2-14-2024

Nontraditional Student Perceptions of the Influence Compressed Courses Have on Their Academic Success

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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

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2024

Abstract

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MS, Walden University, 2009

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Project Study Submitted in Fulfillment

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Abstract

This study addressed low graduation rates at Midwest Community College (MCC; a pseudonym) and explored factors affecting student success. The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to delve into nontraditional students' perceptions of the influence of compressed courses and the effect the courses had on their academic success at MCC. Over the past decade, 6–8-week compressed courses in community colleges have stirred both support and controversy among students, educators, and administrators. Despite research suggesting that compressed courses enhanced success rates, retention, and course completion and advocated for their continued integration, a gap persists in understanding and implementing compressed courses, especially in community colleges. Minimal research has examined how this trend impacts students' academic success. The accelerated learning theory was used as the conceptual framework in this study. The research question focused on nontraditional students' perceptions of compressed courses' impact on academic success at MCC. Through semi-structured, open-ended interviews conducted with 11 students who met the inclusion criteria, this study unveiled eight prominent themes, utilizing the NVivo software program. These included completing courses at an accelerated pace, flexibility, and limited interaction. The findings suggest that promoting accelerated academic degree completion among students could promote positive social change. Additionally, this approach may offer advanced career opportunities and support individual goal achievement for students.

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Dedication

I want to dedicate this doctoral paper to those who think it is too late to obtain a higher degree. It is possible at any age.

Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank my family, particularly my two sisters and two children, for their unwavering support during challenging and rewarding moments over the past few years. A special acknowledgment goes to my chair, Dr. Heidi Crocker, whose steadfast support and encouragement have been invaluable and beyond measure.

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Section 1: The Problem

The Local Problem

Midwest Community College (MCC; a pseudonym) experienced graduation rates lower than the institutional benchmark. According to the college's website, MCC reported a graduation rate of 82.5% in the 2013–2014 academic year; however, in 2014–2015, the student graduation rate was 72%, below the institutional benchmark of 80%. According to the MCC provost and the college's website, for the next 3 academic years, graduation rates remained below 80%. To address the problem of the low graduation rates at MCC, in the fall of 2018, the college initiated a new 8-week compressed course option for students instead of the traditional 16-week format to see if compressed courses would influence student graduation rates. After 1 year of implementing compressed courses, student graduation rates did not significantly increase. The provost reported that the student graduation rate for the 2018–2019 academic year was 74.6%, still below the institutional benchmark; however, it must be recognized again that little time had passed to gauge results accurately. In the June 2022 issue of the state business journal, the MCC provost stated that due to many changes at the college, one being the 8-week compressed course format, the college was improving outcomes for students at a slow rate, yet the 8-week compressed courses could be challenging for nontraditional students. Thus, the college was still looking for ways to improve student outcomes and seeking students' perceptions of compressed courses to determine whether these courses could improve graduation rates.

Nontraditional students were more apt to take courses using an alternate delivery method, such as compressed courses (Carman & Bartsch, 2017). Allen and Voytek (2017) found that compressed course length may challenge nontraditional students. The students taking compressed courses were typically expected to do the same amount of work in a shorter amount of time alongside work and family commitments compared to the longer course length that could offer flexibility in balancing academic and personal commitments. On the other hand, Holzweiss et al. (2019) noted that 8-week compressed courses would allow students to focus on fewer courses at one time and complete the courses they otherwise may have failed due to the long semesters and situations outside of their control.

Since implementing the compressed courses at MCC, internal bursar records indicate that the number of students graduating had declined. Given the 2022 state business journal article data showing that three quarters of the courses offered at MCC were held in 8-week sessions, it was essential to understand the students' views. The students' perceptions could help the MCC administration understand the students' experiences and then, if needed, improve the compressed courses to assist with student success rates. The nontraditional students taking part in the 8-week course structure had limited support from college leadership on how to excel in compressed courses given the shortened time of implementation; thus, there was a need to fill this gap by exploring students' experiences of the compressed courses and what challenges students were facing within these courses. The findings of this study provided leaders and policymakers at MCC with valuable information to understand students' experiences in terms of

challenges, strengths, and the support needed to improve student success in the new 8-week course structure.

Rationale

According to O'Banion (2019), community colleges create opportunities and access for nontraditional students who faced many obstacles in obtaining higher education. Higher education institutions have embraced compressed courses to appeal to a broader range of students (Thornton et al., 2018). Compressed courses allow students to schedule successive intensive courses over short periods during a term (Grosz et al., 2021). In some situations, students in compressed courses received half- or full-course credit for classes that met for only 1 or 2 weeks (Grubbs, 2019).

The problem under study was the low graduation rates at MCC and determining how the new format of compressed 8-week courses influenced students' success. Research showed that poor performance and the inflexibility of highly demanding coursework generated high course failure and withdrawal rates in compressed courses (Iloh, 2018). Life problems contributed to low attendance, missed assignments, and poor academic performance (Thornton et al., 2018). However, compressed courses allow the student to focus on just a couple of courses at a time rather than four to five traditional courses; thus, students have less time in the classroom and more time to attend to everyday needs. That said, there was a dearth in the literature focused on exploring students' experiences in compressed courses and their perceptions of how these courses could help to improve academic success (see Evans et al., 2020). Therefore, the rationale for the current study was the lack of understanding of student experiences in compressed

courses and their perceptions of how these courses challenged their academic success. Students could benefit from this understanding, and faculty and administration at MCC could use the information to help students succeed in achieving their educational goals.

Definitions of Terms

I have provided the following definitions of terms for reader clarity and understanding relevant to the study.

Compressed courses: A course that is less than the typical 16-week format, such as an 8-week format, yet still provides the same number of contact hours as a traditional 16-week course. The compressed courses reduce the length/number of weeks of each course by increasing each lesson's duration and weekly meeting times (Allen & Voytek, 2017).

Graduation rates: The number of students who have completed the program of study divided by the number of students enrolled in the program's final year (Law Insider, 2022).

Nontraditional student: A student who does not typically attend college directly after high school, has other obligations, such as family and work responsibilities, and is usually over the age of 24 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2020).

Student success: Either a letter grade of an individual course, the overall grade point average, retention, graduation, and completion rates. To students, it might mean a holistic sense of fulfillment (Educational Advisory Board, 2019).

Universal design for learning: A learning experience design developed to meet all students' needs (Posey, 2020). In this design, barriers to learning are removed from the

environment, not the learner, and are based on evidence-based educational practice (Posey, 2020). Posey (2020) stated that universal design for learning might appear different in every course; however, there are four common components included in all courses:

- All learners know the goal.
- Intentional, flexible options for all students to use.
- Students have access to resources from the start of all lessons.
- Students build and internalize their learning.

Significance of the Study

Through this study, I explored students' experiences of compressed 8-week courses and examined the students' perceptions of how the 8-week courses influenced their academic success and graduation. This study was significant because the results can be used by the leaders at MCC to improve the compressed course format. Understanding students' experiences can aid MCC design course offerings that address the effects of an 8-week course for nontraditional students and provide an ongoing structure that addresses the low graduation rates. Student retention and on-time graduation rates could lead to new opportunities for nontraditional students, such as successful career placement, which is vital for the student and an MCC regulatory requirement, according to the MCC 2020 strategic goals.

This study's positive social change implications included helping students successfully obtain academic degrees, have opportunities for more advanced careers and reach individual goals. Improved student academic success can help them become

contributing members of their local communities and the greater society; impact their overall happiness, stability, and life satisfaction; and increase their attainment of educational and career goals (Evans et al., 2020).

Research Questions

Compressed courses have been embraced by higher education institutions, including community colleges (Walsh et al., 2019). However, some schools noted challenges among students enrolled in compressed courses (Evans et al., 2020; Thornton et al., 2018). For instance, Thornton et al. (2018) pointed out that family and work-related factors affected students' commitment to their coursework in compressed courses, given the challenges of balancing learning and personal use in highly shortened courses. Despite such findings, scholars have made limited effort to explore students' experiences in compressed courses to understand the challenges and factors influencing their overall success (Thornton et al., 2018). I conducted this basic qualitative study to explore nontraditional student perceptions of the influence compressed courses had on their academic success and graduation. This information can help MCC improve its courses for enhanced student success. The following research questions guided the study:

RQ1: How do nontraditional students describe the benefits of the compressed courses?

RQ2: How do nontraditional students describe the challenges of the compressed courses?

RQ3: What are the perceptions of nontraditional students about the ways to improve the compressed courses to support their path to graduation?

Review of the Literature

Conceptual Framework

The accelerated learning theory, proposed by Rose and Nicholl (1997), offers a compelling perspective on the potential transformation of traditional teaching models by introducing compressed courses. In this theory, the authors suggested that compressed courses represent an exciting development capable of revolutionizing conventional educational approaches. At its core, the accelerated learning theory was developed to advocate for a simple yet powerful learning model, positioning effective learning as a skill accessible to everyone.

According to Rose and Nicholl (1997), the fundamental premise of the accelerated learning theory is that offering courses in a more compact format can prevent students from experiencing boredom and contribute to their success. The notion aligns with Wlodkowski's (2003) findings, highlighting a connection between the course delivery format and student engagement and achievement.

Beyond addressing monotony, the accelerated learning theory includes the idea that there are additional benefits associated with compressed courses. Rose and Nicholl (1997) argued that these courses can improve student engagement and attendance, creating a more dynamic and participatory learning environment. Furthermore, they suggested that the condensed format may contribute to enhanced dropout statistics because students are more likely to remain motivated and committed throughout the shortened duration of the course.

In essence, with the accelerated learning theory, Rose and Nicholl (1997) envisioned compressed courses as a remedy for potential student disinterest and a catalyst for a broader positive outcome regarding engagement, attendance, and overall academic success. The theory emphasized the democratization of effective learning, making it accessible and beneficial to a diverse range of students.

Accelerated Learning Framework That Relates to the Study

The 21st century witnessed constant change, characterized by a faster paced generation, prompting the need for traditional teaching methods to adapt accordingly (Carman & Bartsch, 2017). This demand for adaptability was particularly pertinent for millennials who sought expeditious attainment of their college degrees. Harwood et al. (2018) observed that adult students, including millennials, actively sought flexible course delivery methods aligned with their schedules to facilitate goal achievement.

Implementing the compressed course delivery model emerged as a solution to meet these evolving educational needs. Kurg et al. (2016) highlighted its role in assisting students to advance academically and enter the workforce more swiftly. Thorton et al. (2017) contributed to this discourse by emphasizing that compressed courses afford students increased study time per course, enabling them to take only two courses in 8 weeks, in contrast to four courses in a traditional semester. This not only streamlined the academic process but also created a potential sense of urgency for students to grasp and successfully navigate the course material.

Notably, Rose and Nicholl (1997) and Wlodkowski (2003) recounted instances from the early years where students, when exposed to compressed courses, not only

improved their exam scores but also demonstrated enhanced focus on a reduced amount of course material. This historical perspective supports the effectiveness of compressed courses in optimizing learning outcomes.

The constant evolution of the educational landscape aligns with the dynamic demands of the 21st century. Compressed courses respond to the need for flexible, accelerated, and focused learning experiences, catering to students' educational and professional aspirations.

How Conceptual Framework Informs This Study

MCC boasted a significant percentage of nontraditional adult students, often more inclined towards alternative course delivery methods (see Carman & Bartsch, 2017). I anticipated that this project study could build upon the work of others, such as Rose and Nicholl (1997) and Wlodkowski (2003), by investigating how the learning outcomes of compressed courses compared to traditional-length courses for nontraditional adult learners. Understanding the needs of students and discerning motivating factors in course design is pivotal for enhancing student success. This study was carried out to ascertain whether students' experiences with compressed courses influenced their success and graduation rates. I conducted individual interviews with students, focusing on three research questions designed to elicit their experiences with compressed courses by exploring their perceptions of what worked well, what did not work well, and how they believed compressed courses could be improved.

Review of the Broader Problem

Community Colleges

Community colleges, also known as junior colleges or 2-year colleges, are affordable public learning institutions funded by the federal government. Originating from the Morrill Act of 1862, aimed at expanding access to higher education, especially for the general public (Drummond, 2020), these colleges offer an opportunity for individuals to access affordable college and university education (Baber et al., 2019). Through the Morrill Act, the federal government encouraged colleges to enroll individuals from the general community at an affordable cost, with institutions failing to comply facing the denial of federal funds, thereby enabling many underrepresented students to access college education (Mountjoy, 2021).

The concept of community colleges emerged in 1896 when the president of the University of Missouri proposed that the first and second years of college were not necessarily part of university-level education (Drury, 2003). This perspective, reinforced by the President of the University of Chicago, William Rainey Harper, led to the organizational separation of junior and senior colleges and the introduction of associate degrees in 1892 (Grubbs, 2019).

In the early 20th century, the development of junior colleges was slow, with only 14 public and 32 private junior colleges in 1914 (O'Banion, 2018). However, their numbers began to rise with the formation of the Association of Junior Colleges in 1920 and the establishment of the *Junior College Journal* in 1930, fostering the exchange of ideas and the development of vocational training materials (Levin & Kater, 2018). The

surge in community colleges during the Great Depression and the increasing number of high school graduates seeking additional qualifications for employment accelerated their growth, with college education seen as a means of upward economic mobility (O'Banion, 2018).

The Truman Commission Report of 1947 further boosted community college growth by recommending the establishment of community colleges with minimal or no tuition fees, fulfilling the educational needs of World War II veterans in the 1960s (Baber et al., 2019). By the end of the 1960s, junior colleges had over 4.5 million students, offering specialized training and vocational programs, and as of January 2022, there were 935 public community colleges in the United States (Duffin, 2022).

Community colleges primarily cater to local students' educational needs, aligning with the community's financial status and providing affordable access to higher education (Mountjoy, 2021). Offering various programs, including diplomas, certificates, and 2-year associate degrees (Levin & Kater, 2018), community colleges attract students with shorter academic programs that allow for specialization or certification within 2 years (Cuellar & Gándara, 2020). Many students from low-income areas attend community colleges for shorter programs, gaining an advantage in employment and further academic development (Evans et al., 2020).

Critical characteristics of community colleges include federal funding, shorter academic degree completion, and lower tuition fees compared to 4-year institutions (Grove, 2020). However, questions arise about the sustainability of federal and state funding for community colleges, given the increasing student enrollment (Hu, 2019).

Community colleges, like MCC, typically have open enrollment and cater to nontraditional students, offering various benefits. They are affordable compared to universities and private institutions, facilitating access to education for students with limited family capital (Saenz et al., 2018). Experimental research by Ortagus and Hu (2019) highlighted policy changes in community colleges, such as tuition fee adjustments, making it easier for students to enroll in degree programs. Iloh (2018) and Wang et al. (2019) reinforced the consistent affordability of community colleges and their influence on student transitions to higher education.

Community colleges emphasize flexibility, offering compressed courses to attract and retain students, particularly those from diverse backgrounds (Jensen et al., 2021; Ossiannlsson, 2019). The flexibility extends to allowing students to reschedule lessons at their convenience. Grosz et al. (2021) and Jensen et al. (2021) reported increased student performance and enrollment due to the flexibility of courses, especially in subjects like remedial math.

In summary, community colleges have evolved from their origins in the Morrill Act, adapting to the changing educational landscape and providing affordable, flexible, and accessible higher education options for diverse student populations.

Compressed Courses

Scholars have variously defined compressed courses. Walsh et al. (2019) characterized them as courses delivered in a shorter time frame, typically 8 weeks, rather than the standard 15- or16-week format. Despite the condensed timeframe, these courses maintain academic rigor and compliance with governing policies, allowing students to

concentrate on fewer courses within a given period. Holzweiss et al. (2019) viewed compressed courses as mainly offered outside standard semesters (i.e., winter or summer terms), featuring credit hours equivalent to an entire semester or term course. The common thread among these definitions is that, although compressed courses were outside the standard semester, they adhered to academic rigor and had similar outcomes to traditional courses offered in a standard semester.

Compressed learning diverges from traditional institutions in the organization of courses. Traditional college curricula often feature multiple courses concurrently, whereas institutions with compressed courses typically adopt sequential formats (Ho et al., 2021). This sequential structure enables students to focus on courses one at a time, promoting deeper immersion, attentiveness to topics, and better synthesis of materials (Holzweiss et al., 2019). The reviewed studies consistently indicated that compressed courses, offered in a sequential format, allowed students to concentrate on multiple courses simultaneously, distinguishing them from traditional programs where a single unit or program was taken concurrently.

Due to their flexibility, compressed courses have gained popularity among nontraditional students. Holzweiss et al. (2019) reported that community college students, particularly in the United States, favored compressed courses due to the flexibility offered by community colleges. Most participants in their qualitative study considered compressed courses because these programs required less time than traditional ones to obtain university credits or certificates and degrees. This finding echoed Lott and Davies's (2018) earlier qualitative study, where 60% of students enrolled in compressed

courses cited flexibility and reduced time to acquire certificates as primary motivators. Evidence from existing literature suggests that compressed courses became popular among nontraditional students due to the shorter duration required to obtain degrees, university credits, or certificates.

Scholars have identified several benefits of compressed courses. Herron and Garland's (2019) qualitative study with 37 students revealed that compressed courses facilitated immersive learning, enhancing attentiveness to course content and expediting program completion. Ho et al. (2021) also emphasized the greater learning efficiency of compressed courses without compromising educational quality and increased flexibility for part-time working students. These studies suggested that students perceived compressed courses as offering enhanced accessibility, convenience, and satisfaction.

Advocates of compressed courses, including Colclasure et al. (2018) and Herron and Garland (2019), argued that the benefits outweighed criticisms, noting comparable or superior student success rates and retention compared to traditional courses. However, the existing literature lacked insights into students' perceptions regarding factors influencing their participation in compressed courses, their challenges, and how these courses influenced completion based on performance. By addressing this gap in the literature, the current study contributes valuable insights.

Methods of Delivery and the Effects of Compressed Courses. The delivery method significantly influences students' preference for compressed courses, and their impact on academic performance was a trend noted by McDonald et al. (2018), particularly in health programs. Compressed courses have gained popularity, especially

among nontraditional students in health programs who find it challenging to fit traditional length programs into their work schedules and family commitments. The appeal of compressed courses lies in their efficient use of students' time, allowing for quicker degree completion and maintaining student motivation. The mode of teaching and delivery, especially in online platforms for part-time students, plays a crucial role in the effectiveness of compressed courses (Evans et al., 2020; Walsh et al., 2019).

Most compressed courses are offered virtually, with a study involving 45 instructors from U.S. community colleges finding that most of these courses are delivered online (Thornton et al., 2018). Walsh et al. (2019) supported this observation, reporting that many students enrolling in compressed programs prefer virtual learning due to other commitments, such as job responsibilities, making in-person learning inconvenient.

Emphasizing the influence of instructional mode on student success in compressed courses, teachers must balance workloads when delivering these programs to ensure positive teaching and learning outcomes (Lott & Davies, 2018). The authors suggested that the workload for reading and writing-intensive courses in compressed formats should be adjusted accordingly, with the consensus in existing studies being that the method of delivery significantly impacts the efficacy of compressed courses. Adopting appropriate teaching and learning methods is crucial in determining the success of compressed courses.

Factors That Impact Student Success in Community Colleges

Today's students face many new challenges; thus, the definition of success has been expanded. It now includes knowing how to adapt to change, understand one's needs

and balancing them, and manage resources (Parnell, 2018). Parnell (2018) also observed that to be successful, the student needed to understand their contributions to the world, stating:

> Postsecondary education allowed students to become more engaged citizens, contributors to the public good, and advocates for themselves and others. If we could prepare students to adopt those roles and earn a credential, they would experience the kinds of success that they deserve during and after college. (p. 2)

Student success in community colleges was linked to several factors. For instance, Holzweiss et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with 23 community college students to investigate factors influencing their success in community colleges. The researchers found that persistence and high retention of students in different courses positively contributed to their performance and success in community colleges. In addition to retention and course persistence, Colclasure et al. (2018) also found that the mode of instruction, type of courses offered, and their rigor influenced students' success rate in community colleges.

Using a qualitative study, Tiedt et al. (2021) also investigated factors influencing students' success in community colleges with 45 students in the United States. They found that performance in different courses influenced students' success. In particular, students who maintained steady performance were successful and less likely to drop out. However, students with poor performance considered themselves successful and were three times more likely to drop out than those with good grades. Like Tiedt et al. (2021), Walsh et al. (2019) conducted a qualitative study with 27 students to investigate their

perceptions of success in community college. The findings deduced that students considered academic performance and motivation as the significant factors influencing their success and retention in different courses (Walsh et al., 2019).

Advisors, staff, or administrators in most college settings monitor student retention and success. Hempel et al. (2020) argued that classroom practices were not considered a factor in student success. These authors stated that the instructors only interacted with students about three hours per week in a traditional 16-week course. Thus, the time the instructor spent with the students could substantially impact the student's success. Hempel et al. (2020) suggested that even a small act of learning the students' names allowed them to feel that they matter; thus, there was a connection, and student success was more likely.

Compressed Courses and Student Success. Utilizing quantitative research methodology, Park et al. (2018) investigated the impact of compressed courses on underprepared first-time-in-college students in math and algebra, finding that enrolling underprepared students in developmental compressed programs increased their chances of success, a conclusion supported by Trout (2018). Trout (2018) conducted quantitative research with 78 students, revealing that students in a 16-week class achieved better results than their counterparts in an 8-week class.

Rutschow et al. (2019) contributed additional research on the impacts of compressed courses, conducting a randomized control study with 1,422 students to evaluate the success of an accelerated math program. Their findings indicated that students in the accelerated programs completed their math programs successfully. Similar

positive outcomes were reported by Woods et al. (2018) in a quantitative study involving 16,796 students enrolled in compressed reading and writing courses.

Holzweiss et al. (2019) explored compressed online courses using qualitative research with 28 students, revealing that many preferred shorter online courses in which they excelled. However, the study argued that compressed online systems negatively influenced students' academic practices, reducing in-depth reading and writing.

Samarawuckrema and Cleary (2021) conducted a quantitative study comparing traditional learners attending the entire school semester and a new-generation cohort attending the same class with reduced time. The new-generation learners performed well and succeeded in their courses much faster than the traditional cohort, a result supported by Brathwaite et al. (2020) in qualitative research indicating that compressed courses shortened the time for non-English speaking students to complete English-speaking courses with excellence.

Hu (2019) investigated how student success could be improved by increasing momentum using a sample divided into six cohorts from 28 public schools. The study found that accelerated lessons resulted in tremendous student success, corroborating the results by Kassis and Boldt (2020) in their study on factors influencing student success in introductory economy courses.

Despite the positive impacts of compressed courses, challenges were noted. Weiss et al. (2021) found that accelerated courses negatively impacted the depth of learning engaged by students. Lott and Davies (2018) investigated the caseload issue in core courses with a quantitative research method, revealing that while accelerated courses

shortened completion time, they also resulted in a significant workload, affecting performance.

Cotti et al. (2018) presented similar results, establishing that differences in the time allocated for courses influenced student scores. Contrary to increased workload and difficulty adjusting, they found that students attending classes for shorter periods recorded improved performance. This suggested that multiple factors influenced the outcomes of compressed courses.

These studies highlight the benefits and challenges associated with accelerated learning, emphasizing the importance of thoughtful program design to maximize advantages while mitigating potential drawbacks. While compressed courses may contribute to faster completion, addressing workload concerns and ensuring equitable benefits for all students are essential considerations in their implementation.

Compressed Courses and Student Performance. In the previous discussion, the investigator noted that students enrolled in such developmental programs reported successful completion at different levels despite the challenges associated with compressed courses. In an overview of the effects of compressed courses based on the impact of on-course success, the investigator hypothesized that similar results would be replicated in student performance. A closer examination of current studies revealed that accelerated courses improved student performance.

One study investigated the effects of compressed courses on students' academic performance in construction surveying (Williamson, 2017). Using a quantitative research method with two groups of students, one in an entire 16-week spring semester and the

other group in a 10-day mini-semester, Williamson (2017) found that students in the compressed mini-semester recorded an improvement in reading quizzes and laboratory activities than their counterparts. However, students in a 16-week entire spring semester reported as improved. Overall, students in mini-semester courses performed better because they had a smaller time frame to grasp the concepts and apply them immediately in the course examination. However, in terms of understanding the concepts for long-term application, Williamson (2017) credited students for the fall semester.

It was interesting to see how various studies have examined the effects of compressed or accelerated courses on students' performance in different subject areas. These studies suggested that there could be variations in the impact of accelerated courses on students' academic performance, depending on the nature of the subject and the specific design of the course.

Trout (2018) also researched on a larger scale, reinforcing that compressed courses could positively affect student performance. The choice between accelerated and traditional formats could have depended on the specific learning objectives, the subject matter, and the student's needs.

The key takeaway was that compressed courses could offer advantages in more immediate and intense learning experiences. However, the suitability of such courses could vary based on the specific context and subject matter. As with any instructional format, it was crucial to carefully consider the course design and content alignment with the desired learning outcomes.

Multiple scholars have also investigated the effects of compressed courses on

students' overall performance. For instance, Trout (2018), in quantitative research with 78 students, found that even though students in 8-week courses posted had improved performance, performance had been much higher for students who had received the same instruction in a 16-week course schedule. Students in 16-week courses had spent much of their time online doing homework, hence the recorded performance. Similar results were posted by Daffin and Jones (2018). They used a quantitative sample of 1,700 students and compared their performance in proctored and non-proctored courses. They found that students in non-proctored courses performed 10-20% better than those in proctored online psychology classes. In a more recent quantitative analysis of longitudinal data from more than 700,000 students and 100 schools, Thompson (2021) found that shrinking school weeks had not improved student performance but had decreased math performance by 6% and reading by 4%. Even though there had been positive cost outcomes, education's impact had been negative.

However, as mentioned, the long-term retention concepts might differ in such courses. This demonstrated that the effectiveness of compressed courses may vary depending on the goals and content of the course.

Compressed Courses and Course/Program Retention. In addition to examining the impact of compressed courses on overall course success and academic performance, scholars have also explored their role in facilitating students' retention in enrolled programs. For instance, Tanner (2018) conducted qualitative research with 15 students, revealing that improved performance within the compressed timeframe influenced their decision to remain in the program. Similar results were found by Thorton

et al. (2018), who conducted qualitative research with 77 students on the effects of reduced contact hours and accelerated courses. Students in the accelerated degree program reported improved grades and expressed intentions to continue.

Paasch (2020) supported these findings, noting that accelerated learning improved performance and influenced students to stay in the program. Holzweiss et al. (2019) found that compressed courses halved students' time to complete a degree program, attracting new students and encouraging persistence among existing ones. Herron and Garland (2019) designed a compressed learning program that decreased course time attendance but increased student retention. Hung et al. (2021) supported this by demonstrating that accelerated courses in online learning enhanced student retention through improved course flexibility.

Guillory (2018) conducted quantitative non-experimental research, comparing 5-week time-compressed face-to-face summer courses with 16-week fall courses. While statistically insignificant differences were found in course retention, many participants in the 5-week program expressed a willingness to stay. In a related study, Walsh et al. (2019) investigated students' perceptions of fall semester and condensed summer courses, revealing a preference for compressed formats to expedite school completion.

In nursing programs, scholars like Lott and Davis (2018) and Burgess and Medina-Smuck (2018) reported positive impacts on retention through accelerated learning and collaborative testing quizzes, respectively. Snowden et al. (2018) explored the effects of accelerated learning on innovative and leadership programs for underrepresented students, showcasing increased retention. Through a community-based

inquiry study, Tiedt et al. (2021) unveiled that accelerated learning fostered critical thinking and thoughtful peer engagement and facilitated early program completion, making it favorable compared to a 16-week course. Compressed courses enabled students to cover the semester swiftly, mastering critical concepts.

Factors Influencing Student Retention

Family Support and Structure. Several factors influence student retention, with family support and structure being crucial elements. McCulloh (2020) conducted a qualitative study with 12 rural school students, revealing that extended family, parental, and community support influenced students' withdrawal rates. High family support correlated with increased retention and lower withdrawal rates, emphasizing family support and structure's significant role in students' persistence toward degree attainment. Similar results were found in a quantitative study on online learning, where Muliana and Luo (2019) identified institutional support, family support, and course design as significant factors impacting student retention. Institutional support, in particular, was noted to enhance performance and promote retention.

Proctor et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study with 8 African-American specialist students, exploring retention and persistence in school psychology programs. The participants highlighted social engagement, reliance on family support, and support from classmates as crucial persistence strategies. Emotional, financial, and academic support from family members played a pivotal role in students' persistence toward degree attainment during the early transition stages to college life.

Sadowski et al. (2018) echoed similar sentiments in a qualitative study aiming to

improve retention and success for university students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. The study reported that students relied on family engagement during various academic phases, contributing to their persistence in education. The studies suggest that solid family support is associated with higher academic expectations and increasing retention rates.

While the studies offer valuable insights, Sadowski et al. (2018) emphasized the need for additional research with diverse sample sizes, different geographical locations, and unique characteristics such as gender. Despite varying perspectives, Muliana and Luo (2019) highlighted the impact of institutional and family support. In contrast, Sadowski et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of family engagement in students' persistence and improved retention levels. In summary, family support and structure significantly influence student retention, depending on the level of support and its impact on students' motivational levels.

Financial Resources. Education, significantly higher education, poses a significant expense for students, and the availability of financial aid plays a crucial role in influencing student persistence rates in colleges and universities. Numerous studies have linked financial resources to student retention. For instance, Barbera et al. (2020) conducted quantitative research in 2010, establishing a direct correlation between financial aid and students' academic achievement, educational commitment, engagement, and persistence to graduation. The increasing costs of higher education make financial aid a vital resource for most students, impacting their ability to pay for college.

Thomas (2021) investigated student retention and institutional change, reporting

that the lack of funding available to academically capable students contributed to low retention rates. Access to financial aid significantly influenced students' decisions to persist in attaining their degrees, especially among underrepresented students, enabling them to dedicate their efforts to academic and social activities.

Herodotou et al. (2020) investigated motivational intervention and administrative support in distance education with 630 students. The results showed statistically significant better student retention outcomes for students with sufficient financial resources to facilitate their education. The stability of the funding source also affected the probability of student retention and their ability to persist in completing courses.

In a comparable study, Norge (2018) investigated professional communication to help students overcome obstacles and stay in school, revealing that community college students often faced family problems and financial constraints, leading to dropouts due to a lack of resources.

Together, these studies indicate that financing college is an expense that supports students in remaining in school for their education and securing a better economic future. Financial resources are a significant factor in ensuring student retention in schools and courses. However, there are contrasting conclusions regarding the influence of financial resources on student retention. While Herodotou et al. (2020) found statistically significant better student retention outcomes for those with sufficient financial resources, Norge (2018) reported that lacking financial resources led community college students to drop out. Despite these differences, these studies consistently suggest that financial aid is directly related to student's academic achievement, commitment, engagement, and

persistence in graduation.

Student Retention in Compressed Courses

Many colleges offer compressed courses to cater to students who prefer shorter durations. Various strategies are associated with student retention in compressed courses, with engagement programs being one of them. Friðriksdóttir (2018) conducted a quantitative study emphasizing the impact of engagement programs on student retention in open online courses. Institutions were recommended to encourage engagement programs to foster relationships with advisors, teachers, and faculty, supporting students and guiding their academic success. Such programs facilitated connections between professors and students, making the learning experience in compressed courses more manageable and enhancing retention rates (Friðriksdóttir, 2018). Replicating this study, Perez et al. (2022) conducted a quantitative study with 54 students, affirming that interventions like engagement programs effectively supported developmental community college students' retention and academic persistence in compressed courses.

Progression policy programs have also been linked to student retention. Nadeau (2018) conducted a qualitative study on factors affecting retention in online courses, emphasizing the need to change policies and offer flexible terms for students in compressed courses. This approach involved specific remediation activities for students still needing to meet program standards. Mokher et al. (2021) replicated these findings in a quantitative study, reporting that progression policy programs ensured course contents were introduced earlier in the curriculum for short-duration courses, which students preferred due to their quicker completion.

The studies reviewed highlight that compressed courses demand more effort and commitment due to their shorter duration. Strategies are crucial for ensuring the retention of students in such courses, though authors differ in their views on these strategies. For example, Perez et al. (2022) advocate for developmental interventions like engagement programs, emphasizing their effectiveness in supporting retention and academic persistence in compressed courses. Nadeau (2018) suggests policy changes in retention programs, providing flexible terms for students in compressed courses and implementing specific remediation activities for those not meeting program standards.

Benefits of Student Retention in Compressed Courses. Schools aim to retain their best students to enhance overall performance, recognizing the positive impact of student retention on academic achievement. Vazquez-Garcia (2018) conducted a quantitative study focusing on improved knowledge retention among second-year medical students in the field of human psychology. The findings emphasized that student retention enhanced individual knowledge and contributed to overall school academic performance. Institutions foster student retention through collaborative approaches, encouraging interaction and discussion among students and professors, ultimately improving academic performance (Vazquez-Garcia, 2018).

Murphy et al. (2020) expanded on this idea, conducting a quantitative study that explored the retention of socially disadvantaged students. Their findings highlighted that addressing belonging concerns among students increased retention, consequently improving overall school performance.

Thomas et al. (2021) supported these findings in a quantitative study on student

retention and success in higher education. They emphasized that student retention and engagement promoted success for both schools and students, emphasizing the need for educational institutions to adapt to ensure student success. Similarly, Glew et al. (2019) conducted a quantitative study with undergraduate nursing students, revealing a positive relationship between academic literacy support, student retention, and overall academic performance. The studies collectively suggest that high student retention correlates with improved school performance due to students' commitment to academic endeavors.

In examining the financial aspect, Romine et al. (2018) conducted a quantitative study linking student retention to the influx of revenue into institutions. They found a direct correlation between higher education student retention, graduate rates, and increased revenue through tuition fees. Gibson et al. (2018) and Richardson et al. (2018) further explored this connection, highlighting how student retention contributes to the consistent flow of revenues into institutions. Wasserman (2021) reinforced this perspective, emphasizing that positive student retention reflects an institutional commitment to diversity, ensuring high revenue from student tuition fees.

While these studies unanimously advocate for strategies to increase student retention for the continuous flow of income into institutions, there are differences in their interpretations. Romine et al. (2018) emphasized the correlation between high education student retention and graduate rates with revenue inflow. In contrast, Richardson et al. (2018) demonstrated a significant relationship between revenue sources and student retention rate, indicating lower revenue collection during low retention and vice versa. Despite these nuances, the common conclusion is that student retention is a vital source

of revenue for learning institutions, emphasizing the need for effective strategies to enhance retention.

Implications

Compressed courses, as identified by scholars such as Evans et al. (2020) and Holzweiss et al. (2019), have been suggested to contribute to timely degree completion and enhanced student learning outcomes. These formats may instill a sense of urgency, positively impacting student engagement and retention. Improved test scores and success rates are potential outcomes of the compressed format, addressing issues of boredom and burnout (Holzweiss et al., 2019). The positive findings at MCC may have prompted the administration to expand flexible course offerings, allowing students to choose formats aligned with their preferences.

While the literature review highlights the potential benefits of compressed courses, challenges exist, raising concerns about their impact on student performance. However, existing studies focus on outcomes; the proposed study aims to address the research gap by exploring students' experiences and perceptions of compressed courses, shedding light on potential challenges and strengths. Faculty engagement is crucial to implementing an expanded compressed course format, requiring training to maintain academic rigor. Additionally, student orientation programs on time management and understanding the dynamics of compressed courses may be essential for successful implementation. This study seeks to contribute valuable insights to the existing literature and inform future decisions regarding course structures and formats.

Summary

This chapter conducted a comprehensive literature review addressing compressed courses, community colleges, and factors influencing student success. A significant demographic overview, as highlighted by the American Association of Community Colleges (2022), revealed that approximately 39% of undergraduate students attended community colleges. These students typically juggled school, employment outside the home, and family responsibilities. The average age of community college students, reported in 2019 by the American Association of Community Colleges (Breedlove, 2021), was 28. Moreover, Community College Review (2022) emphasized that over 80% of these students received some form of financial assistance, indicating economic challenges. This diverse student body often comprised single parents, individuals in the workforce, those needing remedial courses, nontraditional students, and individuals from disadvantaged families.

Despite the prevalence of such challenges, MCC and other community colleges faced low student success rates. The literature review on compressed courses, specifically those lasting 8 weeks, revealed a positive correlation with improved student success. Various factors may contribute to this enhanced success, including, but not limited to, increased classroom time, enhanced engagement between students and faculty, and improved communication strategies. As explored in the subsequent sections, these findings underscore the potential benefits of compressed course formats in addressing community college students' unique needs and challenges.

Section 2: The Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Qualitative research is an iterative process that enhances understanding within the scientific community and makes significant distinctions by closely examining and gathering in-depth, rich data about the phenomenon under study in natural settings, allowing for a naturistic perspective (Merriam & Grenier, 2019). Using a basic qualitative study design enabled me to collect in-depth data from participants to offer thick descriptions of students' perceptions of which aspects of compressed courses influence their success and graduation at MCC. Percy et al. (2015) underscored that thick descriptions were the main feature of qualitative studies.

Qualitative research involves collecting and analyzing nonnumerical data to help understand concepts and experiences (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). In this study, I focused on collecting self-reported student perceptions regarding the compressed course, and such data were nonquantifiable, which became another rationale for selecting a basic qualitative study design. In the basic qualitative research design, data collection involves interviews, observations, or archival (i.e., content) data (Busetto et al., 2020). A basic qualitative research design was also appropriate for investigating the current research problem in this study because I conducted semi-structured, open-ended interviews to collect participant data to understand the students' perspectives of the compressed course format and why or how the students believed it might challenge or strengthen their success.

I chose the qualitative approach because I wanted to understand what the students of compressed courses felt and experienced. Quantitative research is related to numbers, hypotheses, and even correlations between studies. Quantitative research is generally more extensive and involves closed-ended interviews or laboratory experiments (Babbie, 2017). With the quantitative method, other researchers could repeat a study that had been previously performed (Simmons University Library, 2022). Using the qualitative method, I could ask open-ended questions to the students in individual interviews. For the most part, this qualitative study could not be replicated because I was the one collecting the information from participants within the study site college, which gave me a real sense of MCC's students' perceptions.

This study could have been conducted using a mixed-method approach involving both quantitative and qualitative research. Qualitative research can be seen as unreliable due to uncontrolled factors; however, I opted to stick with the qualitative approach to facilitate the inclusion of open-ended questions during the interviews. The qualitative method also would gave me the ability to focus on students' experiences and perceptions, whereas the quantitative method would not have allowed me to collect and analyze this information in the same way.

Participants

I selected participants through purposive sampling to ensure that those participating could provide insights into how compressed courses challenged and strengthened student success (see Etikan et al., 2016). Only nontraditional students (i.e., those aged 24 years old and older) who had undertaken at least one compressed course

within the past 2 years of the start of the study were included as participants to share their experiences and views to answer the research questions regarding students' perceptions of how their experiences in compressed courses challenged or enhanced their success and graduation in their academic progress.

After obtaining written approvals from the study site, I asked for assistance from the MCC Registrar's office to gain the email addresses of students who had taken at least one compressed 8-week course between Fall 2019 and Spring 2022. Email invitations were sent to these students requesting their participation in the study. The first 20 students who replied to the email request were contacted by phone to provide them with more information concerning the study's date, time, and venue. I planned to begin with 10–15 interviews and then assess if there was a need to continue interviewing additional students depending on whether I was still collecting any new information, indicating that future interviews would be necessary to reach data saturation.

In qualitative studies, the sample size is obtained through data saturation. Data saturation occurs when additional data do not result in new information or themes, and the redundancy of the current information is due to data duplication (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022). Starting with 11 participants, I obtained the final sample size through data saturation at the point when I realized the self-adequacy of the sample used to conduct the study. Other seminal scholars had recommended a sample of between five and 25 participants in qualitative studies based on the research design used; too large of a sample was unnecessary, and too small of a sample was unscientific (Andrade, 2020). Therefore,

the sample size for this study aligned with seminal recommendations for the sample size required in qualitative studies.

I provided informed consent paperwork to all participants. This consent form included an explanation of the study's purpose and any human risk that might occur, which was minimal in this study. The participants' identities were kept confidential, and I did not share any of their personal information with anyone. The participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and if they desired to drop out, they could do so at any time without any questions asked.

To establish the researcher-participant relationship, I made certain that the participants knew how much I appreciated their time and their interest in this research topic and that not only was I interested in this study but that I hoped this would help them and other students succeed in the future. Some of these students may have known me as the dean of Health Sciences; still, they were assured that I had nothing to do with their grades or courses, especially since these students were most likely General Studies students. The interviews were casual and held within a nonintimidating area, allowing the participants to be comfortable and speak freely.

Data Collection

I collected data for the study through semistructured, open-ended interviews. This data collection method enabled study participants to share their views and experiences and did not limit them to providing confidential answers or sharing specific experiences (DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Using semistructured, open-ended interviews allowed me to analyze the data into emergent themes and patterns concerning the influence of

compressed courses on student success. I developed the interview questions based on the key concepts identified in the literature review and the conceptual framework. These concepts and theories shaped what I asked participants to gain insights into the challenges of compressed courses on student success at MCC.

Each participant was interviewed in person, and some were interviewed via Zoom due to their schedules. The interviews were audio recorded with the participants' prior knowledge. I asked the same interview questions of each participant using an audiotape device for the in-person interviews or an audio-recording feature on the Zoom platform meeting when conducted virtually. Each interview took approximately 45–60 minutes.

I was a MCC administrator at the time of the study; however, none of the participants were past or present students I had taught. Even though some participants may have known me as the dean of Health Sciences, they were not current students of any Health Science course(s) I oversaw at the time of the study, and they were assured that I did not influence their grades or courses. The data were compiled once all participants were interviewed, and common themes were determined using Braun and Clarke's (2019) coding methods. Appendix B shows the interview guide/questions used to collect data from the research participants.

I received Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval (#03-29-23-0070007) before selecting any participants, which was a step that was required to be sure that the study was compliant with federal, state, and other regulatory guidelines related to human research. IRBs ensure that all human subject research follows ethical guidelines; thus, federal agencies require each institution to establish IRBs (Rubin &

Rubin, 2012). All research has some level of risk, even if minimal (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). With this in mind, I designed the current study to lower the participants' risk.

All participants received informed consent paperwork related to the study. This consent form included an explanation of the study's purpose and any participant risk that might occur, which was minimal in this study. The participants' identities were always kept confidential, and their personal information was not shared with anyone. I maintained the privacy of participants through the anonymization of data. The participants are referred to throughout the study by designated numbers instead of being referred to by their actual names. The participants were assured that their participation was voluntary, and if they desired to drop out, they may do so with no questions asked.

To ensure the sufficiency of data, I took care to develop the interview questions with the anticipation of them leading to additional questions and further conversation. Making the participants feel comfortable increased their relaxation and allowed more personal conversations. The approach involved presenting a preliminary question followed by a secondary one, combining both to elicit more comprehensive responses from the participants.

Data Analysis

As the researcher, I incorporated processes and data analysis to organize and manage the participants' information (Ravitch & Carl, 2016). A six-step process was employed to analyze data, as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2019). I used thematic analysis to analyze the data because this data analysis method allows for the identification of patterns of meaning in the data collected (see Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The first step of the thematic analysis method was data familiarization (see Braun & Clarke, 2019). I read through all the interview transcripts to become familiar with the participants' views. During this step, I took short notes about some essential issues that emerged from the data collected.

The second step was coding, where I identified related words and phrases and highlighted them using the same color. The codes created were placed into categories based on the extent to which they related and the issues they touched on. I adopted manual coding because it ensured a thorough examination of interview data to identify relevant words and phrases even when the software did not identify such information (see Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The third step involved developing themes generated from the categories created using the codes. Some categories became themes, while others were discarded for lacking relevance concerning the investigated issue (see Braun & Clarke, 2019).

The fourth step was reviewing the themes identified. I examined these themes to ensure they were accurate and valuable representations of the interview data collected (Braun & Clarke, 2019). At this point, I returned to the data and examined whether the themes were accurate and then explored the interview data again to determine whether other themes had been omitted. A review of themes also ensured that subthemes were appropriately placed.

The fifth step was defining and naming the themes. During this step, I determined exactly what each theme meant and what its information was (see Braun & Clarke, 2019).

I then provided a name for each theme, and the name offered a succinct summary of what the theme discusses.

The sixth and final step was the analysis of the themes to provide in-depth insights into the research topic. The analysis of themes involved examining what the results meant and implied. I completed a respondent validation to ensure the accuracy and credibility of the findings.

Limitations

I identified two limitations associated with this study. The first limitation was that this study's findings could not be generalized. Since the study focused on MCC specifically, the findings could not be applied in a general context. The second limitation of this study was that some of the interviews were conducted via Zoom versus in a live setting. Even though the Zoom interview sessions were conducted with video turned on and were audio recorded, not being in the same room with the participants might have detracted from the intimacy of the results. However, I ensured that the findings were credible and valuable by conducting a rigorous study.

Data Analysis Results

The data collected for this project study included the perceptions of 11 nontraditional students from MCC. I sent out invitations electronically to the first 20 students who replied to the initial recruitment email and met the criteria to participate in this study. Eleven participants responded and agreed to participate in the study. The following subsections, I discuss the setting, participant demographics, data collection and

data analysis procedures, the credibility of the data, and member checking before presenting the study results.

Setting

I conducted this study at MCC, which had a large percentage of nontraditional adult students. A nontraditional student typically does not attend college directly after high school, is usually older (i.e., 24 years old or older), and has work and family commitments. I selected students from MCC who were at least 24 years old and had taken at least one 8-week compressed course between 2019 and 2022 to participate in the study. No organizational or personal conditions influenced the participants. Moreover, no such conditions influenced their experiences during the study since there were no budget cuts, personnel changes, or other traumas during the study. Therefore, the interpretation of the results of this study was not influenced by organizational or personal conditions.

Participant Demographics

There were 11 participants in the current study. The participants were nontraditional both male and female nontraditional students at MCC. Regarding the characteristics relevant to the current study, it was important that each participant was at least 24 years old or older and had undertaken at least one compressed 8-week course within the 2 years of the start of the study because not being a nontraditional student and not having undertaken at least one compressed course within the past 2 years would have meant that the participants could not provide the relevant data needed for this study.

I knew the actual names of the participants; however, because the participants' anonymity and confidentiality were paramount in this study, using pseudonyms was an

important consideration. Therefore, I created pseudonyms for each participant, which were used in place of their real names. The use of pseudonyms was consistent with a qualitative approach. Overall, assigning a pseudonym to each participant helped to ensure that their identity was protected. Each of the 11 participants stated they were willing and prepared to engage in the semistructured, open-ended interviews that lasted 45 to 60 minutes. The demographic information of the study subjects is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Participant pseudonym	**Gender**	**24 years or older (yes/no)**	**Ethnicity**	**Taken at least one 8-week compressed course (yes/no)**	**Career**/profession
Participant 1	M	Yes	Black	Yes	Mechanical engineer
Participant 2	F	Yes	White	Yes	Navy veteran
Participant 3	F	Yes	White	Yes	Dental hygienist
Participant 4	M	Yes	Hispanic	Yes	Medical assistant
Participant 5	F	Yes	White	Yes	Surgical technologist
Participant 6	F	Yes	Black	Yes	Not specified
Participant 7	F	Yes	White	Yes	Surgical technologist
Participant 8	F	Yes	White	Yes	Not specified
Participant 9	F	Yes	White	Yes	Nursing
Participant 10	F	Yes	Black	Yes	Nursing
Participant 11	F	Yes	Hispanic	Yes	Business owner

Data Collection Process

Before the collection of data, IRB approval from Walden University was obtained first because the study involved human participants. For data collection to answer the research questions, the number of recruited participants was 11. This was the appropriate number, allowing me to conduct in-depth, semi-structured, open-ended interviews efficiently. The interviews used both semi-structured and open-ended interview

questions. The interview data was recorded using the default Zoom voice recorder, which allowed me to record the online Zoom meetings. Permission was first obtained from the participants before the recording. For backup, notes were taken in the old-fashioned way using paper and pen in each interview. This was important in case something happened to the digital voice recorder and all the digital data got lost.

Data collection from the plan presented was the same; for example, the plan was to interview 10-15 participants, and 11 were interviewed—this number of participants allowed for data saturation. A guide was utilized during the interview; probing was done by asking follow-up questions. This was particularly appropriate when I needed to fully understand a given response, when the answers were ambiguous or vague, and when more detailed or specific information was needed. No unusual circumstances were encountered when collecting data.

Data Analysis Procedures

Verbatim transcripts of the 11 individual interviews were analyzed in NVivo 12 (https://lumivero.com/resources/free-trial/nvivo/) qualitative data analysis software. The data analysis procedure applied to the data was Braun and Clarke's (2006) inductive, thematic method. The procedure had six steps, including (a) familiarization, (b) generation of initial codes, (c) grouping codes, (d) reviewing themes, (e) defining final themes, and (f) producing results (Braun & Clarke, 2006)—the first step of the analysis involved familiarization with the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The data was read and reread in full. I made handwritten notes regarding points of potential analytical interest,

including repeated ideas, phrases, and keywords, from which codes might be developed in the second step of the analysis.

The second step of the analysis involved generating the initial codes. Braun and Clarke (2006) stated that generating codes to organize the data was the second phase of reflexive thematic analysis, with full and equal attention given to every data item. I clustered different excerpts from the transcripts that expressed similar meanings into codes. Those codes were then labeled with descriptive phrases that indicated the meaning of the data assigned to them. For example, Participant 3 spoke about completing the courses fast, saying, “I have three children, and I wanted my degree as fast as possible, and the compressed courses allowed that quicker.” Participant 6 also spoke about being able to finish the courses faster, saying, “Being able to get my degree faster and make money and get to my purpose of getting into school.” Both responses indicated that the participants described being able to complete their courses fast as a benefit of compressed courses, so both responses were assigned to the same code, which was labeled, ‘finish the courses quickly.’ In total, 221 response excerpts were assigned to 33 codes. Table 2 indicates the initial codes and the number of response excerpts that were assigned to each of them (i.e., the code frequencies).

Table 2

Initial Code Frequencies

Initial code	Code frequency in interviews
Cuts off unnecessary materials	3
Difficult to get the right information in 8 weeks	6
Easier to finish in 8 weeks	14
Faculty more readily available	16
Finish the courses quickly	27
Flexibility with schedule	7
Get more courses done in one semester	13
Group projects tough to do because of limited student interaction and communication	8
Guidance on how to use the website to prepare online learners	6
Have a structure and plan ahead	6
Have a group environment and student interaction	8
Have hands-on approach	5
If you fall behind, it is difficult to catch up	6
More classes are offered in 8 weeks	4
More communication between instructors and students for online classes	4
More interactive learning tools	3
More workload and not enough time to do all the homework	11
No access to the professor for online classes	3
Not beneficial for everybody and just gets the basics	6
Prevents procrastination	5
Provide guidelines and course calendar to prepare students	6
Put out the syllabus sooner to prepare students	3
Some lessons deserve more time	4
Reduce the number of courses	2
Struggle with some compressed courses	4
Time management a challenge	9
Too much information in a short time	11

The third step of the analysis involved grouping codes. Themes were developed by grouping codes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). I grouped codes to form themes. When different codes indicated different aspects of the same broader, overarching idea, I identified them as related and clustered them to form a theme. For example, the three codes, ‘easier to finish in 8 weeks,’ ‘finish the courses quickly,’ and ‘get more courses in one semester’ were grouped into a theme because they all indicated that compressed courses allowed nontraditional students to complete their courses at a faster pace. The three codes ‘have a structure and plan,’ ‘put out the syllabus sooner,’ and ‘provide guideline and course calendar’ were grouped into another theme because they all indicated how students could be prepared for the compressed 8-week course. In total, the 33 initial codes were clustered into 8 themes.

The fourth step of the analysis consisted of reviewing the themes. I cross-checked the themes against one another to ensure the ideas they represented did not overlap. I also compared the themes to the original data to ensure they indicated patterns in the participants' responses. The themes were named and defined in the fifth step of the analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). These definitions were provided in the Results section of this section. The sixth step of data analysis involved presenting the results by writing this chapter (Braun & Clarke, 2006). As a preliminary overview of the results, Table 3 indicates how the initial codes were grouped into the finalized themes. There were no discrepant cases.

Table 3

Grouping of Codes Into Finalized Themes

Theme **Initial code clustered to identify theme**	**Theme frequency in interviews**
Theme 1: Compressed courses allow nontraditional students to complete their courses faster as more courses can be done within one semester	57
Finish courses in 8 weeks	
Finish courses quickly	
Cuts off unnecessary materials	
Get more courses in one semester	
Theme 2: Compressed courses offer flexibility with schedule and help to prevent procrastination	12
Flexibility with schedule	
Prevents procrastination	
Theme 3: It is difficult to obtain the right information within such a short time period, and you only get the basics	16
Not beneficial for everybody and gets the basics.	
Struggle with some compressed courses.	
Difficult to get right information in 8 weeks	
Theme 4: Too much information provided within a short time, resulting in more workload, inadequate time to do schoolwork, and difficulty catching up	28
Too much information in a short time	
More workload and not enough time to do all the homework	
If you fall behind, it is difficult to catch up.	
Theme 5: Online classes have limited interaction and communication between students and instructor and between students	11
Group projects are tough to do because of limited interaction and communication.	
No access to the professor for online classes	
Theme 6: Increase access to the professor for online classes and create an environment for student interaction	14
More office hours for students who need extra help	
More communication between instructors and students for online classes	
Have a group environment and student interaction.	
Theme 7: Offer guidance on how to use website for online students and provide course calendar and syllabus sooner to prepare students	15
Provide guidance and course calendar to prepare students.	
Guidance on how to use the website to prepare online learners	
Put out the syllabus sooner to prepare students.	
Theme 8: Increase time for some lessons and decrease the number of courses	6
Some lessons deserve more time.	
Reduce number of courses.	

Credibility

Credibility was the internal validity of qualitative studies. It focuses on how congruent the findings were with reality (Amin et al., 2020). It also measured the truth value of qualitative research or whether the findings were accurate (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). In this current study, strategies were utilized to strengthen this criterion. One of them was member checking. Member checks were utilized to establish credibility. This was also called respondent or participant validation (Morrow, 2005). After collecting data from the participants, I returned it to them to check for accuracy and resonance with their experiences. All 11 participants confirmed that the data gathered from them were accurate; hence, there were no changes to be made. In this way, credibility was established.

Results

The current study sought to explore and understand nontraditional student perceptions of the influence compressed courses had on their academic success. This sub-section provides a presentation of the results. The findings were presented in detail. In total, 8 themes emerged from the data. The research questions organize the results of the data analysis. The themes were summarized in Table 4.

Table 4

Research Questions and Their Corresponding Themes

Research question	**Themes used to address the research question**
RQ1: How do nontraditional students describe the benefits of the compressed courses?	Theme 1: Compressed courses allow nontraditional students to complete their courses faster as more courses can be done within one semester. Theme 2: Compressed courses offer flexibility with schedule and help to prevent procrastination
RQ2: How do nontraditional students describe the challenges of the compressed courses?	Theme 3: It is difficult to obtain the right information within such a short time period and you only get the basics. Theme 4: Too much information is provided within a short time, resulting in more workload, inadequate time to do schoolwork, and difficulty catching up. Theme 5: Online classes have limited interaction and communication between students and instructors, and between students making group projects difficult to do
RQ3: What are the perceptions of nontraditional students about the ways to improve the compressed courses to support their path to graduation?	Theme 6: Increase access to the professor for online classes and create an environment for student interaction. Theme 7: Offer guidance on how to use website for online students and provide course calendar and syllabus sooner to prepare students. Theme 8: Increase the time for some lessons and decrease the number of courses.

Research Question 1

The first research question for this study was: How do nontraditional students describe the benefits of the compressed courses? Two themes emerged from the data that helped to answer this question. These were as follows: (a) compressed courses allow nontraditional students to complete their courses faster as more courses could be done within one semester, and (b) compressed courses offer flexible schedules and help prevent procrastination.

Theme 1: Compressed Courses Allow Nontraditional Students to Complete Their Courses Faster as More Courses Can be Done Within One Semester. Data supporting this theme were drawn from all 11 individual interviews. The finding

indicated that, according to the participants, a key benefit of compressed courses was that they enable the students to complete their courses at a faster pace because more courses could be done within one semester. Participant 2 stated, "The benefit was that you get it over with quicker." Participant 3 noted that:

> I had children young, so my goal was to finish courses as fast as I could with quality still being a main point…but the goal was to get it done as quick as possible, to get my degree as fast as I could so I could provide better for them. I have three children, and I wanted my degree as fast as possible, and the compressed courses allowed that quicker.

Likewise, speaking of the benefits, Participant 4 mentioned that:

> Well, they're faster. There are more, I guess, available. So, I took Anatomy One and Two in the same semester because they were 8-week classes. So, I got those requirements done faster than a whole year. It was just within one semester.

Similarly, Participant 5 noted that:

> The part I like about it was the pace…Things like my communication course, I felt like having it in an 8-week course was great. We went through it. It was kind of at a quicker speed, faster speed, and that was good that it worked, and then you're onto the next thing.

Concerning the benefits of compressed courses, Participant 6 talked about "being able to get my degree faster and make money and get to my purpose of getting into school." Participant 9 stated, "So they are quicker. You are going to get to your goal quicker." Participant 9 also spoke about completing more courses, stating, "So with the compressed

courses, I was able to take... I took three courses in the spring semester. I think if it would have been a traditional 16-week, I would have probably only taken two."

Theme 2: Compressed Courses Offer Flexibility with Schedule and Help to Prevent Procrastination. Six interview participants contributed to this theme. The finding demonstrated that, as per the participants in this study, the other benefit of compressed courses was that they offer flexible schedules and enable nontraditional students to avoid procrastination. Participant 10 said, "I guess there's more flexibility with the schedule." Participant 9 said, "The flexibility of you not having set times to go to class, or you just have a day when all your assignments are due, really. So that was nice too because then I could work at my own pace." This participant added, "The flexibility was great because you can do it on your own time, but then you have to designate that time to do your coursework." Speaking about the benefits, Participant 10 also indicated, "I guess it just helps you not to procrastinate. Make sure you always do your work when you're supposed to." Similarly, Participant 7 noted, "A lot of assignments are due, and I am a big procrastinator, so of course I would wait till the last minute, and in 8-week courses, you can't really do that." Participant 8 indicated that she felt that she was procrastinating with the 16-week course and not with the 8-week compressed course, stating that:

> The main problem was with the other two courses being so tight on time; the 16-week was easy to fall behind since I was like, oh, well, I can just come back to this; this was a small deal, it's no rush.

Research Question 2

The second research question was: How do nontraditional students describe the challenges of the compressed courses? Three themes emerged from the data that helped to address this question. They were: (a) it was difficult to obtain the right information within such a short time period, and you only get the basics; (b) too much information was provided within a short time, resulting in more workload, inadequate time to do schoolwork, and difficulty catching up once you fall behind; and (c) online classes have limited interaction and communication between students and instructor, and between students making group projects difficult to do.

Theme 3: It Was Difficult to Obtain the Right Information Within Such a Short Period, and You Only Get the Basics. Six interview participants contributed to this theme. This theme suggests that a major challenge faced by the nontraditional students at MCC with the 8-week compressed courses was the difficulty in obtaining the right information within a short time as they can only get the basics. Participant 11 indicated that compressed courses only give the students the basics of what they need for that course, stating, “In the challenges, I would say that it's very hard to get the right information in those 8 weeks. It's a very push, push, push, not just for the students, but for the teachers, in-person or online.” Participant 6 noted that:

> Some subjects you can't do in 8 weeks. As I said, anatomy and microbiology are some things you just can't do. I do have to say, with 8-week courses, I feel it's forced the instructors to focus on the information that we need to know and not just everything that floods our brain with. I do like the 8 weeks. It does, I don't

> know, hyper focuses what we need to know about the... And then maybe on our own time, we can dig more into it.

Participant 5 talked about how tough it was to take the compressed math course during that short period of time of 8-weeks, saying:

> My math was a compressed course, and I'm not a math brain, so that was a struggle. And I felt like I was fighting all the way through it, and I still don't know. To this day, I am like, "What did I learn, and did any of that stick?" And I'm sure something did. So, depending on the class, for me, it was kind of what mattered. If I had to pick, of all the 8-week courses that I've done, I would say math was my most challenging.

Theme 4: Too Much Information Provided Within a Short Time Resulting in More Workload, Inadequate Time to Do Schoolwork, and Difficulty Catching Up.

Nine out of 11 participants in the semi-structured interviews contributed to this theme. The theme indicated that the other challenge of compressed courses faced by nontraditional students was that they are offered a substantial amount of information within a short period, which leads to more workload, insufficient time to do schoolwork, and difficulty catching up when they fall behind. Speaking about being presented with too much information within such a short time, Participant 2 stated that:

> I was basically going back and learning 2 years of math from high school plus new things, and I had no time to comprehend anything. It was so much information in such a short period of time. And some of it was familiar to me. I remember learning it. But math today is not done the same as math was 40 years

> ago. And so that also presented a challenge because I'm like, I have no idea what you're talking about.

Concerning the challenges, Participant 3 mentioned, "The obvious, there was more information involved, but I do think that faculty knew that, so they were more willing to help too," and added, "The workload was more." Similarly, Participant 6 stated, "It was a lot of information at once, especially with anatomy and microbiology. I joked that you barely had enough time to read the chapter of each lesson."

Participant 8 reported, "I think there's just a lot of information being put out and a lot of work we have to do on a small timeframe; there's not a lot of time to make new friends or whatever." Participant 9 spoke about the increased workload, stating, "You just got to understand that the courses are fast-tracked because it's an 8-week course. And yeah, it'll get you there quicker, but your workload was going to be a little more severe than your 16-week courses." This participant also noted that: "It's a shorter course, so my only complaint was just how much all at once, especially in ANP, because there's so much information in ANP book-wise that you need to know that you're just reading all at once."

Participant 10 talked about how easy it was to fall behind, saying, "Just if you miss one class, you've already missed a lot. You have to make sure you stay on task and that you're really committed because it only takes one week to get behind." Similarly, Participant 4 reported that:

> And if your schedules don't match up or different things, then it just makes it more difficult. Sometimes, the faster pace can be a con just because you have to

> keep up and you have to get things done. And if you fall behind, it's almost impossible to catch back up at that point.

Theme 5: Online Classes Have Limited Interaction and Communication Between Students and Instructors, and Between Students Making Group Projects Difficult to Do. Seven out of the 11 participants contributed to this theme. The nontraditional students described online classes having limited interaction and communication between learners and instructors and between students as another challenge they faced with compressed courses. Participant 11 stated, “I find the online [class] is/was definitely push, push a little bit more because there isn't that personal interaction with the teacher of being seen and held accountable,” Participant 4 spoke about the difficulty in having group projects in online classes due to limited interaction and communication between students, saying:

> Group projects: I've done them in a compressed class or 8 -weeks. That can be tough, too. Because in person, it's easier because everyone's there, and you can exchange information. But once again, it's hard to sometimes communicate with people who could be anywhere in the state or even the country sometimes. And so, I remember having to work on different time zones and other things to complete the project. And so that was a con.

According to Participant 5, “In some of the other classes, you don't make super strong connections because they are short.” Moreover, Participant 4 spoke about challenges, stating:

> Challenges? So, for online 8-week classes, not seeing your professor or having as

> much access to them. Sometimes, well, most of the times, they're just complete strangers. You don't get to know them on a personal level. There's limited communication, if any, in some classes, and it's hard to sometimes get help because you have to schedule it.

According to Participant 2, the lack of interaction between students is/was a significant issue: "If I'm sitting and I'm reading a book, and there's no interaction with other students, which was huge."

Research Question 3

The third research question was as follows: What are the perceptions of nontraditional students about the ways to improve the compressed courses to support their path to graduation? Three themes emerged from the data that helped answer this question. These were: (a) increase access to the professor for online classes and create an environment for student interaction, (b) offer guidance on how to use the website for online students and provide course calendar and syllabus sooner to prepare students, and (c) increase time for some lessons and decrease the number of courses.

Theme 6: Increase Access to The Professor for Online Classes and Create an Environment for Student Interaction. Data drawn from seven interview participants contributed to this theme. The theme showed that the participants believed that increasing access to the professor for online classes and creating an environment for student interaction could help to improve the compressed courses to support their path to graduation. Concerning improving the compressed courses to support students' path to graduation, Participant 4 stated, "More communication between the instructor and the

students, which was hard, especially [if] it's an online class. In person was easier." When asked about things that could be improved in an 8-week course, Participant 11 mentioned, "Having that group environment to get to know each other, not just sitting next to the other students and getting to know your teacher. I think a lot of people don't get to know their teacher." Participant 2 talked about increasing the interaction between students, saying, "The interaction with other students to me was huge." This participant added that:

> Some of my classes offered breakout rooms, and you could interact with other students and hear their views and perspectives, and I'm like, whoa, that's something I never even thought of. Looking at it from that way. Maybe I didn't hear that. I missed what was said, or ... Some of those perspectives because we're all different ages, come from different places, and we hear things differently; our biases make us see things differently. So having that interaction, especially in the 8-week courses, would've been a huge benefit.

Participant 1 talked about the need for having more office hours so that students can interact with professors more and obtain extra help, stating:

> I think something that would help was for the professors to offer more office hours. Classes range in various ages from 18 to 19 years old, all the way up to... I'm 41, and I'm sure there's probably students older than that who need extra help.

Theme 7: Offer Guidance on How to Use the Learning Management System (LMS) and Provide Course Calendar and Syllabus Sooner to Prepare Students. Data drawn from six interview participants contributed to this theme. As per this theme, the

participants believed that offering guidance to online students on how to use the website/Learning Management System (LMS) and providing course calendars and syllabi sooner to prepare students for the 8-week compressed course could help to improve these courses to support the nontraditional students' path to graduation. Participant 7 said, "Maybe a better layout of how the class would be and more detailed course calendars and a course calendar…I know things can change and life happens, but a pretty accurate timeline of the course, if that makes sense." Participant 11 talked about putting the syllabus out sooner, stating:

> If the teacher puts out the syllabus sooner than the weekend of the class, which most of the teachers I've had have been teaching the class, then they know what they're teaching, and the syllabus shouldn't change too much. Having, we're going to; we need this book, we're going to read this, we're going to, it's I guess to pre-prepare yourself of, okay, this was what's coming at you versus the weekend before, and you're going, I don't have my syllabus yet.

Participant 4 suggested training on how to use the website for online learners if the 8-week compressed courses are offered online, stating:

> But maybe just, yeah, a course or something that explains how to use the functions of the website if it's online and how to submit things, edit things, the different just tabs and different things like that could help a person who's never taken an online class at all, especially an 8-week online class. But maybe just something, even if it's just a week or an assignment, just to get to know the functions of it.

Participant 8 mentioned that it was important for online students to have a tutorial on how to use the website, saying, “It was amazing having that tutorial for the website and all that sort of thing.”

Theme 8: Increase the Time for Some Lessons and Decrease the Number of Courses. Six interview participants contributed to this theme. The contributing participants indicated that increasing time for some lessons and reducing the number of courses could help to improve the compressed courses to support their part to graduation. When asked the number of courses they felt comfortable doing in an 8-week period, Participant 1 said, “For myself, one at max. And that's pushing it.” She added that:

> That could change depending on what the core subject is. Now, if we were doing something with 3D modeling software, AutoCAD, CADs type stuff, I could do one or two easily. But when it comes to something like mathematics, it's just way too much information. It doesn't give you time to absorb it.

Participant 10 indicated that harder lessons should have more time, stating, “I guess some of the lessons, I feel they deserve more time than others. I think maybe if they compress the easier stuff together and allow us more time for the harder concepts.” Similarly, Participant 5 mentioned, "With the math, I don't know, it's hard to say. The time, I feel like I needed more time.”

Summary

The purpose of this basic qualitative study was to explore nontraditional student perceptions of the influence compressed courses had on their academic success. The problem addressed by this study was the low graduation rates at MCC. This study

addressed three research questions, which have been answered adequately. Interview data from 11 nontraditional students above 24 years from MCC were analyzed through thematic analysis. Six steps of analysis were followed. The six steps were familiarizing with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing, defining, naming, and reporting—NVivo 12 (https://lumivero.com/resources/free-trial/nvivo/software) aided the analysis process. The first research question was: How do nontraditional students describe the benefits of the compressed courses? According to the participants, the findings revealed a significant benefit: compressed courses enabled nontraditional students to complete their courses faster since more courses could be done within one semester, which was the first theme. The finding also showed that compressed courses provide flexible schedules and help nontraditional students avoid procrastinating, which was the second theme. The second research question was: How do nontraditional students describe the challenges of the compressed courses? The answer was that, according to the participants, it was difficult to obtain the right information within such a short time period, and they could only get the basics, which was the third theme. Furthermore, they indicated that too much information was provided within a short time, resulting in more workload, inadequate time to do schoolwork, and difficulty catching up once they fell behind, which was the fourth theme. The other challenge was that online classes had limited interaction and communication between students and instructors and between students, making group projects difficult to do, which was the fifth theme.

Lastly, the third research question was: What are the perceptions of nontraditional students about the ways to improve the compressed courses to support their path to

graduation? The finding revealed that the participants felt that increasing access to the professor for online classes and creating an environment for student interaction could help improve their compressed courses to support their path to graduation, which was the sixth theme: offering guidance on how to use the website for online students and providing course calendar and syllabi sooner to prepare students, which was the seventh theme; and increasing time for some lessons and decreasing the number of courses, which was the eighth theme. Section 3 contains a discussion of the project.

Section 3: The Project

Introduction

I conducted this study to address the problem of persistently low graduation rates at MCC. Despite the introduction of compressed courses as an intervention at MCC, the expected improvement in completion rates was not realized. To explore ways of enhancing the implementation of compressed courses at MCC, I interviewed 11 nontraditional students. I held individual, semistructured, open-ended interviews both online via Zoom and in person when feasible, forming the basis for this policy recommendations project.

Analysis of the participant responses highlighted the perceived benefits of compressed courses, including faster completion for nontraditional students and flexible schedules to mitigate procrastination. Challenges were also identified, such as the pressure to grasp information quickly and the perception of obtaining only basic knowledge. Participants also noted challenges like information overload, limited interaction in online classes, and difficulties in group projects.

Aligning with the literature findings, properly implementing compressed courses should consider flexibility, acceleration, and accommodation (van Roovem et al., 2021). Given the versatility of compressed course implementation, which allows adaptation to various instructional delivery methods, including synchronous or online formats (Berrios-Barillas & Lemley, 2021), in the proposed policy recommendations I emphasize the importance of creating an environment for student interaction and increasing access to professors for online classes. Additional suggestions involve offering guidance on

website use, providing timely course materials, adjusting lesson durations, and reducing course loads.

In this section, I provide the rationale, literature review, project description, project evaluation plan, and project implications. The discussion of each subtopic contributes to a comprehensive exploration of the proposed policy recommendations project.

Rationale

The project genre that I chose was policy recommendations or position papers. The policy recommendation paper is a genre researchers and scholars use to present data findings and current literature to improve the state of a current and relevant problem (Gaber & Gaber, 2017). Policy recommendations serve as valuable tools for stakeholders, empowering them to tackle previously ineffective or unsuccessful policies from the past and equipping them with the insights to make informed decisions, facilitating the necessary changes for improved outcomes (Gaber & Gaber, 2017).

Considering the data analysis results presented in Section 2, policy recommendations appeared to be the most appropriate genre for this project because the data specifically identified the changes that can be made. The project's content addressed the problem by explicitly highlighting the policy recommendations needed to improve the implementation of compressed courses in MCC, which were suffering from a low success rate. These policy recommendations were based on the findings of this study, which were generated based on the interviews conducted with nontraditional students who were attending compressed courses in MCC. My selection of the policy recommendations

genre was also justified because there was a need to influence the decision-makers within the MCC to adopt or modify policies regarding their existing policies for the implementation of compressed courses for nontraditional students. Finally, policy recommendations were the appropriate genre for this project because the project has implications for positive social change and public welfare, given that the recommendations proposed can contribute to positive outcomes for nontraditional students taking compressed courses in MCC.

Review of Literature

I used various search engines to find relevant literature needed to develop this literature review. Google Scholar was the leading online database used to search for relevant literature. Peer-reviewed journal articles were prioritized to ensure the quality of the literature selected for this project.

The search terms that were used to find relevant literature included the following: policy recommendations, position papers, compressed courses, accelerated curriculum, nontraditional students, and online courses. I combined these terms in isolation to maximize the literature search results. Priority was given to recent peer-reviewed articles (i.e., those published between 2020–2023), but earlier articles were used if no recent literature was found during the search.

The following topics are discussed in this literature review: (a) policy recommendations and policy papers, (b) theoretical foundations of participatory research, (c) transforming education through policies, and (d) improving policies regarding compressed courses. These key topics served as the foundation of this literature review.

Policy Recommendations and Policy Paper

Positive social change is the goal of the policy recommendations project (see Bojtor & Bozsó, 2020; Gulson & Sellar, 2019). In educational settings, positive change through policy recommendations can only be facilitated through evidence-based inquiry (Gulson & Sellar, 2019

I conducted the current project to generate suggestions based on empirical evidence to strengthen and improve the implementation of compressed courses in MCC; therefore, a policy recommendation was the appropriate genre for this project. Policy recommendations are a collection of best practices rooted in empirical evidence that can lead to institutional changes (Bojtor & Bozsó, 2020). For this project, the policy recommendations were based on the findings generated from interviewing nontraditional students and the current literature on implementing compressed courses.

Participatory Research as the Theoretical Basis

The theoretical basis for this policy recommendations project was based on the participatory framework of research. Participatory research is characterized by community engagement to improve a specific problem (Scher et al., 2023; Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). Given that the current project was conducted to generate policy recommendations to strengthen and improve the implementation of compressed courses in MCC, the participatory research framework was the appropriate theoretical basis for this project.

Several characteristics and features are central to the participatory research framework. First, participatory research is a systematic approach wherein direct

collaboration with those affected by a particular problem is studied to facilitate the necessary actions to improve their conditions (Vaughn & Jacquez, 2020). For this study, nontraditional students of compressed courses served as my direct collaborators and the researcher in developing the policy recommendations. Second, participatory research is employed in response to societal changes aiming for greater equality, driven by an improved understanding of existing inequalities (Lennette et al., 2019). Third, the participatory research framework focuses on how traditional practices can be restructured to adapt or augment their benefits (Scher et al., 2023).

The participatory research framework has been used as theoretical justification in various education-related studies to improve existing policies or programs. For instance, Sharpe et al. (2022) employed a participatory research framework as a guiding lens to formulate policy recommendations regarding research involving young people with special educational needs and disabilities. In another research study, Delaney et al. (2022) also utilized the participatory research framework to recommend various strategies to support a mindfulness-informed social and emotional learning program in elementary schools. These research studies highlighted the relevance of the participatory research framework as a lens through which the current policy recommendations project could be developed.

Transforming Education Through Policies

Policies can transform students' educational experiences (Gulson & Sellar, 2019). Through educational policies based on empirical evidence, transformative practices can be facilitated to benefit students (Queiroga et al., 2021). For instance, policies involving

curricular changes can transform students' learning and overall performance (Kandiko-Howson & Kingsbury, 2021). Policies related to online and digital education often serve as the foundation for facilitating transformative changes in the educational landscape (Abad-Segura et al., 2020; García-Morales et al., 2021). These transformative policies were intended to foster sustainability so that educational institutions remained relevant and capable of providing the needs of different learners (Wamsler, 2020). Educational policies alone do not lead to transformative changes in students' learning experiences and teachers' ability to provide effective instruction (Elias & Mansouri, 2023). Effective implementation and delivery were often necessary for educational policies to realize the intended goals or outcomes (Elias & Mansouri, 2023). These educational policies must also be evaluated and reviewed to modify to attain the intended benefits (Llorent-Vaquero et al., 2023).

Improving Policies Regarding Compressed Courses

Even though students recognize the challenges associated with accelerated courses, many believe that the benefits outweigh the cost, which could explain students' enrollment in these curricular formats (van Roovem et al., 2021). However, traditional 16-week, in-person classes have not been shown to produce significantly different results in students' academic success compared to compressed courses (Miller & Bliss, 2023). Divergent views and perceptions exist among students and faculty members about what compressed courses should look like in the classroom, reflecting the continued struggle to implement them to help students with their studies successfully (Holston, 2020).

When compressed courses were implemented effectively, they can benefit nontraditional students in terms of finishing their degree faster and in terms of flexibility (Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021). Nontraditional students particularly benefit from compressed courses because of the flexibility of the curricular structure for these learners (Miller & Bliss, 2023). Compressed courses are versatile because they can be implemented in different iterations, and this flexibility allows for various instructional delivery methods, including synchronous or online formats, to complement the compressed courses approach (Berrios-Barillas & Lemley, 2021).

Compressed courses can also challenge nontraditional students to obtain the correct information quickly and seemingly only get basic knowledge. This was supported by the literature wherein some students believed that traditionally delivered courses afforded them more engagement and depth in their learning than compressed courses (Tiedt et al., 2021). To offset some of the costs and challenges associated with compressed courses, educators needed to make more concerted efforts toward collaboration, discussion, and supportive accommodation of the needs of students (Ho et al., 2021).

Compressed courses can also be challenging to nontraditional students because online classes have limited interaction and communication between students and instructors, making group projects challenging. This was supported by the literature wherein facilitating group projects was identified as a challenging aspect of being part of compressed courses because of time constraints (Bruehler, 2021). Compressed courses ought to center on the student group, fostering dedication from the outset by employing

straightforward design and presentation techniques, integrating scaffolded and well-sequenced assessments, and leveraging learning technologies effectively to motivate students (Samarawickrema & Cleary, 2021).

To improve the implementation of compressed courses, the strategies that have been identified that can be adopted include increasing access to their professors, offering guidance on how to use the website for online students, and providing course calendars and syllabi sooner to prepare students, and increasing time for some lessons and decreasing the number of courses.

Project Description

In this subsection, I present the project description for the proposed policy recommendations for better implementing compressed courses for nontraditional students to enhance their academic success. Included in the discussion are the following topics: (a) needed resources, (b) existing supports, (c) potential barriers, (d) potential solutions to barriers, (e) implementation proposal, and (f) the roles and responsibilities of the administrators.

Needed Resources

The needed resources for the proposed policy recommendations project include the availability and access to student data that facilitate tracking the success of the policy recommendations for this project. These data include baseline information about graduation rates or completion, enrollment numbers, success rates, and demographic data to identify any disparities in access or success rates. Access to current policies and regulations about course delivery is also required for this project. Any existing guidelines

or restrictions that may impact the implementation of compressed courses need to be understood to confirm the viability of the proposed policy recommendations. The cooperation of faculty members who delivered the modified compressed courses curriculum was also vital to facilitate this project's success.

Existing Supports

The existing support that facilitated the success of the proposed policy recommendation project included MCC administrators' cooperation in providing recommendations to improve their ability to provide compressed courses more effectively. More specifically, the MCC administrators allowed me to present my project to the college. The leaders of MCC were also open to me providing support to the faculty in implementing needed changes to help the students succeed.

Based on the study results from nontraditional students who have taken compressed courses, their cooperation in this project was a necessary support. Their recommendations served as the foundation of this project. Additional support from the literature was also used to complement the participants' recommendations.

Potential Barriers

Potential barriers to the project include resistance to change, quality concerns, faculty and student preparedness, resource allocation, and stakeholder communication. Resistance to change can be a barrier because of concerns regarding the potential impact of the proposed policy recommendations on academic rigor, faculty workload, and established institutional norms. A possible barrier could be concerns regarding the quality of the proposed policy recommendations barrier because of concerns about the overall

effectiveness of the educational experience. Faculty and student readiness and preparedness can also be potential barriers if faculty and students do not feel that the proposed policy changes are feasible or beneficial to their academic success. Another barrier could be allocation if insufficient resources are available to facilitate the proposed policy changes in implementing compressed courses in MCC. Finally, stakeholder communication can also be a potential barrier to the success of the policy recommendation project if no efforts are taken to explain the changes needed in providing compressed courses to nontraditional students.

Potential Solutions to Barriers

Implementing a comprehensive change management strategy is a potential solution to the barriers of resistance to change. This comprehensive change management strategy may include providing a clear and coherent explanation regarding why the changes need to occur. This process should involve all the key stakeholders in the decision-making process to have a uniform understanding of the purpose of the policy recommendation changes.

In terms of how the potential barrier of quality concerns can be addressed, one solution is to establish rigorous quality assurance measures. These measures may involve the creation of clear guidelines in the development and delivery of compressed courses or the implementation of peer reviews. Feedback from the participants can also address quality concerns regarding the proposed policy recommendations.

Regarding the potential barrier to faculty and student preparedness, one solution was to provide professional development activities for faculty members to enhance their

ability to deliver compressed courses based on the policy recommendations made through this project. Focusing on students' preparedness, one solution to address this barrier was to provide orientation sessions and resources for students so that a level of familiarity can be achieved with the format changes resulting from the policy recommendations.

In terms of how the potential barrier of resource allocation can be addressed, one solution was to conduct a thorough assessment of resource needs to have a sound strategy for allocating resources efficiently. Securing funding for technology upgrades, additional faculty training for compressed courses, and support staff were possible solutions for potential resource allocation issues. Partnerships or collaborations can also be explored to share resources more efficiently.

The proposed solution was to develop a robust communication plan to address the potential barrier of poor stakeholder communication. All stakeholders should know the policy recommendation project's goals, progress, and evaluation outcomes. Newsletters, workshops, and town hall meetings could be used to ensure that communication was clear and consistent between the different stakeholders.

Implementation Proposal

MCC’s non-instructional week is always held the week before the fall and spring courses start per academic year. This is a time for the faculty and staff to come together for professional development, camaraderie, and time to prepare for the upcoming semester. Usually, two days out of these weeks are set aside for the professional development days. One day is usually geared towards a keynote speaker for the entire

faculty, and the other is utilized to allow our faculty to present to their peers on subjects such as flipped classroom, ChatGPT, and so on.

I have asked and been granted a time slot to present at our MCC Spring non-instructional week. I will present my research findings from my doctoral study project on "*Nontraditional Student Perceptions of the Influence Compressed Courses Have on Their Academic Success*." Based on the results of that study, I will then present the possible changes that might assist students in succeeding in compressed 8-week courses and suggest changes that might aid this improvement. This will hopefully lead to policy recommendations to improve the implementation of compressed courses to enhance the academic success of nontraditional students.

The specific tasks that were conducted in this project were the following: (a) collection of data, (b) presentation of the policy recommendations, (c) training/lecture, (d) implementation, (e) baseline data collection, (f) comparison data collection, and (g) evaluation of the policy recommendations. The timetable for implementing the policy recommendations is presented in the following table (see Table 5).

Table 5

Project Timetable

Task	Estimated Time Frame
Collection of data	1 week
Presentation of the policy recommendations	1 hour
Training/lecture	1 hour
Implementation	One semester
Baseline data collection	before the start of the school year
Comparison data collection	after the end of the school year
Evaluation of the policy recommendations	1 week

The Roles and Responsibilities of University Administrators, Faculty Members, Students, and IT Department

The key stakeholders affected by the change recommendations were the university administrators, faculty members, nontraditional students, and the IT department. The collaboration of these different stakeholders was integral to the project's success. The roles and responsibilities of each of these stakeholders were discussed here.

The roles and responsibilities of school administrators include various vital tasks. School administrators were responsible for ensuring that data were available to evaluate the effectiveness of the policy recommendations. School administrators were responsible for ensuring policy recommendations were implemented correctly. They were also

responsible for communicating the policy changes to the university community, including faculty, staff, and students.

Faculty members' roles and responsibilities ensured the proposed recommendations were implemented correctly. Faculty members were expected to provide feedback on the effectiveness of the compressed course format and be part of the continuous efforts to improve the program. Faculty members were also expected to support nontraditional students by understanding their unique needs and providing the appropriate support.

For students, the roles and responsibilities of the students were confined to ensuring that they understood the latest policy changes that could affect the completion of their respective courses and programs. Existing students may need to transition to the new compressed course structure based on the policy recommendations forwarded through this project. New students must also familiarize themselves with how compressed courses were implemented based on the changes proposed through this policy recommendations project.

Finally, the IT department must ensure the college's technological infrastructure was compatible with the proposed changes in delivering compressed courses. If necessary, the IT department also needs to provide training and support for faculty members and students in using technology relating to compressed courses. Finally, the IT department must ensure that all data remains secure and that technical issues and problems can be resolved.

Project Evaluation Plan

The project evaluation plan that was used was outcome-based by design. The outcome-based evaluation assessed the effectiveness and impact of programs, interventions, or initiatives by examining the observable and measurable outcomes or changes resulting from these efforts (Schalock, 2001). For this policy recommendations project, the outcome that needs to be measured was students' academic success based on the successful completion of compressed courses during an entire school year.

The project evaluation strengthened the policy recommendation content for implementing compressed courses for nontraditional students in MCC. Suppose the evaluation indicates that no effect has been observed in terms of the academic success of students based on the successful completion of compressed courses during an entire school year. In that case, corresponding changes in the policies need to be made. If the evaluation proves to be successful, a periodic reevaluation would be needed to ensure that policies that have been implemented continue to be effective.

The evaluation goals of this policy recommendations project include the following: (a) faculty adherence to the policy recommendations, (b) success rate in terms of completion rate of nontraditional students enrolled in compressed courses, and (c) long-term sustainability of the policy changes that have been made about the delivery of compressed courses. Fulfilling these goals would be instrumental in determining the success of this policy recommendation project.

The project's key stakeholders were school leaders, administrators, curricular designers, faculty members, and students. These stakeholders implement and deliver

policy recommendations about compressed courses. These key stakeholders need to be informed of the evaluation goals of the project so that everybody understands their roles and responsibilities.

Project Implications

This sub-section focuses on the implications of the project. The implications for positive social change were discussed. The implications of the project for the local context, which was MCC, were also discussed. Finally, the implications of the project for the larger context were also discussed.

Implications for Positive Social Change

The implications of the project for positive social change were the enhanced ability of educational institutions to provide educational opportunities for nontraditional students that could lead to faster career advancement, cost-effective use of financial resources, flexibility, accessibility, and accelerated acquisition of skills. When students finish their programs, they were more likely to be exposed to better career opportunities with higher salaries and positions. Consequently, the residents of a specific geographic area were more apt to occupy crucial job positions that might be experiencing a shortage.

Implications to the Local Context

The project was vital to the local context because of benefits such as cost efficiency, access to education, employability and workforce alignment, graduation timeframe, feedback and iterative improvement, and community engagement. These benefits can potentially impact the overall operations of MCC as an educational institution.

The project can be instrumental in offering MCC savings in terms of cost. Cost efficiency can be achieved due to improved insights regarding the optimal tuition fees, resource allocation, and operational costs. When compressed courses were implemented successfully, educational institutions can demonstrate efficient use of their resources without compromising student outcomes in terms of increased course completion rates.

The significance of this project can also be manifested in terms of improved access to education because of better implementation of compressed courses in MCC. The project can improve accessibility for nontraditional students with time constraints or working part-time. The project could contribute to a more diverse student body, reflecting the local community and potentially addressing inclusivity, diversity, and equity issues.

The project also has positive implications for employability and workforce alignment. As a result of the improved implementation of compressed courses, this project can potentially enhance the employability of MCC graduates. In addition, improved graduation timeframe for nontraditional students can be encouraged as a result of this project. The policy recommendations proposed for this project addressed the bottlenecks or challenges that students of MCC were experiencing in completing their studies on time.

The implication of this project to MCC also involved access to quality education. As a result of these policy recommendations proposed in this project, the accelerated pace of the courses ensures that the depth of learning or the acquisition of essential skills was not compromised. The project can improve the educational standards at MCC. Student

support services can also be enhanced because of this project. The issues hindering student success can be addressed due to the recommendations proposed in this project.

The project results have the potential to explore the flexibility and adaptability of the compressed course structure. The policy recommendations would be able to accommodate the diverse needs of MCC students. These include students with part-time jobs, family responsibilities, or other commitments.

Feedback and iterative improvement were other possible implications of this project for MCC. The project can be instrumental in developing a system in MCC that would enable collecting and utilizing feedback from students and faculty regarding implementing compressed courses. This feedback system can be instrumental in continuously improving the policy recommendations proposed in this project.

Finally, the implication of this project to the local setting was enhanced community engagement. MCC plays a role in the local community by providing nontraditional students with the educational requirements to pursue various occupations and jobs. If the policy recommendations for implementing compressed courses were successful, the project can enhance MCC's reputation and contribute to community development by generating a skilled workforce.

Implications to the Larger Context

The overarching implication of this policy recommendations project was to enhance the implementation of compressed courses intended for nontraditional students. However, the implication of this project extends to the larger context of education and workforce development. This policy recommendations project has the potential to

influence the overall educational landscape and address broader issues related to access to education, efficiency in learning, workforce readiness, graduation rates, global competitiveness, and inclusivity.

Access to education was one of the most important implications of this policy recommendations project. These policy recommendations were intended to improve the implementation of compressed courses, which can enhance access to education for diverse individuals, including those who cannot enroll in traditionally structured courses, working professionals, and nontraditional students. As a result, a more inclusive educational environment can be achieved.

Efficiency in learning was another favorable implication of this policy recommendations project. Compressed courses aim to provide a more efficient learning experience, allowing students to complete their education in a shorter timeframe. Even though this learning structure benefits nontraditional students, a successfully implemented compressed course can also benefit educational institutions in accommodating varied schedules and demands.

Workforce readiness was also the anticipated favorable implication of this research project. By improving the implementation of compressed courses, students can finish their courses quicker, giving them an accelerated opportunity to enter the workforce as professionals. Moreover, compressed courses implemented successfully by educational institutions can lead to better alignment of their programs based on the rapidly changing demands of the workforce.

Improved graduation rates also have the potential to have positive implications in the larger educational context. The project's success in improving the implementation of compressed courses may positively impact graduation rates in similar educational institutions wishing to replicate the policy recommendations. A more streamlined and flexible educational approach, such as the availability of a compressed course structure, can facilitate the timely completion of degrees, which can address issues contributing to lower graduation rates.

Global competitiveness was another possible implication of this study to the larger context outside the local target of MCC. A more efficient and adaptable education system, as facilitated by improved compressed courses, can enhance the ability of graduates to be globally competitive in their respective fields of work. Global competitiveness was particularly relevant because skills development and lifelong learning were crucial for success in various professional fields in today’s employment landscape.

Finally, enhanced inclusivity was a possible implication of this project. Providing alternative opportunities for individuals who face challenges in accessing traditionally structured courses can be time-consuming for nontraditional students, which can be a barrier to pursuing higher education. As a result of the proposed improvements brought about by the policy recommendations made in this project, a more inclusive and diverse student population can be encouraged.

Section 4: Reflections and Conclusions

Low graduation rates pose a challenge at MCC and in numerous community colleges and universities. Analyzing MCC data from the 2014–2015 academic year onward revealed graduation rates consistently below the benchmark of 80%. To address this concern, MCC introduced an 8-week compressed course option in the fall of 2018, targeting nontraditional students aged 24 and older who are known for juggling work and family responsibilities.

I conducted this basic qualitative study to delve into students' experiences with the 8-week format and explore their perceptions of its impact on their academic success and graduation. The collected data indicated a preference among nontraditional students for the 8-week compressed format; however, certain adjustments could enhance the student's learning experience. In light of these findings, I developed a PowerPoint presentation for faculty scheduled to be delivered in January during the faculty and staff breakout session preceding the new semester. In the presentation, specific recommendations derived from the identified themes are offered to improve the effectiveness of the 8-week compressed courses.

Project Strengths and Limitations

The 120-minute breakout session that I will present during the noninstructional week at MCC will address the perceptions and needs of the nontraditional student to be successful when taking a compressed 8-week course. Based on the participants' interview responses, it was noted that faculty should understand what works best for nontraditional students and what could be improved. One strength of the project is that faculty attending

my breakout session will better understand student perceptions and needs regarding compressed 8-week courses and some suggestions offered by these participants. This will help those faculty members who teach a compressed 8-week course add or subtract material from the content of the course, which will, in turn, strengthen student learning and academic success. This new insight will help faculty and students towards meaningful social change. After the presentation, there will be time allocated for a question-and-answer session where faculty can discuss and ask questions. A survey will also be given at the end of the presentation to allow faculty to ask additional questions or comment and provide feedback.

One project limitation is that my breakout session during the noninstructional week is only 120 minutes long, and attending faculty might benefit from additional professional development on this topic. Most presentations inspire excitement for change; however, sometimes, it is hard for the participants to remain and stay committed to change after the session, and their real-life workday challenges set in. Another limitation is that not all faculty will attend my session because they will have four other 120-minute session options during the noninstructional week. Additional professional development and training on this project would be advised to achieve continued student success.

Recommendations for Alternative Approaches

An alternative approach to addressing the problem would be to create a learning shell within MCCLearn (an institutional learning portal for employees). Faculty members have many professional development opportunities and require courses that must be completed, such as the Health Insurance Portability and Accountability Act (HIPPA) and

safety training, which, when completed, are recorded, and a certificate is given to the participant. These courses are within MCCLearn, modules based in Canvas, and MCC's LMS. Within this course, participants would have access to the PowerPoint slides, and after each section, a short learning quiz would be completed and would need to be passed with an 80% or better before the participant could proceed to the next lesson. Each quiz would have unlimited attempts. After completing the course, participants could upload and print their certificates and add them to their portfolios for further reclassification. This additional training via MCCLearn could help faculty become more aware of the issues that nontraditional students face and the students' perceptions of the compressed 8-week course format.

The research questions and the themes that emerged in the findings provide an in-depth analysis of the benefits and challenges of compressed courses for nontraditional students. The findings also provide solutions for effectively addressing them. Another way to look at this problem is that the faculty lacks insight into the students' perceptions and does not have the information needed to eliminate the problem. Thus, alternative approaches to address the problem could be additional research, be it qualitative, quantitative, or mixed methods. Additional research could also focus on the views of faculty and administration versus the students' view, using interviews, surveys, or other data collection methods.

Scholarship, Project Development and Evaluation, and Leadership and Change

I have been working towards this degree for several years. I have become more knowledgeable and increased my skills throughout this journey, and I will carry the

skills I developed in my everyday life and academic career. This research has taught me that prior to this study, there had only been minor and sporadic research on the perceptions of nontraditional students and their academic success, whether in compressed courses or not.

Growth of Self as a Scholar

Completing this research study has enlightened me on what it means to become a scholar. The details, participants' equity, and the rules regarding protecting the participants from any risk, whether minor or significant, were eye-opening. I am also a nontraditional student yet researching nontraditional students' perceptions in compressed 8-week courses allowed me to understand different views better.

I knew the difference between qualitative and quantitative research; however, throughout this process, I developed a more in-depth understanding of the concept and chose the correct research method for this study. When I decided to complete interviews with the participants, it took several tries to understand how to create and to ask a semistructured, open-ended question. Through trial and error and practice, I determined the type of questions most suited to this study. I am a very hands-on learner; thus, understanding qualitative research and interview questioning will help me in my career and future life endeavors.

Growth as a Practitioner

Completing this project study has enabled me to grow as a practitioner. I have explored new experiences, such as conducting a project study with participants using a semistructured, open-ended interview process, recording their data, and analyzing it to

develop categories and themes. Conducting this project has expanded my skills, causing me to become more forward-thinking and adding to my administrative responsibilities. I started my teaching career in 1990 after being a healthcare professional for over 13 years. Since then, I have had many roles. First, I became an instructor at a vocational career center, where I developed a new curriculum for a new program. From there, I went to a community college, became a healthcare program instructor and program chair, and developed another new curriculum. I kept the title and position of the program chair and then became the dean of Health Sciences. I have taught or mentored in the above positions, and my patients and students have always been my main focus. As I have grown, I have also learned how to be a leader to my faculty and staff. After completing this study and degree, I am more prepared to continue leading in all capacities, knowing that my support for my faculty, staff, and students will never waiver.

Growth as a Project Developer

As stated above, I have had many roles, and whether officially or not, they have all been leadership roles. The need for improvement for MCC's staff, faculty, and students has always been first and foremost. I am very hands-on and will continue being so through my leadership design. Through conducting this study of nontraditional students' perceptions, I realized that it is not the solution to the problem is not a one-time fix that can just be moved on from it; there needs to be a continual approach taken by all to solve the problem. I also realized that this approach would need to be modified over time. The 120-minute presentation is the first of many ways that MCC can work

toward overcoming low student success rates. MCC also has an annual event held in the spring that encompasses all the many campuses across the state. I plan on submitting a request to present at the statewide conference; however, I must wait until late spring (April) to ask to be a presenter at this conference.

Reflection on the Importance of the Work

The significance of this work transcends academia. In this study, I critiqued the 8-week compressed courses and their effects on nontraditional students' academic achievement: this project combined theory, previous studies, and real-world applications. Carman and Bartsch (2017) and Allen and Voytek (2017) contributed essential research to this effort, which, in turn, serves as a valuable resource for novice researchers. In this study, I found that nontraditional students struggle with workload and time management in compressed courses. I developed the project recommendations to match these challenges; therefore, other educational institutions may consider this demographic's demands and needs when looking to refine their compressed course offerings.

This project study has enlightened me with a new perspective on nontraditional students and their struggles, experiences, and perceptions. The interview responses showed that these nontraditional students want to succeed and better their lives for themselves and their families. However, they face barriers, and it appears that MCC, as an institution, has ways to help decrease those barriers. Everyone wants the same thing: success and fulfillment, and both are within reach for all stakeholders at MCC. I hope the project study is met with excitement from faculty and students because it attempts to increase nontraditional success rates, providing positive social and economic change.

Implications, Applications, and Directions for Future Research

In this project study, I obtained data with which I developed a presentation regarding the perceptions of nontraditional students on compressed 8-week courses and their benefits or challenges. Allowing faculty the opportunity to attend this presentation through professional development will assist them in creating a more nontraditional student-friendly learning environment. This improvement in the delivery of compressed 8-week courses could potentially increase student success. The low success rates of community college students are not just an MCC issue; they are happening across the country at community colleges (Lee & Shapiro, 2023). I intend to start locally with my presentation at MCC before working my way up to the state level and then, if accepted, to present information from this study nationally.

Conclusion

This study reveals the challenges and benefits of nontraditional students in fast-paced learning contexts. The project developed based on the study results emphasizes adaptive learning formats to accommodate the needs of diverse students. In Section 4, I reflected on my journey and discussed the strengths and weaknesses of the project. I also provided alternative approaches and described how I have grown as a scholar, project developer, and leader. This study's importance to social change, the implications of possible applications of the study findings, and directions for future research were also discussed.

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Appendix A: The Project

The project will be presented to faculty members at MCC's non-instructional in January as a 120-minute break-out session.

This is held each year the week before the beginning of the Spring Semester.

TOPIC:

Non-Traditional Student Perceptions of the Influence Compressed Courses Have on Their Academic Success

1:30 - 1:40

- Participant's attendance sign -in sheet—Door of classroom
- Pick up a survey sheet
- Welcome/Introduction to Session

2

Housekeeping

1:40 – 1:45

- Please turn off your cell phones.
- Know that there are no wrong questions or answers.
- This is a safe space.
- Please keep an open mind.

Ice Breaker

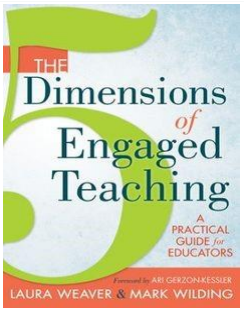
1:45-1:55

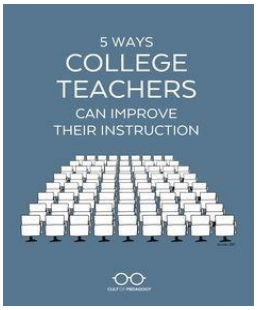
- By a show of hands:
  - *How many of you have taught at least one traditional 16 -week course?*
  - *How many of you have taught at least one compressed 8-week course?*
  - *How many of you have taken a traditional and or compressed course?*
  - *What concerns did you have when you took a compressed course? Discussion*

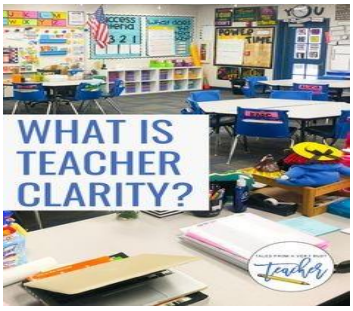
Goals for Today

1:55 -2:00

- Understand the perceptions of our non-traditional students on how compressed courses influence their academic success.
- What might we do and how can we help our students succeed in this modality of the classroom/course?







Student Perceptions (Compressed Course) via Semi-Structured, Open-Ended Interviews---Qualitative Research Themes from Data

2:00 -2:15

Theme	Theme	Theme	Theme
Allows for faster completion	Flexibility/prevents procrastination	Difficult to obtain the right information within a short time, only get the basics	Too much information in short time, more workload, inadequate time for assignments, hard to catch up
Theme	**Theme**	**Theme**	**Theme**
Limited interaction and communications between student and instructor	Need to increase access to the professor and create the environment	Offer guidance on how to use the LMS, provide calendars, and syllabus sooner	Increase time for some lessons and decrease others

6

The facilitator will expand on each theme.

Discussion of Student's Perception Themes

2:15 -2:30

- The facilitator will start the conversation and recap the eight themes on the previous slide
- Participants will be asked to take a few minutes and discuss the themes and their thoughts regarding the themes (depending on the number of participants, they will be paired off in sets of 2 or 4)
    - Discuss their thoughts on given student themes
    - Have they heard any of these thoughts before
    - How might we as faculty help our students succeed and overcome some of the challenges they have voiced?

Short Presentations from Volunteer Groups

2:30 -2:55

- The facilitator will ask for volunteers to share what their group(s) discussed and their thoughts on how or what could be improved
- The facilitator will write down key points on easel paper.
- As thoughts are being introduced, the facilitator will add additional comments from the research data and how others perceived a positive change could be made.

Summary of Presentation

3:00 -3:20

- The facilitator will recap the take -a-ways
- Write down a couple of themes from this exercise

Similar to a Simplex Training Exercise

  - What might we be able to change starting this semester to help our students succeed?

Questions and Answers
Survey

3:20 -3:30

- Please take the time to answer the survey that you picked up on your way in.
- Feel free to leave it on the table, and I will collect them.

Thank you

Christy Ross

Non-Instructional Day

120-Minute Break-Out Session

Christy Ross

Nontraditional Student Perceptions of the Influence Compressed Courses Have on Their Academic Success

Survey

1. Please check the appropriate (box[es], all that apply) below regarding your feelings about nontraditional students and their perceptions of compressed 8-week courses.

- ☐ I agree that we need to understand students' perceptions of Compressed Courses and how they might influence their success.
- ☐ I agree that we must adapt our compressed 8-week courses to aid students' success.
- ☐ I am willing to adapt my compressed 8-week course to aid in students' success.
- ☐ I would be interested in learning more about how to adapt my compressed 8-week course to aid in student's success.
- ☐ I would be interested in more Professional Development opportunities on this subject.
- ☐ I agree that there is a need for resources to support the barriers students face.
- ☐ I would be willing to be on a committee to advocate for change in how compressed 8-week courses are delivered.

2. Please list any comments you have about the presentation.
3. Please list any additional comments you have about Nontraditional Student Perceptions of the Influence Compressed Courses Have on Their Academic Success

Appendix B: Interview Guide/Questions

Title of Project: **Student Experiences of the challenges and strengths of Compressed Courses on Student Success.**

The following demographics were collected: The participant's age (Must be 24 or older to be considered a nontraditional student). The participant must have taken at least one compressed (8-week) course between 2019 and 2022.

To Participants:

Thank you for taking the time to participate in my study. I see that you have signed the consent form, and I am happy to give you a copy of the form if you wish. I want to ask you if I have your permission to record the interview. Would you like to ask me anything before we begin? Any information you share with me will be confidential, and your name will never be used to protect your privacy (Rubin & Rubin, 2012).

Questions:

- Can you tell me a bit about yourself?
- What compelled you to attend MCC?
- Could you tell me about the benefits you see with your compressed courses?
- Could you please tell me about the challenges (if any) you have encountered with 8-week compressed courses?

- Would you tell me about the strengths you feel have come through offering 8-week compressed courses?
- Do you feel that the compressed course has helped you succeed, and if yes, why?
- Now that you have taken compressed courses, what are your perceptions of ways to improve compressed courses to help support graduation goals?
- Do you think you have time to engage with your instructor or classmates in a compressed course? And whatever the answer is, can you explain it, please?
- Is there anything MCC could have done to help you prepare for the 8-week compressed courses?