participants to explain circumstances they encountered that were rooted in their own experiences.

Many analysts have criticized the case study process. Yin (2017) suggested that the case study design lacks thoroughness, and data can be transformed. Flyvberg (2017) explained that

the case study requires variation because it involves incorporating a small sample. The value of applying the case study is it allows understanding a problem extensively. Therefore, it is the best method to use in this study to answer research questions.

Research Site

The selected site for this project was a 4-year private college located in Nebraska. Before the investigation, there was no interaction with the participating university and no prior relationship with gatekeepers, students, administrators, or academic advisors. The first interview and the focus group took place at a conference room on campus. Remaining interviews were held over the telephone. Once the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) (Number 11-20-18-0171146) approved the project proposal, I emailed the university's administrator. In the email, I included a request for permission to research at their site, an explanation of voluntary participation, and a description of the study's topic and objectives. After receiving permission to research on site, the next step was to access participants.

Participants

Sample Population

Nontraditional students, administrators, and academic advisors at a private college were the population. The first sample included seven nontraditional undergraduate students at a 4-year private college in Nebraska in freshman, sophomore, junior, and senior level programs. They were 25 or older, fluent in English, were Nebraska residents, and attended the participant university. The second participant group included one undergraduate administrator, and the third

participant group was comprised of seven undergraduate academic advisors; both were from the same research site.

Purposeful Sampling

The process for selecting participants is known as sampling. A screening procedure known as a sampling network was chosen. Purposeful sampling was a probability sampling technique used during the study. Yin (2013, 2017) said the sampling system involves asking informed people about candidates or gathering basic facts about the research population. Participants were seven current nontraditional students, one undergraduate administrator, and seven undergraduate advisors. The sample was collected from a private college with an approximate total enrollment of 1,385, of which 277 were nontraditional students.

Justification for Number of Participants

When selecting research participants, researchers must choose an adequate number of individuals. The respondents were selected according to the IRB guidelines for participant selection from the research. The next segment describes the process I followed. The sample size was determined according to the resources available, the information required, and the inquiries asked (Lodico et al., 2010). Consequently, I decided on fifteen total participants, this included seven students following the interview protocoll, one administrative interview, and one focus group consisted of seven academic advisors. To attain the number of participants, the University Registrar and Institutional Researcher Official offered a list of current students to select nontraditional learners from the Summer 2019 through Spring 2020. The college official also provided two contact names. One of the individuals was the primary contact who facilitated

access to the administrator, and the second contact provided access to the academic advisors. The saturation point is usually eight to twelve participants (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006). Small samples in interview-based qualitative research, collecting the interview data will take longer, and offer more in-depth information. Fifteen participants were included in the study from a potential participant's list from the participant university which included students, administrators, and academic advisors. Because of the qualitative nature of this study 15 participants was acceptable and approved by the committee.

Protection of Participants' Rights

Before gathering data and conducting research, an IRB application was sent to Walden University. Further, the IRB from the local participant university was also approved. The purpose of the approvals was to assure the integrity of the investigation. Additionally, respondents received an email correspondence inviting them to volunteer in the study. The letter explained specific consent conditions. Informed consent was applied to notify the risks related to the research. Participants' involvement was voluntary; they could retreat without any consequences at any stage of the study.

The consent document included a segment on privacy-related to anonymity and confidentiality. This measure assured the confidentiality of participants' answers. In the final report, the researcher used a different identifier other than the names of members. To keep names and personal information gathered undisclosed, participants' comments in anecdotal evidence used coded indicators such as a number to indicate each different participant. Data information was kept in a password-protected encrypted database on a secure cloud server. Information

related to data collection will remain stored on a computer for five years. After the five-years

term, the files will be deleted with any information obtained during the data collection process.

Gaining Access and Selecting Participants

Gaining access to respondents required a particular protocol. Bogdan and Biklen (2007)

suggested that these steps include obtaining consent from different parties. The first step was to

get a proposal approval from Walden University's IRB and the research sites' Institutional

Review Board. The criteria for student participants were male or female adult learner, 25 years

old, single or married with/without family responsibilities, and fluent in English, Nebraska

residents, and attending participant university. The qualifications for an administrator and

academic advisors were either male or female, working with undergraduate students, employed

by participant university, and fluent in English. Also, an email was sent to each respondent

requesting their voluntary participation and explaining research conditions.

The next step is to contact the students. Once the institutional board granted permission

to reach students, a list of potential participants containing their names and email address was

requested. Participants were selected by the University Registrar and Institutional Researcher

Official. The list included learners' names and addresses. Furthermore, an email was sent to 277

nontraditional students, eight academic advisors, and a single administrator requesting their

voluntary participation, explaining the benefits and that they would receive a $25 gift certificate

for their participation. Additionally, 277 nontraditional students, eight academic advisors, and a

single administrator received an invitation to telephone call. Only seven nontraditional students,

seven academic advisors, and a single administrator agreed to participate in the interview.

Participants replied either by email or telephone.

Ethics and Confidentiality

When conducting qualitative students, seven academic advisors, and one administrator,

some ethical issues could arise. Ethical issues in my project are related to protecting the

participants' identity or not disclosing sensitive or personal information. A copy of participants'

data information will be kept in a password-protected data file to avoid identity issues.

Participants were treated respectfully and were informed that their participation was voluntary

and could withdraw at any time of the research process. Another ethical issue was related to

designing an informed consent form to obtain written permission from participants. Before the

interviews, respondents were informed about the duration of the meetings. During the writing

process, an accurate account of findings was recorded, even when the results did not agree with

attrition, the fundamental theory of the research.

Moreover, some of the biases could become apparent when a researcher forms an

investigation. (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Discrimination occurs when a researcher behaves in

favor of or against participants' culture or any other perspectives. Moreover, to avoid habituation

(bias) from participants, a social desirability technique was applied (Robinson, 2014). On one

occasion, a respondent tried to answer a question looking for approval. The questions were

repeated this time to reduce habituation, the interview conversation, and the question-wording

were changed to reduce habituation. Throughout the research interviews, questions were asked,

notes taken, and the participants' responses were listened without interruptions to avoid misconceptions.

Some biases in the research could be present during the study. One of the techniques used to avoid biases was refraining from making cultural assumptions from participants' responses. Another kind of bias emerges when the researcher designs a hypothesis and uses the participants to justify their theories. When revising transcribed notes, the methods applied were critical thinking, response reevaluation, and verification of assumptions and hypotheses with the respondents.

Data Collection Instruments

Research instruments are the measurement tools acquired to gather information concerning the research topic (Jamshed, 2014). I designed three instruments to collect data: A student interview, an academic advisor's interview, and an administrator interview. I tried to understand the perspectives of the phenomena subjectively through the interviews (Jamshed, 2014). I developed nine open-ended questions for students, academic advisors, and the administrator. Additionally, nine probing questions were included to add more information and clarify the subject (Lingard and Kennedy 2010). The following step was to organize the data.

Data Collection Process

Data collection instruments refer to the device the researcher uses to gather data. Data gathering was an inductive approach to research based on theory gathered from interviews and questionnaires (Lewis, 2015). The information from interviews was audio-recorded, and notes were taken on paper. During the investigation, tools to manage data included face-to-face and

telephone semi-structured interviews, audio-recordings, MP3 interview recordings, a reflective journal, participants' call logs, and questionnaires. Data gathered were organized into computer files, conveyed from spoken words into a typed document.

Because of the investigation's fundamental nature, personal experiences and viewpoints were gathered during the inquiry. Throughout the interviews, the participants voiced their perceptions about the existing financial, social, and academic barriers in higher education. Throughout the focus group, academic advisors expressed their opinions about their knowledge concerning the difficulties learners face in higher education and how they can help students overcome the barriers.

The participants received an email explaining the study's purpose, confidentiality agreement, contact information, and interview process description. The qualitative data collection tools included one-on-one semi-structured open-ended interviews and a focus group session. Open-ended questions related to investigation topic were incorporated in the one-on-one interview and focus group protocols. A reflective journal and research logs were included to keep track of the data. The participants' sample size was seven nontraditional students, a focus group with seven academic advisors, and a single administrator. Protocols were followed to guide the discussion. The protocol pertains to the questions and directions used in the inquiry procedures. Finally, the informed consent was defined to the participants, and each participant signed the consent statement.

The research interviews were at a private university in Nebraska. The university has two campuses. The first interview and the focus group were in-person — the rest of the meetings

were over the telephone. Initially, it was difficult to make appointments with participants. During

the research interview process, IRB approved to add telephone call interviews to improve

nontraditional students'research participation because they are geographically varied and have

busy lives. Generally, nontraditional students have family responsibilities, one or two jobs, and

school. Offering more than one option to meet lhelped with their willingness to volunteer. Once

we met, they seemed comfortable sharing their opinions, ideas, and experiences about the

research topic.

A voice recorder with high-quality audio and an integrated omnidirectional microphone

was used to record the conversation. The remaining students' and administrator's conversations

were recorded simultaneously with a computer transcribing system. The data were transcribed on

a computer into a Word document immediately after the meetings with a password. Then, the

documents were prepared and edited for analysis. Next, a copy of the transcription was sent to

each respondent by email. I requested participants to review the document in the email to ensure

their answers conveyed the message they intended to deliver. Once the interviewer received the

document back, the analysis process started. The participants engaged in either individual

interviews or a focus group.

Semi-Structured Interviews and Focus Group

The scheduled time for individual face-to-face telephone interviews was for 35 to 40

minutes. The nine interviews included questions concerning the participants' perspectives about

the barriers preventing nontraditional students from achieving their bachelor's degrees at a four-

year college in Nebraska. The interviews consisted of nine semi-structured open-ended questions

for students and nine slightly different for academic advisors (see Appendix C & D). I asked

participants interview questions and probing-related questions. Participants' responses were

direct and spontaneous.

The time initially scheduled for the focus group was 45 to 60 minutes. The final time

frame for the focus group was 51 minutes. The discrepancy in the interview duration was due to

the limited time the participants had available because of their busy schedules., According to

Oltman (2016), telephone interviews can save time, but they tend to be shorter than in-person

interviews due to participants talking less when using the telephone method.

The contact person for the focus group was one of the program directors from the same

institution. The program director provided advisors' email addresses. It took various attempts to

schedule a meeting with academic advisors. I contacted the advisors directly by email on several

occasions. The meeting's date was changed twice. At the end of each meeting, participants

received a gift certificate as a token of gratitude for their participation. During the process, I

communicated various times with the academic advisors; to send them a letter of invitation and a

letter of consent which they read and signed before the interview on the meeting day. The last

contact was to request advisors to verify if data transcriptions represented their ideas and

opinions.

Logs, Journals, and Notes

Other procedures for keeping track of the data included call logs, reflective research

journals, tables, and field notes, to reduce bias and build transparency (Korstjens & Moser,

2018). The procedures helped in acquiring information recovered from interviews and notes. I

wrote a reflective journal before and after each meeting to record thoughts and track the data collection process.

Moreover, the journal contained thoughts or concerns before the research interviews and participants' completion research process notes. The accounts were written before and after the research. Also, the research journal contained information about respondents' participation process completion status concerning consent forms, gift card certificates, and member checking documents. A log was incorporated into the data collection process. It contained participants' interview call log. The records described the following headings: participants' identification name, call date, appointment date, and comments. Three to five calls were scheduled daily. If there was no answer, the interviewee left a message on participants' voice mail, including the call back number, name, and purpose of the call. Also, under the comment section the interviewer wrote a call reminder in the comment section to call the participant back the next day. Additionally, the analyst composed a short script recorded in every unanswered call and participants who answered the telephone. Following this, a matrix was created.

Table 1

Interview Dates and Locations

Dates	Participants	Location
July 24, 2019	1	Face-to-face
Sept 04, 2019	7	Face-to-face
Sept 10, 2019	1	Telephone
Sept 11, 2019	1	Telephone
Sept 20, 2019	1	Telephone
Sept 25, 2019	1	Telephone
Sept 27, 2019	1	Telephone
Dec 18, 2019	1	Telephone
Feb 22, 2020	1	Telephone

Note. The table represents a sample of participants interview dates and locations.

Data Analysis Process

Examining the data was the next step in the process. Data analysis is a systematic process of working with the data used to understand the subject's experiences (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Once participants approved the transcription accuracy of the document, the coding of the data started. The data were closely read and analyzed to unfold the phenomena (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Conventional qualitative content analysis was the method applied to examine the data gathered. According to Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, (2017), coding the data constitutes analyzing the information from research, subdividing, and

categorizing the data. To study the qualitative data, Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, (2017) suggested the following steps.

The first step in the analysis process was reading, examining the data, and writing few notes in the margins. The following outline was used for page coding interview analysis, suggested by Jones (1999). The margins were wide on the left and the right side to write down the researcher's thoughts. Leaving space on both sides of the margin facilitated the process of writing ideas or memos related to data research, justifying the general idea, and collecting the right amount of information.

The second step was to divide the text into fragments of information. The documents were examined one at a time. The most "interesting, or the shortest comments" were selected from each interview, drawing a box around it (Creswell, 2012, p. 244). Selecting exciting or short comments is a technique used to analyze the meaning behind a statement (Creswell, 2012). During this process, key passages were chosen. On the left side of the document, two or three words were designated to identify the words of the participant (Jones, 1999). The following step is coding and analyzing the data collected.

The third step was to reduce overlapping and to code repetition. Participants' ideas were identified to discover the relationship between them. This course of action required identifying concept relations between text fragments and placing a bracket around the text. Text segments are defined as sentences or phrases that relate to a single code (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). A code was assigned, with a word or phrase to describe the interpretation of the text segment. The process moved back and forth between data analysis and collection (Bugdan & Biklen,

1998). Codes conveyed the academic advisors, administrators, and nontraditional students' perspectives concerning learners' financial, social, and academic barriers.

The fourth step in the data analysis process was collapsing codes into themes. Subsequently, the codes were assigned to categories to identify patterns, themes, and relationships (Dey, 2003; Milles & Huberman, 1994). A list of the code words was made, related codes were identified and grouped together, and redundant codes were eliminated. I applied 15 – 25 codes as labels which were actual words or phrases from respondents, and occasionally, some personal code words were used. I reduced the previous code list to seven respondents' descriptions by further chunking the codes into smaller themes. The strategy I followed was identifying a passage in the text, searching and identifying concepts, and relationships in the data (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Previous codes were reduced to seven making a personal interpretation of the information (Erlingsson & Brysiewicz, 2017). Finally, I wrote the initial data analysis process of notes. This process involves identifying, examining, and interpreting the patterns and themes in the research data collected from participants. These patterns and themes answered the research questions.

Assessing the trustworthiness of data findings of one's research requires coordinating the investigation process in a way that can uphold academic consideration (Miles et al., 2014). The following segment includes the strategies applied to validate the credibility of the research. First, notes were taken during face-to-face interviews, telephone conversations and employed an automated transcription conference room system that transcribed the conversation. Next, the quality of the research was evaluated using validity, reliability, and dependability.

Validity measures the accuracy of a study. Participant review was used to verify the investigation's accuracy and consistency; transcribed documents were emailed to the participants to ensure that the written words expressed their ideas and opinions to build research validity and consistency. Reliability refers to how consistently a method measures something. The data from participants were gathered, transcribed, and inspected. Interview conversations with open-end questions were formulated and recorded with an audio recorder. Next, the recordings from participants were transcribed on a computer Word document.

To reach dependability, I presented consistency in study findings, interpreted findings, and reported the results (Moon et al., 2016). Additionally, detailed records of the study were collected in a word document and kept on a computer to facilitate future duplication of the research and process.

To show confirmability, I incorporated member checking and triangulations. Also, related data framework to theory, analyzed the data objectively, and made fair statements sopported by experimental facts (Padgett, 2016). A critical analysis of the research findings was applied. The next step was to justify the procedures and conclusions of the study. Member checking and triangulation were incorporated to ensure the credibility and accuracy of findings. Analysts must remain impartial to secure the result's accuracy of the investigation (Creswell, 2016). For this study, it was proper to apply member checking and triangulation to verify the accuracy of the data obtained from the participants during the investigation. Creswell (2016) explained, "Member checking is a process in which the researcher provides each member with a draft of the results "to solicit feedback from research participants to review, add more

information, or edit what they said." (p. 259). A draft of the transcribed interview was sent to each participant to review whether the data reflected what they wanted to convey. Besides, additional time was provided for participants to review their answers. Fourteen participants sent an email confirming the member checking. Respondents reviewed the document and concluded that the information conveyed their message and did not need to change the transcription.

Triangulation was the second method used to verify the accuracy of the findings. Triangulation means using more than one collecting data process related to the same topic (Creswell, 2016). The first step was gathering information from three groups of individuals with different perspectives. Triangulations consisted of interviews' analysis from nontraditional students, an administrator, and academic advisors. Thus, systematic coding and classifying text methods were added throughout the research to reveal patterns and themes. To verify the findings first, the analyst closely examined the text considering the data and recorded the findings' interpretations. A conventional content analysis was incorporated to examine the text in the study. The objective of applying content analysis was to discover the concealed interpretation "of the text, quantifying, and analyzing the meaning of words, themes, or concepts" (Renz et al., 2018, p. 825).

Data Analysis Results

The interviews were analyzed manually without the use of a software program. After the interviews and the focus group, reflections, thoughts, and feelings were recorded in a log. During data analysis, seven leading themes were identified. The van Kemp analystic process was

followed through coding and the development of themes. The following is a list of the research

questions and the themes aligned with the research question.

Table 2

Research Questions and Themes

Research Questions	Themes
RQ1 What are the financial ...ges preventing nontraditional ...ts at a private college in Nebraska ...chieving their bachelor's degree?	**Theme 1** Financial needs. **Theme 2** The cost of education.
RQ2 What are the social challenges ...ting nontraditional students at a ...e college in Nebraska from achieving ...achelor's degree?	**Theme 3** Managing personal life, school, and work. **Theme 4** Personalized ...es, community, and school ...rt.
RQ3 What are the academic ...ges preventing nontraditional ...ts at a private college in Nebraska ...chieving their bachelor's degree?	**Theme 5** Commitment to Education. **Theme 6** Academic knowledge, and skills. **Theme 7** Lacking E-Learning

Review of the Findings

Nontraditional students at a college in Nebraska face financial, social, and academic

barriers preventing them from enrolling and completing their undergraduate education. The

purpose of this qualitative case study was to discover the potential financial, social, and

academic barriers preventing nontraditional students at a private college in Nebraska from

achieving their bachelor's degree. Tinto's student integration model and Bean's student attrition

model are the conceptual frameworks of the study. The research questions were intended to

discover the potential financial, social, and academic challenges preventing nontraditional students completing a bachelor's degree at a private college in Nebraska. Data collection consisted of seven semi-structured interviews with current college students, ages 25 and older, an interview with an undergraduate administrator, and a focus group with seven undergraduate academic advisors.

Findings indicated that students are experiencing financial, social, and academic barriers preventing them from achieving a bachelor's degree. Data analysis included organizing the data, reading the data multiple times, creating codes, category's themes, and interpreting findings. The major themes that emerged during the research were

a)   financial needs;

b)   cost of education;

b)   managing personal life, school, and work;

c)   personalized services, community, and school support;

d)   commitment to education;

e)   academic knowledge and skills

f)   lacking e-learning

A position paper was created as the deliverable that will help leaders and educators develop and implement strategic programs and services to assist Nebraska's nontraditional students in achieving their bachelor's degree, advancing professionally, and contributing to our nation's economy.

Themes Described Through Research Questions

Financial Needs and Cost of Education

Theme 1, connected to the following research question: "What are the financial challenges preventing nontraditional students at a private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree?" The first research question sought to determine the financial resources students use to pay for their education. It also discovered the financial challenges and financial needs of the students. The research question disclosed a pattern from the students, advisors, and the administrator's opinions concerning the students' financial barriers.

Financial Needs

Respondents described that they hadstudents had limited finances and that school expenses are high. Most of the financial resources they used were grants, scholarships, loans, university scholarships, and particular foundations' money. Also, some students stated that they work two or three jobs to cover expenses.

The participants expressed that tuition and books prices were excessive. Most nontraditional students declared that they are currently in school ibecause of the university's financial aid program for nontraditional students. Besides, the student's responses about their financial circumstances were described. Student 9 explained how finances are a challenge as a nontraditional student.

It's about 14 to 15 thousand dollars a year to just take the four classes a year through ▮▮▮▮▮ so, if you do the math, that's approximately twenty thousand dollars after taxes.

Between those things and my work schedule, it just makes the time strain a little more significant than it would for other people. And the financials obviously are a bit of a strain as well.

Cost of Education

Education costs are high, including tuition and books. Students expressed that prices are excessive. One of the students suggested that using online material could reduce the cost of book expenses. Student 9 shared her views about the cost of books.

Books are always kind of a stressor because of the cost of books. A lot of the professors do try to get cheaper books, but sometimes what they considered cheap isn't necessarily cheap in my book.

Student 13 stated about the cost of education: "Had I not gotten into the (financial) program, I would not have been able to afford to finish my college degree because it would have been way too much money for."

Another participant, Student 10, commented concerning holding various jobs to pay school's financial debt: "I was about $35 to $40 thousand dollars in debt, most have been paid for. I worked at three jobs and one of them I took last spring because I'm becoming a teacher, so I wanted the experiences.", student 12 stated, "I work full-time. I also work at a part-time job, and I worked extra hours during the night shift to earn extra money."

Student 1 was concerned about her financial situation, "I've always just have learned to work hard. We don't take money from the government. We still just work, work, work." Student 9 shared the following information about working hours and student debt: "I work about 60 hours a week. Student loans are about $600 bucks a month. I'm only taking two classes a

semester because of my lack of time and the financial strain." Furthermore, student 1 explained the following about one of the scholarship programs at the participant university. "I'm grateful for it (the scholarship with the Sherwood Foundation) they pay for tuition and books and even the Praxis. They even promised to pay for student teaching. They pay for tuition and books and even the Praxis."

The student continued and stated: "I'm thankful I wouldn't have done it if this wasn't available. I wish that there were more programs like this across the country". Combining a full scholarship and work opportunity has helped nontraditional students pay for their educational and personal expenses; otherwise, the respondents would not have received an education.

Outside of School Expenses

According to participants in the study, nontraditional students have more financial responsibilities than traditional students. Administrator 11 stated the following about nontraditional students' financial challenges:

I think it's pretty basic the financial challenges they (nontraditional students) face are like anybody else. It's just that they often have more personal expenses outside of school. I don't know if you mentioned this, but they often have to pay for daycare as well.

Administrator 11 added: "I think it's probably financial and also family commitments. So, we are studying that right now transfer students, for instance, do have a little more challenges with them completing we do surveys, and primarily, it's still financial."

Academic advisor 2 also acknowledged that nontraditional students experience financial challenges in general and struggle with tuition costs.

Unless they (nontraditional students) have some sort of funding someplace else, the university may not be an option for them just based on that initial price tag tuition rate. They may want to go to UNO or another state institution that's going to have a smaller tuition rate.

Finally, upon analyzing the data, it became clear that the students did not have enough money to pay for their financial responsibilities and education. However, students receiving specialized financial programs are showing dedication and commitment. According to Zerquera et al. (2018), there is a need to support nontraditional students financially to complete a degree. Which, in return, could increase the number of educated adults in the region to satisfy the future needs of the workforce.

Managing Personal Life, School, and Work and Community, Family, and School Support

Theme 2 addressed the question on the social challenges preventing nontraditioal students at a private college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree. Research question two sought to discover the social challenges and network support students need while in college. The results revealed a repeating pattern from the students, advisors, and the administrator's perspectives about the student's social barriers. Participants reported that students struggle with socializing, isolation, balancing time relying on a social support network. There were two themes within the issue of social barriers: managing personal life, school, and work; and personalized services and community, family, and school support.

Managing Personal Life, School, and Work

All nontraditional students stated having difficulties balancing their time. Respondents suggested that students feel isolated due to personal responsibilities. Students say it is difficult to

interact with other students due to the age gap, especially the traditional students. The social barriers became visible throughout the interviews. According to Administrator 11, limitations are due to personal responsibilities such as school, work, and family. Nontraditional students do not have extra time to participate in on-campus social life. She also said: "typically, they are not (nontraditional students) part of the fabric of the day to day institution."

Moreover, administrator 11 explained further, "they are not able to participate in night-time social activities or group studies." The administration issued iPads to all students to connect traditional and nontraditional students in group studies to solve the situation. She believes that technology will allow both student populations to work together outside of the classroom. During one-on-one interviews, Student 8 expressed the following concerning the iPads: "The school provided us with iPads, so we were able to collaborate outside the class time hours on written projects through the cloud on the internet." Technology appears to be improving social interactions between the students.

Research participants shared that one of the reasons they do not socialize is because of family and work responsibilities. On-campus activities are generally held in the evenings when nontraditional students have dinner with family or study with children. Various nontraditional respondents shared that occasionally, it feels lonely. Student 9 expressed sometimes feeling alone:

I missed out on a lot of social opportunities to go out with friends, parties, and other things that right now for me, I've put on the back burner because my education is more

important, so, yes, sometimes it can feel a little lonely because you do have all this work

(college) to complete.

Academic advisor 4 voiced concerning students'managing time:

Several of the nontraditional students in our education program that we are not able to

commit to the course load are full-time students along with their work schedule, family schedule,

and all of that (school, family, and work). They had to withdraw an entire semester or take a year

off and try to come back. Those students that do decide to withdraw or say that they're taking a

year back. They often never returned.

Student 1 shared the following about managing time:

Time is the second biggest challenge. Student 1 continued by saying, I am married with

two kids. I needed to drop the kids off before coming to school so that my husband could

pick him up at grandpa's house. I have even asked my kids, we have had family meetings

sat them down, and I asked them if they can help me by giving me time.

Student 9 stated about balancing time: "Between those things, (personal life and school)

and my work schedule, it just makes the time strain a little more significant than it would be for

others." Student 13 shared her personal experience concerning juggling responsibilities:

My biggest challenge would be time management. Trying to figure out how to do my

studies, go to class, go to work, parent my children, you know and then, do my volunteer

work because I'm very active in the Autism Society of Nebraska. It's kind of hard to

figure out how to juggle all of it.

Student 10 said, "I guess the biggest struggle is scheduling. Just finding time to fit everything in."

Research findings revealed that nontraditional students are encountering barriers in managing time. Some of the students mentioned that scheduling is the most challenging task. They are independent adults with various responsibilities such as a job, family, and school. Student 13 explained about feeling pressure when applying for grants:

> I received none (financial aid) from the institution that I was going to school at. I'm sure that there were different loans and grants that I could have applied for. But again, I didn't do it because I was afraid of being told no. I did not pursue them (financial aid). It was overwhelming to me. All the paperwork involved.

Student 9 explained the following about feeling stressed with work and having little time to socialize,

> In school. I'm only taking two classes a semester because of my lack of time and the financial strain. Work six days a week, 10 hours a day on average, one day off. Tuesday is my day off, actually. So just trying to find time to sufficiently complete the projects and homework. I generally will. Choose to forgo spending time with friends. I see my family about three times a year for about two days at a time. I see conflicting views when you work around 300 days a year as well.

Student 10 said, "When my scholarships were up, I had to figure out a way to pay for the rest of my dorm. That was a little stressful." Student 1 shared her own experience about how her day looks like before going to the university: "I needed to drop the kids off before coming to

school so that my husband could pick them up at grandpa's house and he's 72 so, he's not the best babysitter. Well, I would say that for a mother, the biggest problem is childcare." Student 8 shared her financial burden:

I work 60 hours a week. It's about 14 to 15 thousand dollars a year just to take four classes a year. I have my own home I pay for as well and have to budget pretty conservatively. Time strain is a little more significant than it would be for other people, and the financials obviously are a bit of a strain as well.

Community, Family, and School Support

In the research, participants talked about social networks they trust . While attending college, students voiced the need for support from others in the community, such as school staff, parents, friends, partners, or children. According to research results, nontraditional students are financially independent, and generally, they are either single or married, live with their husband and children, some live far away from relatives. Others are single living with children. While the source of support they need may be different from one student to another, most rely on various community and school support sources to fulfill their daily responsibilities. Respondents talked about various sources of support provided to them, such as emotional, academic, and infant care.

Student 1 said: "My mother is gone, but my father is still in town, and so he has helped with some of the afterschool situations (childcare)." She continued saying: "My husband went through a similar (scholarship) program. So, he has been my main support because I supported him when he went through schooling."

Student 1 voiced: "We have professors and the dean. I have met all of them, and there are about three or four people who have given me their phone numbers. I can call them anytime." Student 14 declared another comment related to student support, "Everyone (at the university) that I have had interactions with have been very, very helpful." Additionally, Student 15 expressed, "the university has done the best that they can to make everything work for us."

Student 9 shared about support from family: "my family is supportive, but they can do nothing to support me. My family lives in a different state and, I've lived away from them for over ten years now I am at school." Student 9 also shared personal beliefs about social support **"**I don't expect any assistance (from the school), and social support seems unnecessary.

Student 15 stated concerning community support**:**

I have a wonderful support system with my parents, my husband, my friends, and even my co-workers. I would hope that every adult who is going to school would have that kind of support. I'm very blessed that way. My classmates are my biggest support we email, text each other questions, clarifications on assignment, and we have met to work on projects, and just support each other through this whole process. Student 12 said the following about family support,

> For schooling, I've always had a hard time finding those people that can support me. Like where it could be like a mentorship program. Outside that, I have a family that supports me. I'm going to be getting married in June, and my fiancé is very supportive when it comes to my studies.

Student 14 said about parents' support,

Both my parents live in Omaha, which is why I chose to move here. So, they helped me.

Maybe not so much financially, but they help me emotionally with my studies and my

family. They also help, like babysitting for my children.

Another barrier students face the large age and background gap between traditional and

nontraditional student. Nontraditional students rely on social support. Participants in the study

declared they need encouragement, guidance, and service from different sources in society to

fulfill their obligations. The type of support they need varies depending on the student's

situation. Providing childcare services is vital to nontraditional students who have children.

Financial and family are the major concerns of nontraditional students. Student 1

suggested there is a need for childcare services. Student 1 voiced: "Some people need childcare

services while they attend night school. I would say that for a mother, the biggest problem is

childcare. I'm lucky that my kids are 10 and 13, but there are others who have kids." Student 10

expressed the need for children care, "Sometimes I miss time of classes because I have to make

sure that I pick up my kids. So, I've had to leave classes early to be able to pick up my kids on

time." Administrator 11 shared the following about customized services:

We (at participant university) do not currently have a separate physical space for these

people (nontraditional students), but they have access to the same support as traditional

students. We need one, and we're talking about it, but we do not currently have that. She

continued and said, we have professional advisers, academic support, and tutoring. They

handle both traditional and nontraditional. Also, we have a robust writing center, math

lab, and we provide supplemental instruction.

Administrator 11 continued explaining about student's personalized services: "I have heard from nontraditional students that we currently don't have a good way of welcoming them into the campus community." Moreover, Student 8 also stated his opinion about the age gap between traditional and nontraditional students:

> The social challenge would be identifying with students that are obviously significantly younger than me now. I'm nearly 30, and most of them are in their late teens early-20s. Obviously, there's a decent enough age gap. Where I'm not current with the things they interact with due to my lack of social involvement in the world at this point for the contemporary environment style and music and such, I just simply relate to them through school. It (this situation) puts me at a slight distance between me and my technically academic peers in the scholastic setting. It doesn't really bother me, though. I work with younger people as well, at times.

Results suggested students experience social challenges: time management, feeling of guilt from not sharing time with family, stress, and loneliness from social isolation. Diverse practical sources assist in school success, such as strong social support from co-workers, friends, and family; campus resources such as professors, mentors, academic advisors, library, remedial courses, and community service from private childcare centers. Research findings revealed the need for personalized services such as online services and courses to fit nontraditional students' unique demands. Findings uncovered that children's care services are expensive and not convenient for all parents.

Academic Knowledge and Skills, Commitment to Education, and Lacking E-Learning

The objective was to discover the academic challenges and resource support that students need. Further, the inquiry revealed a pattern from the students, advisors, and administrators' opinions concerning the students' academic barriers. Student participants shared their commitment to education. They expressed that they value education and want to graduate. Students also admitted they lacked some academic skills when they returned to college. Advisors believe students do not commit to education because personal responsibilities are getting in their way, which they suspect is the reason for attrition. This third theme included the themes of real value of education and academic skills and knowledge.

Real Value of Education

Various students expressed the extent of their willingness and commitment to graduate. Student 1 stated:

I've also cleared my calendar and made school a priority. I'm not involved with my church; I took that off. I stopped playing tennis. I also stopped cooking. I've gained 30 pounds. However, my academics are fine. She continued saying: I've asked my kids and my family to give me some time.

Student 9 acknowledged that:

I'm usually up at about 4:00 a.m. doing homework, so that's usually how it works for me after I get done with work. I work six days a week, 10 hours a day on average, one day off. Tuesday is my day off actually. So just trying to find time to sufficiently complete

the projects and homework. I generally will. Choose to forgo spending time with friends.

I see my family about three times a year for about two days at a time. I see conflicting vi

when you work around 300 days a year as well. You just generally don't have time to

cultivate social friendships relationships of any caliber, for the most part outside of

professional and work relationships.

Also, student 15 explained:

I understand that this commitment (attending school) is so important for my future, and

therefore, I missed out on a lot of social opportunities to go out with friends to parties and

other things that right now for me I've put on the back burner because my education is

more important.

Participant continued sharing: We (everyone in the family) just made sacrifices that included no

vacations, no cable, we cut out anything that was extra in order to make it work. Respondent 10

replied concerning commitment, "I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but the thing that stopped me

from graduating with my degree the first time around was the test (Praxis Test) you have to

take." The participant's barrier for withdrawing from school the first time around was academic-

related.

Administrator 11 stated, "We have done our internal studies, and commitment in

education to college is the single biggest thing that predicts attrition in our institution".

Academic advisor 4 voiced concerning students' commitment,

Several nontraditional students in our education program that we are not able to commit

to the course load are full-time students along with their work schedule, family schedule,

and all of that (school, family, and work). They had to withdraw an entire semester or

take a year off and try to come back. Those students that do decide to withdraw or say

that they're taking a year back. They often never return.

Academic Advisor 1 suggested the following:

Sometimes during one semester or two, the individual who is taking classes here decides

that it's more important to take care of the family. They can't take care of the family and

take classes here at ███████ to complete their bachelor's degrees.

Academic Advisor 3 added the following:

I think one of the biggest obstacles is bouncing their time between family is something

that nontraditional that has a family, in this case, taking a full class load getting the

financial aid so, Federal Aid, the institutional aid, but things don't work out in the

classroom they are still responsible for paying back loans not the loans, the grants or the

scholarships.

Academic Advisor 6 explained the following about student commitment:

I think a lot of the academic challenges are related to the social challenges outside of the

classroom that the nontraditional students are responsible for their kids. Not that they

can't do the content of the courses, just like it's in the way sometimes, and they're getting

pulled in different directions, and they'll choose their family over. And rightfully so, over

getting the paper written that night or studying for the test, I think they decide to spend a

little time with their family than studying.

Academic Skills and Knowledge

Theme 5 was used to address RQ3. Nontraditional students declared they lack some of the necessary skills knowledge to succeed in college. Student participants mentioned that due to the long time they stayed away from school, they had to take courses in subjects like math, reading, or the Praxis test, a certificate test preparedness. Student 9 shared her experience with the Praxis test. The student had trouble graduating because she did not have the necessary college skills and knowledge to pass the Praxis test:

> I knew I wanted to be a teacher, but the thing that stops me from graduating from my degree the first time around was the test (Praxis Test) you have to take." She also said she had to take a preparedness class to pass the test when she returned to the university.

Student 15 shared her experience about her need to use the school academic resources because she did not feel confident her writing skills:

> I will go back to when I completed my general education course at a community college, program. And I had not been in school for twenty years. So, when I was beginning to write papers for my literature class, I did go and have someone look over my papers at the writing center, just to make sure that my paper was at the level it should be after such a big absence from school.

Also, Student 1 expressed that due to the time she spent away from college, she needed to update her test and math skills. The participating university provided Student 1 with a tutor for Math and the Praxis test:

I did take up one tutoring class to pass the Praxis test and I was grateful for that support

as well as some online web classes. It was a one-night class. I was not good at math.

Math was my weakest subject.

The institution offers learners flexible and easy access to online academic support. Student 13

commented on online academic resources:

Besides my professors and peers, we have access to all of the tutoring, the library, and all

that type of support. We have access to that online. Since we can't go to the main campus

so, that's good to know that it's just an e-mail away or a phone call away if we need extra

support academically.

Lacking E-Learning

Although students like the convenience of the online service, the school does not offer

full-time online courses to the students. Laking e-learning can organize their own pace in their

course study. It allows them to manage their time more efficiently.

Academic Advisor 1 commented on this subject:

I know when students look here that are nontraditional students, they're thinking that we

have a lot of online classes that they can just take from home, but they can't. They have

to be here on campus.

Besides, Administrator 11 shared the following about using technology and online learning:

Often traditional students do this stuff (group meetings) late at night, and nontraditional

students often can't be on campus at that time. However, we have now issued iPad to all

our students, and I just think with technology, you know, in terms of working outside the

classroom in a group. Technology takes care of that. ButI will say again we invested in

giving off all undergraduate student ipads this semester. Part of that is that you

technically don't have to miss a class if you're at home with the child; you can just come

into the class through technology. So, I'm pushing faculty to make allowances for

technology and use technology when somebody does have to miss a class.

Findings suggest that some students face academic challenges such as a lack of

writing skills, mathematics, reading, and test-taking strategies. Respondents mentioned

that the university offers online or in-classroom academic resources and remedial

courses for students' success.

Moreover, the administrator, learners, and a few academic advisors discussed the

subject of distance learning. Some students shared that they took remedial classes

onlineand were satisfied with the teaching methods. Additionally, Administrator 11

believes that technology could solve the social barriers nontraditional students encounter

in higher education. Distance learning allows learners to remain at home while taking the

course. Student participants also revealed that they valued education and are committed to

achieving a bachelor's degree to improve their lifestyle. Results demonstrate that academic

advisors believe nontraditional students' family and work obligations take away most of the

students' time and commitment.

The triangulation indicated that Nebraska nontraditional students are encountering

financial, academic, and social barriers. According to research findings at the participating

university nontraditional students are busy adults with work, family, and school obligations.

Research findings indicated that academic advisors and administrators believe students are not committed to education because they ultimately chose family over the school. Study findings showed that nontraditional students are committed, but their personal lives are getting in their way. One type of data-interview responses and three different data sources were added to apply triangulation and confirm the study's discoveries (Abdalla et al., 2018): nontraditional students, one administrator, and academic advisors.

Summary of Results

In this segment, I addressed a synopsis of the research results previously discussed. Findings showed that these barriers include lacking a sense of belonging, an age gap, lack of necessary college academic skills, and insufficient money or time for education. Further, the study's data discoveries and frame of reference were presented. Concluding, the project was discussed together with the outputs suggestions and descriptions.

Review of Discoveries Related to the Literature

Various programs or services can be implemented to improve Nebraska's nontraditional students' financial, social, and academic barriers, respondents reported feeling tense concerning college and personal financial obligations (college tuition, books, and in some situations, childcare). Sutin and Jacob (2016) and Moore et al. (2020) suggested that nontraditional students experience stress due to educational costs. study participants complained about the price of education, including tuition and book's cost, and childcare costs. The cost of education is high, and students cannot afford school materials like books (Grabowski et al., 2016). Providing students with limited access to e-books during the semester at no extra charge

could remedy the situation. Additionally, Grabowski et al. (2016) suggested that implementing personalized financial support programs, such as work experience opportunities, allow learners to earn a salary and gain experience and pay expenses while attending college. Another financial proposition is extending "academic credit for work and life experience " (Grabowski et al., 2016, p.1). The Council for Adults and Experimental Learning stated that credit could be awarded for work and life experience if learners can show that they master specific skills or knowledge (Grabowski et al., 2016).

Furthermore, nontraditional students informed that they spend too much time looking for quality and affordable childcare services. Students said that searching for a childcare provider takes away study time. Finding reliable childcare services is a struggle for nontraditional students (Peterson, 2016). Findings showed that community and school support are essential in nontraditional students' daily lives for children's care and academic guidance. Providing a reasonably priced childcare service for parents with children could provide additional time for school and reduce stress (MacDonald, 2018). College financial adjustments could assist in lowering education costs.

The following recommendations were related to social barriers. Nontraditional students reported they required flexible schedules to fit their responsibilities, work, and school. Incorporating e-learning in course programs could offer schedule flexibility to students. Distance learning offers students the opportunity to complete their education while remaining at home with their families. Nontraditional students also informed experiencing feelings of isolation due to little or no campus social life. Students feel they do not have much in common with the

traditional students' population. Goncaves and Trunk (2014) and Lim (2018) disclosed that

nontraditional learners experience isolation in college due to age differences. It is crucial to assist

students who feel isolated to prevent mental disorders. Carter et al. (2017) declared that learners

who experience isolation could develop mental health issues. According to study findings,

partner university does not have a welcome package for nontraditional students. Creating a

customized welcome and a follow-up package (online or face-to-face) designed to greet and

guide nontraditional students from the moment they arrive on campus to alleviate symptoms of

isolation and help nontraditional students feel part of the campus team. Traditional learners said

they do not feel confident about their academic mathematics proficiency and writing abilities.

MacDonald (2018) commented that when nontraditional learners return to college, many lack

college knowledge and skills due to their time away from school. A possible solution would be

to create online and or on-campus preparatory writing and mathematics courses to help adults be

successful in school.

  Furthermore, distant learning (online education) programs and services could be

customized to nontraditional students' needs, for instance, accessible virtual remote courses,

counseling, financial, and academic services (Sorenson & Donovan, 2017). Long-distance

education could increase the students' ability to connect with the university's students, faculty,

and staff for further assistance. It could also provide learners with the opportunity to succeed in

college (Snow & Cooker, 2020). Online educarion might be an alternative to balance nontradents

busy schedules.

Findings Related to the Literature and Conceptual Framework

Tinto's Students Integration Method (1975) and the Bean Attrition Model (1980) are the theories I used to explain students' college departure. Research participants' data analysis stipulated that financial, social, and academic barriers prevent nontraditional students completing their bachelor's degrees. Tinto declared that the integration model is a conceptual framework that can assist overcome students' financial, academic, and social barriers (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; & Tinto, 1993). Tinto's model agrees with the research findings. Both the research findings and Tinto's theor suggests that there are social and academic barriers influencing student retention. According to Tinto (1975, 1993), students' adaptation to their academic, social context, influences their capacity to interrelate with the social and academic environments in educational contexts. The academic and social integration theory is one of the most regularly used to explain student persistence (Dewberry & Jackson, 2018). It consists of a structure acquired from a social power that impacts academic completion.

Besides Tinto, other researchers have come to a similar conclusion concerning students' college success. Davidson and Wilson (2017) conducted attrition research using the Collective Affiliation Model (a study on various popular theory models). The Collective Affiliation Model does not regard the students lack success to into the on-campus life. Study results suggested that institution's inability to affiliate with the student is the reason for students' attrition. David and Wilson's investigation's findings agrees with participant students' research results. Also, the investigation agrees with Tinto's and Bean's theory which states that attrition is the institutions'

inadequacy to mutually associate with the student. Previous analysts research findings revealed that nontraditional students are encountering social barriers in higher education.

According to study findings, nontraditional students from participating university declared that they are committed and value their education. In an investigation Ellis (2019) researched 139 undergraduate traditional and nontraditional students registered at a university in the United States. The study's objective was to research perseverance in courses and course homework. Ellis (2019) applied a chi-square test in the investigation to point out a potential connection between a particular course and similar course procedures. The analyst discovered that nontraditional students persist more in a single course-related assignment (short-term) but not as much in degree programs (long-term); thus, if learners can persist in a course, they can be persistent in a program (Ellis, 2019). Opposite from foregoing studies, research findings revealed that nontraditional learners persevere more than their traditional peers. Research results agree with participating university's research findings. Ellis (2019) also suggested additional research is necessary to determine why this incident is occurring to assist nontraditional students remain in school until degree completion.

Time management was one of the major themes. articipant university's academic advisors and the administrator explained that nontraditional students tend not to graduate from college due to personal responsibilities. Tinto (1975) suggested that students withdraw from college for various reasons, such as personal traits, family circumstances, or school-related issues before college, such as ethics, abilities, and accomplishments. Research findings revealed the institution's social relationship with the students. Students from participating institution revealed

that would like the school to welcome them supporting and counseling students throughout college. Tinto conveyed persistence as a long-term interconnecting procedure linking the students' institutions' academic and social components. Tinto's theory declared that the academic and the social constituents form two commitments: the commitment to college completion and the personal commitments. Tinto believes that the greater the degree of institutional commitment, the greater the possibility of attaining a bachelor's degree. Tinto's and Bean's theories agree with participating university's findings.

Nontraditional students encounter financial barriers in higher education. Traditional students are between18 to 24 years old, live on the college campus, enroll full-time, and their parents pay for their education (Remenick, 2019). Respondents in the study claimed to have limited income. Most of the learners admitted holding a couple of jobs while going to college to cover personal expenses. They mentioned using various college financial aid to pay for their education. Research participants receiving funding manifested their gratitude for the opportunity to return to college to improve their skills. The SIM stipulates that finances are vital in molding the education preference and the objectives. Tinto mentioned that students who receive financial support do not show higher possibilities to remain in college than those who do not receive aid (Tino, 1987, pp. 80-81). Tinto's study concerning students financiacial barriers agrees with participating university's research findings. Bean and Mezler (1985) also created a model where the persistence process is considered an addition to motivational, social, and academic integration components. Bean and Mezler (1985); Bean and Vesper (1990) embraced two elements an objective component considering the learner's funds accessibility and a subjective

measurement considering the student's discernment of their discomfort to fund the cost of their education. Accordding to Bean and Mezler (1985) and Bean and Vesper (1990) discussed that finances impact learners' decision to drop out and literacy elements, social process, and psychological conclusions of contentedness with the institution. Previous research agrees that financial, social, and academic, barriers prevent nontraditional students from completing a degree.

The next barrier is related to social support. It is vital for the students to feel they belong to succeed at college (Strayhorn, 2018). Isolation could affect the students' academics, achievements, and aspirations, including continuing studying (Strayhorn, 2018). Regarding college education, the analyst defines the sense of belonging as follows:

> Sense of belonging refers to students' perceived social support on campus, a feeling or sensation of connectedness, and the experience of mattering or feeling cared about, accepted, respected, valued by, and important to the campus community or others on campus such as faculty, staff, and peers (Strayhorn, 2018, p. 4).

Therefore, nontraditional students lack feelings of belonging. Chen (2017) suggested that nontraditional learners are the most overlooked student population in higher education institutions. Even though nontraditional learners represent 74 % of the postsecondary student population in the States, leaving only 26% of traditional students' enrollments (Radford et al., 2015 & Remenick, 2019). Nevertheless, they do not feel welcome on-campus. During the study, most of the nontraditional students expressed feeling socially isolated. Feelings of isolation could affect students' persistence (Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014; Lim, 2018). Respondents said it was due

to personal responsibilities such as family, work, and school; nontraditional students cannot participate in on-campus social life. Individuals have psychological demands; they need to feel that the group is or institution they belong to is trustworthy (Strayhorn, 2018). Previous Tinto and Beans' research agreed with study findings.

The final barrier is related to academic limitations. Learners' readiness may depend on the student's background and the educational institution they chose to attend (Klasik & Strayhorn, 2018). Burnell (2019) stated nontraditional students deficiency of basic academic skills due to the long period of time they stayed away from school. As a result, adult leaners loose self confidence (Remenick, 2019). Tinto's (1975) student integration model (SIM) is a conceptual framework that can explain how to help students overcome academic barriers. Tinto grounded the SIM model on Durkheim's theory of suicide. The Student Integration Model regards departure to the absence of compatibility between the learner and the institution. The SIM represents the internal characteristics. It consists of a structure derived from a social power that impacts academic completion. Bean and Metzler (1985) also wrote about the effects of students' persistence and academics. The Student Attrition Model represents the external characteristics affecting students' persistence, such as the sense of well-being, resources, and time (Bloemer et al., 2017; Hovdhaugen, 2015; Mabel & Britton, 2018). The SAM regards departure to the combination of learners' interaction and integration with personal evaluations (e., g. college academic procedures and knowledge indirectly) affects satisfaction and directly influences intentions to persist. Research findings agreed with Tinto's and Beans'.

Summary

Section 2 included an explanation of the methodology, data collection, coding, and research process analysis. This comprised the process of getting access to study participants and explaining ethical and confidentiality procedures. Data collection analysis procedures followed a method from Creswell. Furthermore, reliability and credibility procedures were used to confirm trustworthiness of the investigation. Data findings disclosed seven basic themes. Conventional content analysis was used for data collection from transcribed interview recordings, reading through data, creating codes, themes, and using hand content analysis methods to address important data analysis issues. Data findings showed that Nebraska students encounter financial, social, and academic barriers. Section 3 includes a second review of literature, goals for the position paper, suggestions for strengthening nontraditional student retention programs, and disseminating the project. Finally, implications and benefits of the study were addressed.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

The research objective was to discover potential financial, academic, and social barriers preventing Nebraska nontraditional students from achieving bachelor's degrees. Seven nontraditional students, seven academic advisors, and a single administrator were interviewed. Participants shared their ideas, opinions, and experiences regarding the topic under investigation. Seven main themes were organized into four categories for recommendations: financial assistance, additional academic guidance, social support networks, and seeing the value of education. A white paper was presented to convey findings to staff and administrators. Eight recommendations were discussed within the white paper (see Appendix A). TIn Section 3, the four categorical goals are presented, along with eight specific goals as recommendations. In this section, the project study, literature review, and project evaluation are summarized.

Rationale Supporting a Position Paper

Research results are presented in a white paper. The project's audience includes university leaders and educators, including staff members, instructors, and administrators. Nontraditional students in Nebraska colleges have lower graduation rates than traditional students. Lower graduation rates are critical because barriers are preventing nontraditional learners from completing their undergraduate education. Students leave college before graduation. Nontraditional students depart from school for various reasons that are financial, social, and academic. A qualitative systematic case study design was used to investigate the

problem. The design allowed respondents to express their ideas and opinions in-depth concerning college barriers.

A white paper was prepared to inform institutional leaders and educators about nontraditional learners' barriers in higher education. Once university leaders have been presented with the white paper and recommendations, it is hoped that measures to improve student retention rates can be implemented. Additional research and information will be illustrated in the second review ofliterature concerning the white paper.

The position paper allows me to present information about the problem. In the position paper created for this research, recommendations were made to assist nontraditional students in terms of overcoming financial, social, and academic barriers they encounter in higher education. The position paper is a proposal analysis from different professional fields that informs a complicated issue with suggestions. A white paper was the best way to present research findings for various reasons. One of the rationales was study dissemination. Dissemination offers an opportunity to quickly publish results, mainly when the topic receives considerable attention in the field. The position paper offers researchers the opportunity to share an original investigation with discussions, visuals, and suggestions with the participating university (Mohajan, 2018). Also, a white paper must present the author's point of view and views of an organization as a whole, or perspectives of an entire institution supported by the latest research. White papers should contain appropriate and comprehensive information without bias to increase validity and credibility (Hoffman, 2019). After graduation, original research findings will be shared twith

administrators and academic advisors from the participant university. They are a team of employees that work one-on-one with the participant university's nontraditional students.

It is inexpensive to write and organize a position paper presentation (Hoffman, 2017). As a result, the participant university will not need to incur additional expenses to learn more about the existing problem. The following section ncludes justification for suggested changes to financial, social, and academic programs and services that require further research as stipulated in the white paper and indicated by respondents and the literature.

Review of the Literature

In this section, I demonstrate how research findings supported the position paper. I aimed to reinforce how the position paper is the best choice to present the research findings. Databases used to search for sources were Education Research, EBSCO, ERIC, and SAGE Journals. The following are essential terms: *white paper*, *position papers in qualitative research*, *position paper*, *case study*, *writing a white paper*, *education and barriers in higher education*, *managing barriers in higher education*, *project programs and education*, *student mentorship programs*, *white paper*, *study dissemination program development*, *e-learning advantages and disadvantages*, and *online learning*. Information saturation became apparent following substantial research after generating repetitive scholarly literature from database resources. Research was restricted to sources published between 2016 and 2021, excluding seminal studies.

Nontraditional Nebraska Student Barriers to Completing Bachelor's Degrees

Receiving a degree among nontraditional students is linked with various biological, psychological, and social constituents (Grabowski et al., 2016). Nontraditional learners mostly

leave due to personal conflicts (children, work, or carrying for an elderly parent) and insufficient educational institution assistance (Glowacki-Dudka, 2019). Nontraditional students are less likely to complete their school programs and withdraw less from universities when compared with traditional students (Grabowski et al., 2016). There is an opportunity for the administration at theparticipating university to develop nontraditional student programs to assist learners in order to complete their degrees.

Nontraditional learners account for a significant part of the student population. Nevertheless, educational institutions do not know of nontraditional student population (Zerquera et al., 2018). They do not have sufficient accommodations for students. Several schools have equal admissions policies to attract nontraditional students into higher education (Remenick, 2019). Nevertheless, alternatives are not sufficient to fulfill students' particular demands such as flexible curricula and additional e-learning courses. Educating educational staff, faculty, and administrative leaders concerning nontraditional students might help increase awareness of this population. Research findings at the participaring university revealed that barriers nontraditional learners encounter in higher education are related to financial, social, and academic circumstances.

Learners experience financial barriers in education. Sutin and Jacob (2016) and Moore et al. (2020) suggested adult learners experience stress due to educational costs. More et al. (2020) said educational expenses include costs of books, college tuition, and in some situations, childcare. The integration model is a conceptual framework that can be used to overcome students' financial barriers (Tinto, 1975; Tinto, 1987; Tinto, 1993). The creation of specialized

financial programs for nontraditional learners may lead to encouraging students to complete their degree.

Social barriers was the second obstacle learners encounter. McDonald (2018) declared that nontraditional students required flexible schedules to fit their responsibilities, work, and school. Further, Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014 & Lim (2018) disclosed that mature learners experience isolation in college due to age differences. Current studies agree with research findings. It is crucial to assist students who feel isolated to prevent mental disorders. Carter et al. (2017) declared that learners who experience feelings of isolation could develop mental health issues. Bean's (1980) theory represents the external characteristics affecting students' persistence, such as the academic, social-phsychological, and environmental factors which influence the socialization process (academic, social, and personal). Bean's theory agrees with the investigation's findings and provides strategies to overcome this phenomenon. Also, Tinto's Students Integration Method (1975) agrees with research results concerning learners' social barriers.

Academics was the third barrier. MacDonald (2018) commented that when adult learners return to college, many lack of necessary college knowledge and skills due to the time they stay away from school. On a separate investigation, Burnell (2019) stated nontraditional students deficiency of basic academic skills due to the long period of time they stayed away from school. Participating nontraditional learners from a Nebraska university declared that they do not feel confident about their academic mathematics proficiency and writing abilities. Tinto's Students Integration Method (1975) and the Bean Attrition Model (1980) agreed with study findings.

Bean's theories represent the characteristics affecting persistence, such as the sense of well-being, resources, and time; these theories that agree with study findings. Tinto's theories represent the academic barriers students ecounter in education.

Project Description

The main objective in the preparation of the white paper (see Appendix A), was to provide information on the specific barriers nontraditional students may experience in higher education in relation to student retention. Included in the project description are the implementation, time table, recommendations based on research, roles and responsibilities, project evaluation plan, project implications including social change, existing resources, needed resources, and roles and responsibilities.A white paper was created to discuss the financial, social, and academic barriers preventing nontraditional students enrolling and completing their undergraduate education. Further study of this topic was critical because nontraditional students contribute to the economy of a market, and in order to do so, they need adequate education.

The following are the themes that emerged during the research:

- Financial needs

- Cost of education

- Managing personal life, school, and work

- Personalized services, community, and school support

- Commitment to education

- Academic knowledge and skills

- Lacking e-learning

According to current research, nontraditional students are experiencing financial, social, and academic barriers. Study results may help leaders, educators, and staff members develop and implement strategic programs and services to help nontraditional students achieve their bachelor's degrees. Consequently, Nebraska's nontraditional students may benefit from the research. The results revealed the barriers that barriers might be preventing nontraditional students in Nebraska from completing a bachelor's degree. Significant evidence demonstrates that existing barriers should be addressed.

Needed Resources

The white paper recommendations would need the support of the administration and various departments. The departments include: financial aid, dean of students, accessibility services, academic support, scholarships, and career development center. These departments would need to develop a strategic plan and implement the plan. Additional funding is needed to provide more scholarships and funding for nontraditional students. Two new centers would need to be built, the childcare center and an adult learning center. The remaining existing departments would need to offer additional services to the adult population.

Existing Supports and Resources

The participant university offer the same type of services to traditional and nontraditional students. The following is a list of the university's existing resources. The career development center guides students with job search skills, fininding internships and fulltime employment. The university also offers a help desk and online bookstore which is available 24/7. The university has student leadership opportunities through clubs and student run organizations. If the

university added an adult organization for busy students, this could help build a supportive network for disengaged nontraditional students. Student services offers each student an iPad and assists with technical and academic problem resolution. Counseling services are also available for nontraditional students. Additional financial support and services are needed to better serve nontraditional students. Lastly, the university includes a student success center with advisors and coaches. Although the participating university has a variety resources and services, there is a need to develop student services and resources dedicated only to nontraditional students. It would be advantageous for each of these departments to attend the presentation of the white paper, as well as strategize how the university can better assist nontrational students reach degree completion.

Potential Barriers and Solution to Barriers

There are potential barriers in every investigation. One of the possible barriers is limited existing research related to the study topic barriers to completing bachelor's degrees for nontraditional Nebraska students. Stakeholders might not find sufficient research to assist them in designing new programs for nontraditional learners. A solution to the problem is providing educational leaders with recommendations from substantial research related to the the study. Another limitation may be financial. The current pandemic has caused a significant disturbance in many education institutions nationwide (Crawford et al., 2020). According to the authors, it has forced institutions to cahange from in-person to online-only classes. Additionally, the virus has affected enrollments and special program grants (Crawford et al., 2020). Changes have impacted colleges and universities financially due to unforeseen costs and loss of income. Educational institutions can remedy this situation by encouraging qualified students to apply for the COVID19 Relief Plan to assist them in paying for education expenses.

Implementation and Timetable

The implementation of the project will begin a week after completing my doctoral program. Upon receiving my doctoral degree from Walden University, an email will be sent to the contact adminitrator at the participating university informing them that I have completed my doctorate at Walden University. Moreover, a time will be sought to schedule a meeting to present the study findings to the administrators and educational leaders. Concluding the meeting, the administrator will receive a copy of the white paper. After the presentation, a survey will be used to gather the participants'opinions about the research report and recommendations. To further

support the implementations in the white paper I will implement project management activities to track the plan's progress.

The white paper project is cost-effective. Participant university will not have to fund the professional circulation of the paper. University administrators have shown interest in reviewing the research results. There might be an opportunity to plan a future meeting to present the study findings. Some limitations can be expected due to gathering restrictions as a result of Covid-19 virus health issues and group meeting restrictions unless the college administrators agree to a virtual meeting.

Roles and Responsibilities

The researcher's responsibilities are to present the research results and the white paper (Bell & Waters, 2018), located in Appendix A. Also, the investigator is responsible for setting up the day and time of the meeting with the university and to contact the administrator to present the white paper. Then, the researcher will provide a copy of the documents to the administrator. Once the white paper is presented, their next responsibility is to develop and hand out a copy of the presentation evaluation to the attendees for feedback and to reply to any follow-up inquiries. The evaluations will be used for personal assessment to judge the presentation strategies' effectiveness and to determine if the project objectives were met. Additionally, the researcher protect the rights and the well-being of participants, Secure the integrity of the information.

Bell and Waters (2018) explained that research participants also have specific accountabilities. Their responsibilities encompass: Respect the investigator, staff working in the study, and any other contributors. Read the consent form and documents. Ask any questions they

may have concerning the study, their rights, and responsibilities as members of the investigation, or any other inquiries and to arrive on time for the interview.

Project Evaluation Plan

Evaluation Strategy

Following the presentation, administrators and the stakeholders will evaluate the advantages of implementing the white paper findings and recommendations. Concluding the project presentation meeting I will provide institution administrators and stakeholders who participated in the white paper presentation with an evaluation survey to record their perceptions of the efficacy of the white paper recommendations. This survey will be based on a 5-point scale. The second part of the evaluation plan will ask participants whether the university implemented the goals. The results will be compiled and will help me determine if the white paper and recommendations accomplished the preplanned project objectives. The main objective was to inform and make recommendatiosn to the stakeholders and the administators about the barriers nontraditional students encounter in higher education.

Justification for Evaluation, Evaluation Goals, and Stakeholders

The justification for type of evaluation centers on valuable feedback after the presentation and a year later to determine if the goals were met. The evaluations will provide feedback on the clarity and understanding of the recommended goals. The evaluation is goals based measure. The first evaluation assesses the clarity and understanding of the white paper recommendations. The second evaluation form provides information on whether or not the university was able to implement the goals. Thus, the evaluation forms are goal-based assessments. There are four

categories of goals based upon the academic, financial, social, and value of education goals. Under each category there are two subgoals. These eight goals include: increased financial funding, offere a childcare center, provide a unique orientation, add social groups, add an orientation and seminar for nontraditional students, and offer an online program and greater flexibility of curriculum. The stakeholders are invited to the presentation. These stakeholders include the board of trustee members, administrators, directors, students, faculty and staff. The stakeholders who attend the presentation of the white paper will complete the first part of the evaluation form. These same stakeholders which attend the presentation will be sent the second evaluation form one year later.

Project Implications Including Social Change

The project implementation will take place immediately after my conferred degree. The study can contribute to positive social change by providing political leaders, college institutional administrators, and instructors with knowledge regarding the barrier's nontraditional learners from Nebraska encounter in higher education and how these challenges prevent the students achieving their bachelor's degree. It could also contribute to discovering the actual needs of the students. As a result, program creators might be able to develop programs in tune with students' needs. Additionally, they could create higher satisfaction and student retention.

Another social group that could benefit from the study is the students. When learners feel satisfied in an educational institution, they tend to stay until completion. Consequently, a higher number of nontraditional students would complete their degrees. More adults would have the

opportunity to find a suitable job or get a promotion. The community would have more educated individuals contributing to their knowledge and skills.

The findings of the study may assist the university in advancing higher education programs and services. Leaders, administrators, and instructors may be able to guide nontraditional students, who may be experiencing financial, social, or academic obstacles while attending college. Consequently, new strategies may improve the students' situation, enrollment, and graduation rates of the participant university.

Local Community

The local university is involved in expanding the nontraditional students' programs to continue increasing students' enrollment rates. The administration is searching to gain knowledge about the demands of nontraditional students. The study provides the university with access to first-hand information from the students. Participants in the study shared personal perspectives about the barriers in higher education, and students also expressed their wants and needs. Data gathered will offer the university the opportunity to foster a dynamic social change in the local community by improving higher education programs that could affect the local area's economy. Moreover, the existing evidence will allow the administration to develop new customized programs and services to suit the students' demands. As a result, enrollment rates may grow, and more nontraditional students will be able to achieve a bachelor's degree.

Application to Other Colleges

This research took place at a specific site with a specific group of respondents. Therefore, the results and recommendations may not apply to other colleges. Nevertheless, the

paper could also be beneficial to universities with a high population of nontraditional students. other educational institutions that can use the information are those trying to increase the number of nontraditional students at their site or maintaining a high retention rate; they can benefit from this information. Alternatively, they may be interested to learn more about the problem at hand. These types of institutions could acquire access to the white paper by establishing a collaboration as a means of obtaining access to a copy of the white paper. The far-reaching benefit of this study is to prepare educational institutions with the tools to assist nontraditional students in fulfilling their career goals.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Introduction

The main goal of this qualitative case study was to discover barriers to higher education for nontraditional students. Seven nontraditional students, seven academic advisors, and a single administrator were interviewed. They all shared their opinions and ideas about the research topic. I attempted to discover students' opinions about barriers preventing nontraditional learners from Nebraska from achieving bachelor's degrees. Section 4 includes strengths and weaknesses of this project. I also suggested some alternative approaches for overcoming barriers nontraditional learners encounter in school. I considered the significance of my study and accomplishments as a scholar and doctoral student. Lastly, I addressed implications for social change and suggestions for future studies. The administrator and academic advisors suggested that nontraditional learners must overcome obstacles to be successful in college. Consequently, I designed a white paper to convey this issue. In the following section, I present project strengths and limitations.

Project Strengths and Limitations

I created a position paper with recommendations for addressing students' and advisors' perceived barriers to successful college education, including financial, academic, and social issues. A position paper can be informational and educational. The white paper offered information about what helps in terms of making decisions and offering solutions to problems. In this section, I considered strengths and limitations of the investigation, and offer possible alternatives for distribution of research.

Project Strengths

The white paper style is a strength because it can be extended to multiple audiences. I will send a copy of the white paper to the university administrator and academic advisors. The white paper provides a way to provide research findings to multiple stakeholders. Research information was collected from respondents who shared their perspectives about student barriers in higher education. Then, data were analyzed. Data gathered during research were consistent, precise, and reliable. Institutional leaders and staff members can benefit from the information and findings without taking part in a formal presentation or reading the entire research project. This research paper's specific audience can have access to the document whenever they want to learn about nontraditional student needs.

The position paper will include the latest research data. The white paper will furnish leaders, staff, and instructors with the latest research findings related to the study's topic. It includes research analysis, recommendations, and solutions. Finally, the white paper will allow me to present research results in a comprehensible fashion to help the audience understand issues.

Project Limitations

There are also some project limitations, as in all research. One of the limitations is the small number of participants. I only interviewed seven nontraditional students from one educational institution; research results therefore cannot be generalized. The number of participants was low because I used a qualitative methodology in the study, which requires a small number of participants. Another limitation in the position paper could be encouraging

some stakeholders to enhance adult higher education programs because it requires a financial expense. They might not envision future program development opportunities; stakeholders might read the presentation and not understand it. As a result, they could refuse to invest in the program. Consequently, those staff members, administrators, or instructors who do not participate in the meeting might become indifferent concerning white paper content.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

There are various methods to share study findings. A possible approach is to produce a workshop. This would involve presenting the study findings and themes recovered from research. During the workshop, research papers are converted into easy-to-understand summaries that are shared with administrators, staff members, and instructors. Also, a game or activity related to the research presentation will be incorporated during the workshop to gain the audience's attention and assist with conceptual understanding.

Mentoring sessions via online and video chats can be organized weekly for 2 to 3 months to assist participants with inquiries. A preceptor or an experienced practitioner will supervise mentoring sections. The preceptor will help administrators, staff members, or instructors with questions regarding nontraditional students or research practices. The instructor could also assist with endorsing staff members and administrators to participate in a professional development program. Every month for 4 months, staff and administrators will be encouraged to attend research theory and practices or any other seminar of their preference. Furthermore, participants could have the opportunity to conduct and present their research findings to colleagues.

Scholarship, Project Development, and Leadership and Change

Self as a Scholar

I have gained many skills and knowledge throughout the doctoral process that have prepared me as a professional scholar. I became knowledgeable about writing a scholarly paper. Additionally, I learned how to conduct interviews with nontraditional learners and discover their perceptions about barriers in higher education. Further, I learned about different methodologies, design, data collection, and analysis techniques. Learning these skills will be helpful to me as I start working in the professional field and continue writing about nontraditional students. Another expertise I developed was writing for publication. I realized it takes persistence, patience, and many drafts to write a scholarly paper. However, I understand that editing and proofreading a document helps in terms of refining the message.

Self as Practitioner

As a professional educator, I have noticed a change in my educational practice as I have been pondering new skills and knowledge. I can hold more extended and complex conversations. I do not feel ashamed to read in big groups and have the ability to write my thoughts fluently at a faster speed. The advances I have made have upgraded my teaching style and techniques. Moreover, my academic and professional abilities have improved during the doctoral program. The education I have acquired during the past 6 years has helped me gain faith in my abilities.

Self as Project Developer

In all respects of doctoral research, I became aware of projects I can generate to answer a research question. I chose a white paper to convey the message about Nebraska nontraditional

student barriers in higher education. I feel capable of writing about different strategies university staff and administrators could use to expand programs and services for nontraditional learners.

Reflections and Importance of Work

Once completing my research, I pondered the process the implications of the study. Further, I discovered that researching students' financial, social, and academic programs was a significant undertaking.There were three items which required further reflection. The study required studying the needs of the students which have direct application to practice. Next, the process required my knowledge of educational leaders, administrators, and staff who work closely with the learners and that know the needs of the students. The final reflection I had was it was essential to include prior scholarly investigations from previous research. The knowledge from previous investigations guided me during the study and helped to arrive at conclusions.

Suggestions for the future of this study were divided into stages, two months after my graduation and six months after the first presentation. Initially, the researcher will discuss the study's results with the administrators. If necessary necessary, a follow-up meeting will be scheduled to discuss additional inquiries related to study findings. Then, I am planning to present my project to various administrators at the participant university. The continuance could offer some time to receive the necessary support of the recommendations and become acquainted with the programs.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

I reached data saturation in the study after interviewing 15 participants, including seven nontraditional students, seven academic advisors, and a single administrator. The focal point of

the study was the nontraditional students and the barriers they encounter in higher education. Research findings could not be generalized to nontraditional students from other universities due to the small sample size. However, the study's inquiry uncovered the nontraditional students' barriers. Applying mixed-method research and including more participants could be incorporated into the study to obtain generalized research results. Discoveries of the present investigation provided opportunities for future research. Future researchers could conduct subsequent studies, such as long-term research, to determine why nontraditional students left the university and never returned to complete their bachelor's degrees. Another recommendation, researching and designing new financial programs and services, and developing additional work and study programs designed to meet nontraditional learners' particular financial needs.

In this study, the focus of the investigation was to discover the barriers nontraditional students encounter in higher education. The main ramification of this study was the benefits of social change. In this project I proposed discussions related to improving the nontraditional students' programs to fulfill their demands.

Conclusion

The main objective of this investigation was to discover the barriers preventing Nebraska's nontraditional students achieving a bachelor's degree. I found that the administrator and academic advisors believed that the students were facing barriers in education, preventing them from graduating. Besides, the students concluded that the barriers are based on financial, social, and academic factors. I wrote a white paper to describe the results of the study. Also, I included recommendations for modifications of their financial, social, and academic programs

for nontraditional students. The local university could use the research findings to enhance programs and services dedicated to higher education and improve the chances for nontraditional students to achieve a bachelor's degree. Moreover, the investigation could also assist regional institutions in higher education in fulfilling nontraditional students' needs.

Nontraditional students at a college in Nebraska face financial, social, and academic barriers preventing them from enrolling and completing their undergraduate education. Discovering barriers is essential to allow universities to address these barriers so that adults can be successful in their education and ultimately contribute to the economy of their families and a nation. Although more nontraditional students are enrolling in higher education, fewer registered learners are completing their degrees. It is vital fulfilling the specific needs of nontraditional students to assist them in completing a four-year college degree.

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Appendix A: Project Study White Paper

Barriers to Completing Bachelor's Degrees for

Nontraditional Nebraska Students

Melba Dinorah Fix-Padilla

White Paper – The Deliverable

Walden University

June 2022

The Project Study – White Paper

Introduction

A white paper was created to present the research findings. The white paper explains a complicated problem supported by viewpoints on a topic (Pelias, 2018). The paper's objective is to impart knowledge and understanding of an issue and persuade an educational institution to take action, implement a decision and instruct their staff concerning the existing problem (Cowell & Pierson, 2016; Campbell et al., 2020). The university could use the white paper research findings to expand nontraditional students' programs and services to fulfill their demands. This position paper will review the findings from a qualitative study that discussed the significant barriers to nontraditional students completing a bachelor's degree. The barriers included: financial, social, and academic barriers.

Rationale for White Paper

The purpose of the white paper is to review the original study conducted at the research site's institution, as well as aligning other literature supporting the recommendations. These recommendations are given in the hope that nontraditional students will be retained to the point of completing a bachelor's degree.

The original research intention was to discover the students, academic advisors, and administrator's perceptions of the financial, social, and academic barriers preventing nontraditional students at a college in Nebraska from achieving their bachelor's degree. Moreover, to offer recommendations to administrators, staff members, and instructors at the participant university, determined from the research findings.

Low undergraduate nontraditional students' graduation rates led to this investigation. Despite the increase of nontraditional students attending college; nevertheless, only a few students have been completing their bachelor's degree (Anderson, 2017; Schmidt, 2015; Tinto, 2017). Consequently, it is vital to help nontraditional students overcome obstacles. The study's main objective was to assist the university's administrators and staff members in discovering the barriers preventing Nebraska nontraditional students achieving a bachelor's degrees.

Six Themes Discovered from the Research

Seven themes evolved from the data collected and analyzed. The first theme included the necessity of offering additional financial support for nontraditional students. The next theme pertained to the cost of education and the students finding it difficult to cover the costs of books and tuition. The third theme centered on managing students' personal life, school, and employment. The fourth theme suggested increasing personalized services within the college community and additional school support. The fifth theme discovered included an increased commitment and value to complete a bachelor's degree for personal and economic purposes. The sixth theme commented on a refreshment needed on academic knowledge and skills. The final theme encouraged incorporating full-time e-learning in the higher adult education program.

(a) An increase of financial needs;

(b) Cost of education (books, transportation and tuition);

(c) Managing personal life, school, and work;

(d) Personalized services, community, and school support;

(e) Commitment to education

(f) Academic knowledge and skills, and

(g) Lacking e-learning.

Based on the seven themes, recommendations were made. The first recommendation was to understand better nontraditional students' time commitment and the challenge in managing personal life, school, and work. In addition, offering a more flexible curriculum could further enhance the nontraditional students' experience. The next suggestion includes offering additional

scholarships and financial assistance. Moreover, providing an accessible educational approach Lastly, the institution could offer childcare services, community and academic support to students in managing their time and reducing stress.

The Problem

The problem in this investigation included the high attrition rate of nontraditional students in higher education (Anderson, 2017). Too many nontraditional students are not completing their degrees in a timely basis. Nontraditional students at a university in Nebraska are experiencing financial, social, and academic barriers preventing them from completing a college education. Anderson (2017) commented that in 2011, 31 million adults in the United States had some college credits but had not completed a four-year education.

Furthermore et al. (2018) and Anderson (2017) stated that the students left higher education for diverse reasons, personal obligations, rigorous programs, and high education costs. Nontraditional students'graduation rates are lower than traditional students. For this reason, it is essential to study the barriers that are preventing nontraditional students completing their career goals to assist them in overcoming these barriers.

Background of the Problem

Nontraditional students are an essential part of the economy of Nebraska. In the last ten years, a remarkable number of nontraditional students or "nontraditional learners" have been registering in higher education, but only a small number have been graduating (Fry & Cilluffo 2019; Markle, 2015). Nontraditional students are generally 25 or older, financially independent,

with family responsibilities, and a full-time or a part-time job (Markle, 2015; Nebraska

Coordinating Commission for Postsecondary Education, 2019).

Some of the barriers are financial, social, and academic reasons (Hora et al., 2019;

Moriña, 2017). This situation presents the opportunity to assist nontraditional learners

overcoming barriers in higher education. It is crucial to support nontraditional students because

they contribute to a country's market. In 2016 the Nebraska Legislature recognized education as

an essential part of the economy of the state. Therefore, the Nebraska Coordinating Commission

for Post Secondary Education [CCPE] (2020) stated that increasing the number of educated

people in Nebraska is vital for the development of the economy (Awarded & High Demand,

2020).

Generally, after graduating from high school, nontraditional students do not attend

college. Instead, they go straight to the job field. Later in their lives, they return to college to

advance in a position at work or change their career (CCPE, 2019). In 2020 it is still essential to

support increasing the number of nontraditional students since 71% of jobs currently demand a

minimum of an associate's or a bachelor's degree (CCPE, 2020). With a fast-growing number of

college students, total fall admissions in Nebraska's public and independent institutions and for-

profit/career schools increased from 131,710 in fall 2008 to 135,618 in fall 2018, an increase of

3.0% in the last ten years (CCPE, 2019).

According to the American Community Survey, Nebraskas' students, ages 22 to 64, who

have postsecondary education or higher increased between 2014 and 2018. Between 2013 -

2017, Nebraska ranked 13th in the percentage of adults between the age of 25 to 64 with an

associate degree or higher and 19th in proportion with a bachelor's degree or higher. The progress is moving in the right direction; nevertheless, it is still not enough to fulfill the long-term goals and demands of the state.

Even though a high number of nontraditional students have been enrolling, a significant number have been dropping out before receiving a bachelor's degree (Yair et al., 2020). In an investigation concerning nontraditional students' attrition, research findings revealed that around 52 % of the students earn a BA degree, proposing that only half of the students in the United States complete a four-year degree (American College Testing, 2015). There is not much research available related on the needs and wants of Nebraska nontraditional students (Yair et al., 2020). Study findings showed a need to motivate nontraditional students to complete undergraduate studies.

Proposed Recommendations

During the investigation, research participant's responses disclosed that nontraditional students are experiencing financial (cost of attendance, personal and child care responsibilities), social, and academic barriers preventing them from achieving a bachelor's degree. Students' responses will give leaders and educators insights concerning adults' struggles in higher education. The administrator and the academic advisors also shared their perspectives about the learner's challenges. Previous investigations have shown that financial barriers are vital predictors of student retention and graduation (Barbera et al., 2020). Participants' suggestions will assist leaders in developing programs and services to satisfy nontraditional students' distinctive needs and wants.

I included four recommendations to reinforce their current nontraditional financial, social, and academic programs:

1. **Financial Recommendations**

Improved Financial Support. Both the literature and the original research support the need for improved financial support as one of the financial recommendations. Nontraditional students revealed financial barriers to be a severe threat to their academic achievement. Financial support programs, including work experience, permit students with a limited income to develop job skills and earn money to pay debts (MacDonald, 2018). Anderson (2017) researched nontraditional students' financial struggles in higher education and found that finances prevent nontraditional students from becoming successful.

Providing alternative financial solutions assist students in fulfilling their career goals and further support students financially (Hittepole, 2019). It is crucial to create economic solutions to assist nontraditional students to overcoming financial struggles to promote college success. Participants informed that they encounter financial challenges with tuition costs, textbooks, and finding reasonable affordable and quality childcare.

Tuition cost is one of the economic barriers. McElroy et al. (2017) explained, learners do not have the money to buy books due to the high price. College prices are high and continue to rise (Jacob, 2016). Mitchell et al. (2017) commented that college tuition costs increased 140% from 2014 through 2017. The motivation for the cost increase was due to high inflation resulting in State funding cuts. Educational institutions must work around financial aspects that negatively impact nontraditional learners.

I suggested expanding the existing tuition and book programs to further capture the number of students benefiting from this program. Moreover, developing innovative methods of financial services that support mature students' individual demands (Henrich, 2019). For example, using course reserves (Henrich, 2019), emerging in literature (McElroy et al. 2017), and collaborating with other university departments to design economical, positive-impact programs and services McElroy et al. (2017).

Another recommendation to improve students' financial barriers is offering work-study opportunities to allow the learner to work while receiving an education. This opportunity will allow the learner to pay personal and school expenses (MacDonald, 2018). The institution can integrate this program by collaborating with the human service department guiding the student through completing paperwork requirements, interviewing, and placing the student in the designated job position. Implementations may assist in "increasing program completion and degree attainment" (Becker et al., 2017, p. 10).

Child Care Services. In response to the financial barriers, some staff members expressed that the students struggle to find reliable and affordable childcare services. Also, various students expressed the need for a childcare center on campus. One of the students mentioned that an onsite childcare facility would give parents some peace of mind. Barbera et al., (2020) conducted an experiment with nontraditional students. When the researcher asked what services the college could offer to relieve the stress students encounter, one of their requests was an affordable childcare service. MacDonald (2018) suggested that nontraditional learners prefer educational

institutions offering childcare services. Providing a reasonably priced childcare service for parents with children could provide additional time for school and helps in reducing stress. Thus, educational institutions may increase the students' rate retention by assigning more resources and expanding student services.

Child care centers are a resource for student parents. Higher adult educational institutions may partner with child care centers located close to the school area (Lidsey, 2018). Membership spaces may be preassigned to parent students. A variable scale may be implemented for parents in the centers that do not welcome child care subsidies. In addition, institutional leaders could petition funds to build or finance a campus child care center (Lidsey, 2018). Funding information could be found at The Child Care Access Means Parents in School (CCAMPIS) (U.S. Department of Education, 2011).

Moreover, sponsored program services may benefit students with minor children. The university can subsidize a student-parent operation (Lidsey, 2018). The educational institution could provide financing support to the constituents by developing minor children programs for students (Lidsey, 2018). The operation may serve as a safety net for learners and their families. They may assist one another with child care, tutoring, engagements, and general academic, and social finance.

2. Social Recommendations

Orientation programs. Creating a customized welcome and a follow-up program (online or face-to-face) designed greet and guide nontraditional students from the moment they arrive on campus and make them feel part of the campus team (Remenick, 2019). Research

findings showed two possible solutions to prevent attrition. One is offering nontraditional students a complete orientation related to the course mandatory amount of work required, financial resources available, than any other assistance. The other way is providing adequate complete information to learners before registration might improve the probability that students will remain in college until graduation.

By developing an emailing application informing nontraditional students about engagement opportunities related to the nontraditional students' population to increase learners involvement on-campus life. Mature students informed that they are at least ten years older than traditional students. There is an age gap between nontraditional and traditional students. Consequently, nontraditional students do not socialize with younger students on campus and feel isolated (Gonclaves & Trunk, 2014 & Lim, 2018).

Also, assigning a mentor who will welcome, answer general questions, and guide nontraditional students during their career paths could help the returning student (Benjamin & Rojas, 2018). Guiding, greeting, and following-up with nontraditional students could increase feelings of belonging and connection with the university and increase the chances of completion.

Community and school support. Most of the participant students declared that they have one of the support groups; a friend, family member, school, or a classmate. Grabowski et al. (2016) suggested that nontraditional students receive limited social support from family, friends, and the community. Group support is crucial for students' success Yusufov and Nicoloro-SantaBarbara, (2019) stated that social isolation causes stress. During the investigation, some students voiced that they are feeling socially isolated.

Ray et al. (2019) declared that students who do not have a reassuring strong safety net are more predisposed social isolation. Procedures to encourage social interactions are necessary to enhance communication acceptance from students and instructors. Ray et al. (2019) recommended establishing physical spaces to inspire socialization. A doctor's lounge is an example of physical space. The primary purpose is to motivate the learners to get together and to associate with each other including instructors, in and out of school (Ray et al., 2019).

3. Academic Related Recommendations

Specialized Orientation and Seminar for Nontraditional Students. Given the time nontraditional students have been away from school, the majority lack essential college skills and need a refresher on their knowledge (MacDonald, 2018). Besides, nontraditional students have different needs from traditional students they required educational leaders to design customized programs designed to fulfill their demands (MacDonald, 2018). According to the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES), nontraditional students are the new majority in higher education. They need the educational staff and leaders support and guidance to complete an education.

It is crucial to identify in advance the adult learner's academic needs. Early intervention lowers insecurities, anxiety, and chances of attrition (Hittepole, 2019; Kah, & Nelson, 2018). During the investigation, most of the students admitted requiring remedial courses such as mathematics, reading, writing, or test preparation courses. Advance mediation could further assist students in identifying their academic weaknesses and equip them with the necessary tools to stay in college until graduation.

Thus, I proposed providing compulsory freshman seminar courses. Required freshman courses are becoming more frequent at universities because they are useful (Young & Keup, 2016). A specialized compulsory first semester course, specific to nontraditional students, one that has a small class size, and provides learners with an action plan to overcome personal, academic, including writing, and necessary technical skills, could greatly help students become more accolated to their new experience (McDonald, 2018).

4. Nontraditional Students Perceived Increased Value to Education

The National Center for Education Statistics [NCES] (2018) said that nontraditional students or nontraditional learners are the majority of students in some of the colleges (MacDonald, 2018). Both students and advisers, from the study, commented on the importance of adapting courses and services accessibility during both evenings and weekends. The study also suggested nontraditional students are highly motivated, yet are pressed for time with additional family and employment responsibilities. Consequently, administrators, staff, and instructors must know how to more effectively engage and service these students. The reason for the growth in population is because nontraditional students are looking to improve their education levels to gain a higher salary to take care of their families (McDononald, 2018). They are starting to show additional commitment to education. Chen and Hossler (2017) stated that there was a high percentage of graduations in the field of higher education.

Nontraditional students value education. Nontraditional students have unique attributes compared to traditional students (Ferreira et al., 2018). For instance, previous experience, additional obligations, different needs, and are generally ready to learn (Knowles et al., 2014).

Consequently, learners tend to be prepared to update their knowledge when they enroll in school (Ferreira et al., 2018). Therefore, nontraditional students adjust their schedules around college hoping to become successful. Regardless of nontraditional learners motivation and determination, a high number of nontraditional students drop-out college during the second year (McDonald,2018). Bernardo (2016) discovered that students major reason for dropping from undergraduate studies includes financial status, social, and academic adaptation. In a separate study Ellis (2019) applied the student departure phenomena. The purpose of the investigation was to research college persistence. To gather information the researcher selected 135 traditional and nontraditional students registered at an university in the United States. Data collection consisted of chi-square- tests. The test questions were based on a course of instruction. Research findings revealed that nontraditional learners departure rates were lower than traditional students in a single course. Findings showed that nontraditional learners are more focus in course-level projects eventhoough they do not persevere (Ellis, 2019). Educational institutions develop engagement by creating curriculums to motivate the nontraditional students to persist until graduation.

Therefore, my recommendation is to develop distance learning (online education)programs and services customized to nontraditional students; for instance, accessible virtual remote courses, counseling, financial, and academic services available in the evening and weekends (Sorenson & Donovan, 2017). Long distance education could increase the student's ability to connect with university's students, faculty, and staff. It could also provide students with additional free time to manage family, work, and

school efficiently. Besides, it will increase nontraditional students' opportunity to succeed in college (Snow & Cooker, 2020).

Increased Curriculum Flexibility. Institutions have limited schedules to fulfill the needs of traditional students. Nontraditional learners expressed the need for flexible schedules and curriculums to fit their demands. Rigid and limited curriculums restrict nontraditional students' choices (Remenick, 2019). Online and evening classes fit their requirements better (Yusufov, Nicoloro-SantaBarbara, 2019). Long-distance learning offers students schedule flexibility and unlimited access from any part of the world.

Conclusion

Nontraditional students at a college in Nebraska face financial, social, and academic barriers preventing them from enrolling and completing their undergraduate education. Discovering barriers is essential because educated adults are contributors to the economy of a nation. Although more nontraditional students are enrolling in higher education, fewer registered learners are completing their degrees.

The recommendations are in concordance with the results researched at a local university in Nebraska to gather the students'perspectives and institutional personnel about the topic of the study. Also, the white paper included the literature supporting the recommendations. Thus, the white paper is an accumulation of both the original research conducted at the university site and the literature accompanying the sanctions.

Moreover, I included recommendations for modifications of financial, social, and academic programs to meet the needs of the students. Institutional leaders could customize

economic, social, and educational programs to ensure they fulfill the specific needs of nontraditional students to assist them in completing a four-year college degree.

Future research needs to be conducted, to validate this investigation's findings and expand the results of this study by establishing various ways to help nontraditional students persist in education, and ultematelly, in the higher education program. Especially since more nontraditional students are attending four year colleges to compete their bachelor's degree.

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Appendix B: Project Evaluation

Directly after the presentation of white paper.

Part A:

1 – Strongly Agree; 2 – Somewhat Agree; 3 – Neither Agree/Disagree; 4 - Somewhat Agree; 5 Strongly Disagree

1) The suggestions from the white paper were easy to understand and accurate.

    a) Financial Recommendations

       1   2   3   4   5

    b) Social Recommendations

       1   2   3   4   5

    c) Academic Recommendations

       1   2   3   4   5

    d) Commitment to education Recommendations

       1   2   3   4   5

One year following the presentation of the white paper.

Part B:

1) Recommendations selection. Please, describe what was accomplished, how it was simplified, or why it was not executed.

    a) Financial Recommendations

    Improved Financial Assistancet   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    Child Care Services   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    b) Social Recommendations

    Enhance Orientations   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    Provide Social Group Services   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    c) Academic Recommendations

    Specialized Orientations   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    Offer Seminar of Nontraditional Students Yes or No   Why or Why

    d) Commitment to education Recommendations

    Offer Online Programs   Yes or No   Why or Why not?

    Offer Flexible Curriculum   Yes or No   Why or Why

2) What were other plan of action executed, which encouraged students to overcome

         financial, social, and academic barrier?

 3) Which suggestions do you plan to carry out in subsequent years?