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Paulette Williams

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Unique Barriers Faced by First-Generation Adult Learners Attending Higher Education Institutions

by

Paulette Williams

MSW, University of Maryland, 2002

BSW, Coppin State University, 2001

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Human Services

Walden University

August 2016

Abstract

There has been an increase in the number of first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions. However, literature has revealed limited information on the experiences of first-generation adult learners and their perception of the barriers they face in higher education. The purpose of this phenomenological study was to examine the experiences of 6first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution and their perception of the barriers they faced. The theoretical foundations were andragogy theory and social-cognitive career theory. Data were collected using purposeful interviews and data were analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis. Five detailed patterns were identified: (a) students experienced specific barriers associated with anxiety and fear; (b) students were able to adapt to change and overcome their barriers; (c) students viewed education as a way out of their present situation and welcomed it as a positive influence; (d) students viewed the barriers as normal life challenges; and (e) the availability of supportive services made a difference in the adult learning environment. Findings from this research will contribute to the knowledge and experiences of first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions and the unique barriers they face. In addition to the development of effective programs designed for first-generation adult learners, administrators, staff, and faculty in higher education institutions can use the data generated from this study to improve overall retention/graduation rates for underserved populations in higher education by identifying any obstacles to success and implementing intervention policies.

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Dedication

This work is dedicated to God and my family. I could not have done this without their support and presence in my life.

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Acknowledgments

I would personally like to thank God first for allowing me the opportunity to complete my dissertation, because without him none of this would be possible. I would also like to thank my family and friends for supporting me through this process. I would like to give a special thanks to my loving husband who stood by me when things got really tough. Lastly, my chair and other academic support at Walden University were vital to this process and without them, I would be lost.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

Adult learners attending higher education institutions face various personal, professional, and academic barriers that impact their ability to matriculate successfully (Spellman, 2007). According to Berkner and Choy (2008), half of students attending higher education institutions in the United States are first-generation students. Despite the obstacles faced by the first-generation adult learner, they continue to enroll in higher education institutions across the nation. In 2007, 38% of the 28 million students enrolled in college were adults 25 years or older (U.S. Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, 2009). The National Center for Education Statistics expects that enrollment data for 2007-2018 will remain steady or increase (Hussar & Bailey, 2009). According to Kasworm (2012), though there are programs created specifically for first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions, this population is confronted with barriers that prevent them from completing their degree.

If first-generation adult learners are unaware of the different programs offered in higher education, they will not receive the assistance they need. Lack of understanding and knowledge of supportive programs in higher education institutions creates other barriers for first-generation students (Winograd& Rust, 2014). There is a need for more supportive programs in higher education that address the needs of first-generation adult learners. The demographics of American institutions continue to change; the academic support programs designed to help students will continue to be confronted with challenges (Collins & Sims, 2006). Millions of adult learners pursue degrees in academic

systems that are designed for traditional students (Turner et al., 2007). Adults are not only returning to college for the purpose of completing a degree but also for professional and self-development (Kasworm, 2012).

Non-traditional students constitute a minority of the student body in most post-secondary institutions, and the fact that these non-traditional students take longer to graduate and have higher drop-out rates creates a gap in matriculation rates between traditional and non-traditional students (United States Department of Education, National Center for Education Statistics, Institute of Education Sciences, 2011). For some students, getting into college can also be very challenging. Financial barriers, gaps in learning, and ambiguous student paths are barriers to accessing higher education (Ritt, 2008). Adult learners who are first-generation students might be at risk of failure when attending colleges or universities. Adult students present with moderate to high risk factors that include: first-generation status, employed part time, and single parents (Pusser et al., 2007). First-generation adult learners are not always prepared academically for college. According to Stebleton and Soria (2012), first-generation students lack adequate study skills.

Studies that focus on the barriers that first-generation adult learners experience in higher education institutions and how they overcome them is limited. There is a need for more research focused on the experiences of underrepresented populations attending higher education institutions; their use of supportive programs, and determination to complete their academic goals (Winograd& Rust, 2014). The present study explored the

impact of personal, professional, and institutional barriers on first-generation adult learners in higher education and the supportive programs available to them.

Background of Study

First-generation adult learners are classified as non-traditional students attending colleges and universities. Non-traditional students are usually older, employed full/part-time, have less experience in higher education, and lack confidence related to completing their academic goals (Monroe, 2006). The research either concentrates exclusively on adult learners or first-generation students, whereas there is less known about adult learners who are also first-generation college students (Giancola, Munz, &Trares, 2008). First-generation adult learners face similar challenges when deciding to attend a college or universities, but they have different academic backgrounds. Even though adult learners might have some general knowledge about college, first-generation students might need more reassurance (Smith & Miller, 2009). First-generation students often find themselves breaking inter-generational cycles in their families related to education and economic status impacting the quality of their life and those coming behind them. It is not uncommon for first-generation adult learners to come from low-income families (Engle and Tinto, 2008). For low-income students, overcoming negative attitudes from their family members about education are key factors; First-generation students from low-families who achieve their academic goals have succeeded in spite of their economic challenges (Seay, Lifton, Wuensch, Bradshaw, &McDowelle, 2014).

The experiences of adult learners who are first-generation students in higher education institutions have not been well documented in the literature. The current research study provides a deeper insight into the experiences of adult learners who are first-generation students, and the barriers they face. The andragogy and social-cognitive career theoretical models will provide a better understanding of the experiences of adult learners who are first-generation college students. Malcom Knowles developed the andragogy theory in the 1970s which focused on the unique needs of adult learners (Chan, 2010). The two models will be detailed later in this chapter and in Chapter 2.

Statement of the Problem

There has been an increase in the number of first-generation students attending higher education institutions; they make up 24% of the student population in postsecondary instutions (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In addition, adult learners make up 44% of students in the United States colleges and universities (Kazis et al., 2007). Yet, there is a lack of knowledge related to how adult learners who are first-generation students overcome challenges while attending a college or university. First-generation students have been the focus of an increasing body of research due to the increasing number of students in this population attending higher education institutions (Gofen, 2009). The problem is related to the personal, professional, and institutional barriers experienced by first-generation students who are adult learners attending higher education institutions.

Decades ago, first-generation students included European male descendants from a middle-class family (Merritt, 2008), but these demographics have changed. There has

also been an increase in the number of women returning to college. Women have become the largest percentage of students attending colleges and universities in the United States (Gatua, 2014). According to Davis and McSwain (2007), 64% of first-generation students are women and fall under the working poor status and 60% of first-generation adult female students have children. The ethnicity breakdown of adult learners who are first-generation students include: Caucasions (69%), African Americans (22.7%), Hispanic (3.3%), other (2.6%), and Asian/Pacific Islanders (2.4%; Pusser et al., 2007).

The process involved in returning to school for adult learners is not as simple as it is for traditional students; adult learners must consider how it will impact their life (Adams & Corbett, 2010). These learners juggle a full-time job, childcare, and other responsibilities outside the academic setting (Carriero & Kapitulik, 2010). Social scientists have used the achievement of education, which is often repeated in families, as something that represents an individual's socio-economic status (Rondini, 2009). First-generation adult learners are motivated to return to college for various reasons. For working adults, attending a higher education institution can be compared to professional advancement and improving their overall living conditions (Seay, 2011).

While reviewing the literature, I identified a gap surrounding how first-generation adult learners overcome obstacles related to degree attainment. First-generation adult learners continue to enroll in higher education institutions for different reasons in spite of the barriers they encounter. When institutions become aware of the barriers faced by non-traditional students, it is vital that they pay attention to the obstacles because they

ultimatelty prevent them from completing their degrees (Hardin, 2008). However, the literature demonstrates the need for higher education institutions to offer various supportive services that address the needs of first-generation adult learners. This study was desgined to add to the existing knowledge by exploring the experiences of first-generation adult learners in higher education and the barriers they face and assist higher education institutions and administrators develop effective supportive services, thus improving the graduation and retention rates for underserved populations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to explore and identify, through the collection of data from the participants, their view of the barriers they face while attending higher education institutions.This study addresssed an under-represented population in higher education. By means of the andragogy theory and social cognitive career theory, this study focused on the barriers first-generation adult learners face when attending higher education institutions (Isamil, 2011). According to Kasworm (2014), adult learners fall in the high-risk category and experience problems finishing their degrees.

In-depth interviews were used to depict the the barriers expereinced by first-generation adult learners in higher education. The study provides an innate understanding of combined experiences of first-generation adult learners in higher education. Through this knowledge, higher education institutions will have a better understanding of how to address personal, professional, and institutional barriers that

have an impact on graduation and retention rates and also help them better understand the needs of first-generation adult learners.

Research Questions

In order to better understand how adults who are first-generation students comprehend the barriers they face in higher education institutions, the following research questions were used to guide this phenomenological study:

1. What barriers do first-generation adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?

2. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?

3. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?

4. What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners?

Theoretical Framework

The two primary theories related to first-generation and adult learners—Malcome Knowles (1978) theory of adult learning and the social cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994, 2004)—will serve as the foundation for this study.

Knowles's Model

Knowles's andragogy theory (1978) refers to andragogy as the skill of helping adults learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005). Andragogy is focused more on adult learning, in comparison to pedagogy that is concerned more with the instructor (Yoshimoto, Inenaga, & Yamada, 2007). The andragogy learning theory provides some understanding of the barriers faced by adult learners in higher education. The impact that the andragogy theory has on adult learning in higher education has been well documented.

Social Cognitive Career Model

The social-cognitive career theory (Lent et al., 1994, 2004) is built on Bandura's (1986) social-cognitive theory. The theory suggest that a student's circumstances might be a predictor of their learning experiences (Garriott et al., 2013).The social-cognitive theory has been applied and used when working with underrepresented populations in academia settings. The social-cognitive theory is appropriate when discussing first-generation college students because it correlates with professional and scholastic interests while incorporating their background (Gibbons & Borders, 2010). When first-generation students have positive experiences in college, they are more likely to persevere. A first-generation student's social class and lack of exposure to people who have been to college might be related to the quality of their academic experience (Bloom, 2007; Engle & Tinto, 2008). The social-cognitive theory will shed some light on the perceived barriers faced by first-generation students in colleges and universities. There is a wide-range of

literature that concentrates on how first-generation students enter college, but not enough on their post-college experiences (Olson, 2014).

This research is directly related to academic, professional, and institutional barriers faced by first-generation adult learners in higher education. The andragogy and social-cognitive career theories connect with the research questions by identifying how first-generation adult students approach learning. Knowles's (1978) andragogy have made significant contributions to the understanding of adult learners, while Lent et., al (1994; 2000) social-career learning theory contributed to the development of self-efficacy among first-generation students. As colleges and universities prepare for the increase of diverse student populations and develop programs to meet the needs of first-generation adult students, it is very important to examine the barriers they might face.

The literature review in Chapter 2 highlights other studies focused on the unique barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and how they impact their ability to succeed. The phenomenological method was used to investigate the problem and its' relationship to the adult learning and social cognitive career theories.

Nature of the Study

Phenomenology attempts to define and reveal compositions and the underlying meanings of lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990). Through using Husserl's (2012) interpretive phenomenological approach, this study will examine the academic and personal barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending higher

education institutions. The interpretative phenomenological approach (IPA) takes on a philosophical style when studying experiences; it is dedicated to exploring how individuals make sense of major life experiences that are important to them (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This approach can provide a broader depiction of what barriers are faced by first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions. IPA was chosen because it provides a way for first-generation adult learners to share their experiences with the barriers they face when attending higher education institutions.

Quantitative designs rely on various testing methods. Howerver, such designs would not provide in-depth insight into the participants' experiences. In contrast, the goal of qualitative studies is to understand participants' experiences and views of a specific phenomenon (Maxwell, 2013). Through investigation of the experiencs of first-generation adult learners and the barriers they face in higher education institutions, this study provides a deeper insight into the phenomenon.

The theoretical frameworks for this study will be Knowles' (1970) theory of andragogy, and Lent, Brown , and Hackett (2000) social-career cognitive theory. This study will focus on first-generation adult learners who experience barriers while attending higher education institutions. The literature review for the study identified a gap in the current studies on first-generation adult learners facing academic, personal, and institutional barriers in colleges and universities. The participants for the study were selected from a non-traditional college located in Baltimore City.

Data Collection

Data was collected through two unstructured in-depth interviews of first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution and the final interview for the purpose of validation. The interviews were conducted one-on-one in an office identified by the college and ranged from 45 minutes to an hour and were also digitally recorded. An interview guide was used to introduce the questions in addition to the creation of a matrix during the interview process. Interviewees consisted of a pool of six first-generation adult learners ages 18 and older that attended Sojourner-Douglass College within the past 5 years. The participants were identified by college administrators and faculty based on their status as a former student.

I scheduled a meeting with selected first-generation adult learners to discuss the current study and they received a copy of the letter describing the study. Students who were interested in the study were asked to contact the researcher. During the first interview each participant was asked questions that eventually lead to a second interview that was scheduled before the participant left. The second interview was scheduled one week later and the audio tapes were transcribed and analyzed one week after the first interview. Participants included both male and female students who met the criteria of the study; ethnicity was not a factor.

Definition of Terms

*Adult Learner:*Adult learners are individuals ages 18 and older, employed full/part time, and have been away from a higher institution setting more than two years;

they also have unique life experiences that affect the way they learn and process their library and research needs (Isamil, 2011).

Andragogy: Technique typically focused on pertinent information and skills for the adult learner (Yoshimoto et al., 2007).

Breakthrough phenomenon: Individuals who-complete their degree that have parents that did not attend a college or university. These students break academic intergenerational cycles (Gofen, 2009).

Completion rate: The percentage of students attending higher education institutions that actually complete a degree in comparison to the total of students entering the college or university (Minnick et al., 2013). The U.S. Census Bureau population survey (2010) reported the following graduation rate at a population of 41,085 adult students between years 25-34 years: 19.4 graduates per 24% obtained a Bachelors' degree at the national level.

First-generation students: First-generation students are students that reach higher education status who have parents that did not (Gofen, 2009).

Institutional barriers: Restraints that the student or adult educator does not have control over (Ritt, 2008).

Low-income students (may be classified as a first-generation or adult student):Students with an annual income of $25,000 or less; determined by the higher education institution (Seay, 2011).

Non-traditional students: A student who is age 18 or older, works full time, has family responsibilities, and possesses more financial constraints (Milheim&Bischel, 2007).

Pedagogy: Technique typically focused on socialization rather than comprehension for younger students in higher education (Yoshimoto et al., 2007).

Personal barriers: May include the student's environment, family responsibilities, prior exposure to higher education, lack of daycare, limited finances, and in some case anxieties associated with returning to school (Ritt, 2008).

Professional barriers: Usually found on the job; student may not be able to attend school based on work schedule or lack of tuition reimbursement incentives (Ritt, 2008).

Assumptions, Limitations, Scope, and Delimitations

Assumptions

The adult learning theory was previously used to assess adult learners mostly between the ages of 25 to 50 years old (Ting, 2007). This study assumes that the adult learning and social cognitive career theories is relevant for students 18 years old and older. These theories have been used for many years when discussing adult learners. It was assumed that first-generation adult learners would be receptive to the interview and answer the questions honestly. I collected specific demographic information related to the participants' age, gender, race, and major of study from the participants for verification of their statements. I did not expect any direct harm to the participants from the study questions and did not anticipate any harm that might impact participant's life in any way.

I also assumed that the participants identified by college administrators would be honest about describing their status as first-generation adult learners.

Delimitations

This study was restricted to interviewing first-generation adult learners in a higher education institution who have experienced any personal, professional, or institutional barriers. This study was also limited to a population of students who have attended Sojourner-Douglass College within the past five years. First-generation adult learners in this study are students who are 18 years and older who have parents that did not attend college. This also means that the students might need access to supportive services.

Limitations

There are limitations in every study and they help to identify any possible threats the lived experiences of first-generation adult learners regarding the barriers they face while attending higher education institutions. The results of this study will only be used specifically to explain the barriers faced by the students participating in this study and cannot be generalized to other larger populations. Locating these students was coordinated through administrators and other staff at the institution.

The results of this study were limited to students at this urban non-traditional college. Other higher education institutions were not within the scope of this study. Sojourner-Douglass College is a private institution that is located in the urban community and serves a predominately African American population. Phenomenological inquiry will not provide the quantitative data that previous studies on first-generation adult learners

have generated. Quantitative studies are able to focus on the relationship between specific barriers faced by first-generation adult learners and resources available in higher education institutions. Findings from this study were limited to interpretation, rather than quantitative analysis.

Significance of the Study

The current study examined the unique barriers faced by first-generation adult learners, how they were able to overcome them and whether or not they had an impact on graduation and retention rates among non-traditional students. This study provided some insight into the students' perceptions of the academic and personal barriers they encountered and the impact they had on their ability to complete their academic goals. Understanding and awareness of obstacles faced by first-generation adult learners is significant for social change across higher education institutions in the United States. Though education for adults was well known throughout England in the 18th and 19th century for the elite, there were no efforts to educate working-class adults until the industrial revolution (Shannon, 2009). The goal was to provide underserved populations with the same benefits of education. Higher education institutions play a vital role in educating and preparing underserved and working class populations for the labor force (Shannon, 2009). Colleges and universities continue to educate first-generation adult learners, but these institutions struggle with understanding the barriers first-generation adult learners face. This study will provide information on how to better serve the non-traditional students.

The positive social change implications for the study include knowledge useful for administrators, educators, policy makers, and other researchers looking for ways to improve supportive programs for underserved populations. The potential effects of programs will improve overall retention and attrition rates for first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. First-generation adult learners are confronted with financial and college admission barriers when deciding to attend a higher education institution. When colleges and universities have an awareness of the challenges faced by first-generation adult learners, they can better serve them. "Understanding the issues that affect accessibility, and the factors that play into affordability, is instrumental in helping first-generation adult learners begin their higher education experience" (Ritt, 2008, p. 25). With the increase in first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions, researchers have not examined the experiences of first-generation adult learners.

A study that addresses and describes the personal, professional, and institutional barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions is important for several reasons. First, there is not enough information known about the experiences of the first-generation adult learner population and how they are breaking generational cycles. Second, it is not very clear how personal, professional, and institutional barriers unique to first-generation adult learners impact their ability to successfully obtain a degree. Finally, this study will add to the current literature and increase awareness of the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners. The results of

this study will also provide insight for developing supportive programs for first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions.

Summary of Chapter 1

The study concentrated on first-generation adult learners (18 years and older) who attended a higher education institution. Chapter 1 provides an outline for the qualitative research study. As the number of first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions continues to increase, colleges and universities will face the challenges related to meeting the needs of this population. Unique barriers that first-generation adult students encounter are related to personal, professional, and institutional obstacles they face while in higher education. Many of them are breaking academic intergenerational cycles that do not come easy; they are not always prepared to take on the rigorous schedules or the additional responsibilities required by higher education institutions.

Researchers have discovered that the adult learner's environmental, personal, and life situations might advance or block their learning (Tomlin & Blakely, 2008; Giancola et al., 2008).The proposed study uncovered the experiences that first-generation adult learners have when attending higher education institutions and the barriers they face. The study also provides awareness to higher education institutions regarding the need for programs that will assist underserved populations. Chapter 2 includes a review of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 incorporates a depiction of the study, participants,

procedures, and assessments along with an explanation of how the data collected was evaluated.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

As mentioned above, there is an ongoing problem related to barriers faced by first-generation adult learners and the lack of supportive services available to them at higher education institutions. This literature review ascertains the need for continuous research regarding the obstacles that first-generation adult learners encounter when attending higher education institutions. There are more adult students entering and returning to college (Minnick et al., 2013. For most of these students, obtaining a degree

creates opportunities for upward social mobility. For example, an individual that earns a degree is afforded professional opportunities and can participate in different arenas at the political and leadership level (Ritt, 2008). With the increase in the numbers of diverse learners attending college, higher education institutions are pursuing programs that address their needs. This method of intervention for first-generation adult learners may improve attrition and retention rates for these students.

There is limited research related to how colleges and universities predict degree completion rates for adult students (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014). If institutions are going to be prepared for more diverse populations, there needs to be more studies that can bring awareness into problems faced at the institutional level. A national survey of 77 public and private institutions reported that 43% of higher education institutions do not collect data on retention rates, and 77% are unaware of completion rates for non-traditional students in higher education (Fong, et. al., 2012). Even though it appears that there is some general understanding of personal, professional, and academic features for non-traditional students, little is known about how higher education institutions might react to the unique needs of these populations (Giancola et al., 2008).

In order to understand the specific needs of diverse populations, administrators, faculty, and staff in higher education institutions need to have a clear understanding of the barriers they face. First-generation adult learners face many different challenges when attending higher education that are related to personal, professional, and institutional barriers (Lightweis, 2014). Adult learners present with a variety of different learning

styles, prior life experiences, and views that have the potential to impact future success in the higher education setting (Kenner &Weinerman, 2011). When compared to non-first-generation students, first-generation learners possess added characteristics that become burdens when pursuing their degree (Stebleton& Soria, 2012). First-generation students are usually not prepared academically and usually have to work full-time to pay for tuition and other living expenses (Jehangir, 2010). The increase of diverse populations in higher education institutions has also brought awareness to policymakers and leaders in higher education related to barriers faced by these students.

Research Strategy

The focus of this literature review is to assess the unique barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions by exploring the content of other research in relation to the research topic. This chapter provides a detailed discussion on the following: andragogy theory, social-cognitive career theory, demographics, and barriers, (first-generation adult students) degree completion challenges in higher education, engaging the adult learner, breaking intergenerational cycles, and the need for supportive programs in higher education institutions. In the first section of the review, student demographics and specific barriers are discussed in order to have a better understanding of the obstacles that are common among this population.

The second section involves a review of the transition process for non-traditional students in higher education with a focus on degree completion rates. The segment on challenges of higher education institutions concludes with a discussion of the literature

related to academic barriers faced by first-generation adult learners and how to engage this population in the classroom. An important concern that surrounds higher education institutions servicing first-generation adult learners is how they cultivate programs that address the needs of diverse populations. Nationwide, colleges and universities are developing and restoring programs to serve diverse populations with the goal of increasing degree completion among these students (Horwedel, 2008).

Finally, the chapter concludes with a discussion on the need for supportive programs at higher education institutions for non-traditional students who experience barriers. On-line courses and other supportive programs have been used to accommodate adult learners' busy schedules. According to Kasworm (2012), the improvement in e-learning academic programs and conventional programs for adults has improved admission and involvement for adult learners.

Literature research was conducted digitally using on line data-bases from the following sources: Sage Premiere, ERIC, Soc-Index, and Ebscot. They all provided information for this literature search on the first-generation adult population attending higher education institutions. The terms used were *first-generation students, adult students, college preparations, barriers, higher education, andragogy intergenerational issues, family relations, and higher education*. The Walden online library provided many of the needed articles for this review. In addition to the resources, the University of Maryland Library provided books and journal articles used for this review that were not

found online. These sources provided an overview of research related to barriers faced by first-generation adult learners.

Review of Literature

The following literature review provides insight into the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners and whether or not higher education institutions are prepared to accommodate them. Higher education institutions are incorporating various strategies to address the needs of non-traditional students. According to Sandman (2010), the expansion of e-learning in higher education has been adopted by colleges and universities that wish to improve new outreach strategies for non-traditional students. Allen and Seaman (2013) concur after evaluating their results from a 2010 national survey of online non-traditional students; they found that 66% of higher education institutions reported that students were in favor of new courses and programs, and 73% desired online courses and programs. Understanding the impact of barriers faced by first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions is a very important factor to consider when providing services for them

Andragogy and Social-Cognitive Career Theory

The purpose of this study is to assess and understand the impact of barriers faced by adult learners who are also first-generation students attending colleges and universities. The andragogy and social-cognitive career theories guided this study and will define the different conceptions that will be used in this research. According to Chinn and Kramer (2008), a theory is an innovative and rigorous configuration of ideas

that develops a purposeful and organized view of facts. The andragogy and social-cognitive theories might provide some insight into the impact of various academic and personal barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions. Higher education institutions can also benefit from building relationships with policymakers, employers, and leaders in the workforce that will bring awareness and help in mitigating the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners (Ritt, 2008). The purpose of this study is to describe the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners in higher education and how the barriers impact their ability to complete their academic goals. The study also focused on the need and development of supportive programs in higher education institutions.

Andragogy Theory

In the adult education arena, andragogy is a very popular theory (Halx, 2010). In 1968, Malcom Knowles identified four important factors related to understanding and providing services to the adult learner and later added two more (Hansman& Mott, 2010; Merriam, Caffarella& Baumgartner, 2007; Wlodkowski, 2008). According to Knowles, Holton, and Swanson (2012), the six standards of andragogy include the students' (1) need to understand, (2) self-concept, (3) previous learning experience, (4) willingness (5) enthusiasm, and (6) need to be invested in the learning process. Essential to this theory is how adults receive and process knowledge (Gravani, 2012). Korr, Derwin, Green, and Sokoloff (2012) summarized the Knowles theory and concluded that the theory emphasized that adult students relate to their educational experiences through the

following assumptions: adult learners center new things against their past before they can form new schematics, separate their learning from the outside world, and prefer constructive feedback in place of a grade. When higher education institutions provide training environments for non-traditional students they focus on how they process information (Yuan, Powell, &Cetis, 2013).

Adult learners possess personal strengths and face barriers, which makes them different from the traditional college student (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). According to Knowles (1990), adults enter college with a desire to learn those things they absolutely need to know and are focused on their life experiences, not so much on the subject matter. Even though adult learners present with some strengths, they also experience obstacles to learning new things. Many adult learners return to college with a great deal of life experience but a lack academic skills (Kenner &Weinerman, 2011; Zacharakis, Steichen, Diaz, de Sabates& Glass, 2011), which might create some apprehensions related to their ability to succeed (Jameson & Fusco, 2014). When students have been out of school for a length of time, they often find themselves enrolling in basic math and reading-skill courses as a refresher. For some students, math is a subject that can bring on anxieties and cause them to feel inadequate and may be more challenging for adult learners. According to Coffey (2011), math skills are very important to an individual's professional as well as personal life; most people do not like math and try to avoid it (Jameson, & Fusco, 2014). Adult learners might experience stereotypes related to their age, and lack confidence in their math skills (Hollis-Sawyer, 2011).

Jameson and Fusco (2014) completed a quantitative study that assessed math anxiety, perception, and self-efficacy among traditional and non-traditional students. The study included 226 undergraduate students from an average-size institution in the United States. The participants included 60 traditional students and 166 adult learners. The participants were from different general education courses over a 2-week period. The results revealed that adult learners reported decreased levels of self-efficacy and increased levels of anxieties related to math when compared to traditional students. The results also revealed that the negative self-perceptions experienced by adult learners may present obstacles to learning. Prior research has suggested that negative self-perceptions correlate with student retention and degree attainment rates for adults (Kazis et al., 2007; Lim, 2001).

In another quantitative study, Minnick et al., (2013) assessed Praxis testing scores of adult learners enrolled in colleges and universities in comparison to traditional students. The data was collected from Elementary Education majors over a year. The participants included 53 traditional students and 74 adult learners. The traditional students were placed in the control group, while the adult learners were labeled as the experimental group. The results revealed that 96% of traditional students scored higher on the Praxis than adult learners. The researchers also recommended remedial courses and seminars for adult learners to assist them in addressing test anxieties.

Higher education institutions are charged with teaching the necessary information and competencies to students that will help them to accomplish their lifetime goals

(Harper & Ross, 2011). The andragogy theory supports the notion that adults pursue their own way of learning and utilize acquired knowledge as a way to help them overcome obstacles they face (McGlone, n.d.). Halx (2010) contends that some researchers defend the use of andragogy techniques by suggesting that it should only be used for adults who are invested in their education. The andragogy theory continues to be useful in educating and training adults in various settings. Adult learners have the benefit of knowledge that they have acquired through life experiences and can apply in the classroom (Marschall& Davis, 2012). The techniques used in the classroom can make a difference in how adults practice what they learn.

The University of Georgia, School of Social Work illustrated how the andragogy model was incorporated in the development of their program. They used a bell-like structure to show how the courses were designed to take students from a pedagogical approach to an andragogy method as they matriculated through the program. The pedagogical approach is one that has been applied to helping children learn (Merriam et al., 2007). By the time the students reached their junior and senior years, they were expected to take control of their learning experience. For example, an elective seminar course for MSW students was selected as an experiment in andragogy learning; the students were able to work in small groups and take control of their learning through designing and critiquing the content of the seminar and grading format. The results of the experiment revealed that the students were able to learn from each other, and showed a

great deal of enthusiasm and commitment to their learning beyond the classroom setting (Knowles, 1984).

More specifically, by incorporating the andragogy theory in adult learning environments, this approach may add to the development of programs for diverse populations within higher education settings, heighten awareness of different learning styles of adult learners, and decrease academic barriers for first-generation adult learners. The andragogy theory is related to the research questions that will guide the study because it provides a rationale for how participants identify with the information they learn in higher education institutions.

Social-Cognitive Career Theory

Knowles's (1970) andragogy theory, however, did not specifically address first-generation students in higher education and the impact barriers have on them. Lent, Brown, and Hackett (1994, 2000) presented the social-cognitive career theory to further expand on the barriers faced by first-generation students. This theory takes into account the impact self-efficacy and self-perception have on the first-generation adult learners' ability to complete their degree. According to Majer (2009), self-efficacy is very important among first-generation students. First-generation students often reflect on their academic abilities related to career and academic achievements. Even though first-generation students deal with obstacles when they first present to college, they might not see themselves thriving the way they would want to (Olson, 2014). The social-cognitive career theory has been applied in empirical research with first-generation students (Olson,

2013); the performance and variation of first-generation students (Gibbons & Borders, 2010); and the success of first-generation students who are sophomores (Vuong et al., 2010).

Gaining access and achieving academic goals well after high school is linked to employment (US Census Bureau, 2013) and emotional wellness (Erford& Crockett, 2012; Ojeda, Flores, & Navarro, 2011; Zunker, 2008). The social-cognitive career theory provides an outline for understanding internal and external factors that impact an individual's professional development (Tate et al., 2015). According to Owens et.al., (2010) African American men first-generation students face obstacles related to career development that include isolation from their counterparts and the college they attend; they also experience lack of support from their family. Parks-Yancey (2012) completed a qualitative study about career advancement of first-generation African American students. The participants included 236 African American first-generation students; they found that African Americans perceived fewer options after college.

In a study by Wang and Sound (2008) studied the effect of self-esteem, academic-self-efficacy, social support, and the individual's generational status. They examined the welfare of 367 undergraduate college students at a college located on the West-coast and found that first-generation students showed decreased levels of self-efficacy when compared to non-first-generation students. The results from this quantitative study also revealed that the participant's generational status control the connection between anxiety and perceived support received from family. Other researchers (Trenor, Yu, Waight,

Zerda, & Sha, 2008) examined the connection of culture to female students and how they perceived their knowledge of engineering in a mixed method study. They also examined the reasons why the participants chose the engineer program as well as their perseverance. There were 160 female participants from three colleges at the University of Houston: Engineering, Education, and Technology. This study was different from prior studies because the participants were all female students from a very diverse higher education institution; not one specific ethnic group represents the majority (US News and World Report, 2007). The researchers utilized the social cognitive-career theory grounded in Bandura's (1986) work. The study revealed that the participants from various ethnic backgrounds perceived robust support from the college and their counterparts. The researchers also found that other differences in the student's perceptions of obstacles related to achieving their engineering academic and career goals were centered on their parents' level of education and their cultural background.

Colleges and universities are trying to meet the needs of first-generation adult learners and recognize the need to change teaching methods. According to Halx (2010), conventional pedagogy no longer works and should be updated to modern-day techniques related to adult learners in order to prepare them for the world. Integrating the andragogy and social-cognitive theories into higher education institutions is an interesting topic and has been very popular among adult educators.

Demographics: First-Generation Adult Learners

Prior research has documented the changing demographics of students attending higher education institutions; the number of first-generation students and adults attending colleges and universities is expected to increase (Giancola, Munz, &Trares, 2008). There has always been an interest in adults in higher education, and past studies have discussed the reasons why these students decide to return to school. According to Giancola et al. (2008), there has been a surge in non-traditional students. About one-third of all college students are freshmen (Stuber, 2011), and of those freshmen who entered college in a given year, less than three-quarters of them return for their second year (Stebleton& Soria, 2012; Stuber, 2011).

First-generation adult learners represent different genders, ethnicities, and socioeconomic classes. Minority students continue to enroll in college but have not caught up with their White peers. African American, Hispanic, and Native American first-generation students are registering in higher education institutions at rates lower than White students (McCoy, 2014). Even though there has been an increase in first-generation Latino students enrolling in higher education institutions (Saenz, Hurtado, Barrera, Wolf, & Yeung, 2007), they only achieved 5.9% of the 625,023 masters degrees that were given in the United States for the academic year 2007-2008 (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). For some minorities, family views on education have a direct impact on their attitudes toward higher education. There are various obstacles to education for Hispanic students that impact their decision to enroll in college such as: language barriers, no prior college experience, and low family income. Ceja and Shoret (2008)

revealed that even though Hispanics encourage their children to attend college and create a better life, in many situations they have the willpower but they have a negative attitude about borrowing money to pay for college. With the surge in diverse student populations, demographic backgrounds not only play an important role in who these students are but also how their societal views affect their experiences in colleges and universities (Coll&Draves, 2008).

Barriers: First-Generation Adult Students

Barriers experienced by students attending higher education institutions cross all socioeconomic, age, and ethnic backgrounds; these barriers do not discriminate. Though there is limited research on White working-class students, research has shown that they also face academic and social obstacles (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011; Thering, 2011). However, the barriers faced by White working-class students are often overlooked in higher education due to their status. According to Stuber (2011), White working-class students usually drop below the college's radar because they are usually described as the "racial majority and socioeconomic minority" (p. 120).

Regardless of the ethnic background for underrepresented students, families are encouraging their children to go to college to meet the demands of a changing society. Obtaining a post-secondary education is vital for the future of the world's economy and most parents view it as a way to improve the quality of life for their children (Kirshner, Gerardo, & Tracy, 2011). Some families set educational goals for their children when they are very young, and they are expected to carry them out. For middle-class

Americans, obtaining a college degree represents independence and the higher education experience is perceived as something that comes naturally (Stephens, Fryberg, Markus, & Johnson, 2012). Although college can be a change of life for some people, it does not offer equal opportunities for all people. Due to various reasons ranging from the high cost of college to attending inadequate public schools, college is not an immediate goal for minority students (Kirshner et al., 2011).

Obstacles that make it difficult for adult learners when returning to college may be personal, professional, and institutional; most students are faced with at least one of these barriers (Ritt, 2008). Barriers that adult learners face can range from inadequate finances to issues surrounding single parenting (Deggs, 2011). Similarly, a large number of first-generation students also face various challenges, from low socio-economic families (Blackwell &Pinder, 2014). Economic barriers are real for most students; fear of debt deters students from economically challenged backgrounds (Altback et al., 2009).

Many first-generation students come from low income households (Engle & Tinto, 2008). In comparison to their peers, motivating factors for first-generation adult learners in higher education are key to degree completion. Much like first-generation students, adult learners often decide to attend college with dreams of enhancing their careers. According to Seay (2011), adult learners that fall in a low-income status are motivated to enroll in college in order to improve their financial condition. The obstacles that first-generation students encounter are significant to their ability to accomplish their academic goals; motivating them to dedicate more time to study can be problematic

(Petty, 2008). When first-generation adult learners are confronted with various barriers while in college, they have to find a way to manage their personal lives as well as their professional lives.

Prospero and Vohra-Gupta (2007) conducted a quantitative study that examined 277 first-generation students' personal and academic responsibilities. The results were consistent with prior research that indicated first-generation students spend longer hours at work and are at risk of dropping out of college in comparison to their peers. Many of these students are committed to achieving their academic goals, but find it difficult to focus on their studies when they have additional problems. Adult work settings, personal, and life experiences might present obstacles for learning (Blakely & Tomlin, 2008; Giancola, Grawitch, &Borchert, 2009). When first-generation adult students are faced with barriers that force them to make a decision between their personal responsibilities and attending college, education usually takes second place. Adults attending higher education institutions find that their personal lives impact accessibility and their level of involvement with their academic goals (Kasworm, 2014).

Barriers in Higher Education

Research related to college options imply that decisions regarding which college to attend is just as significant as the decision that students make to attend (Braddock, Lv, & Dawkins, 2008). The idea of attending a four-year institution can be overwhelming for some first-generation adult learners and prevent them from enrolling in college. The social environment is also very important for first-generation students and determines

whether or not students are able to assimilate and be successful in the academic arena in higher education (Fischer, 2007; Inkelas, Daver, Vogt, & Leonard, 2007). The proximity of the students' home in relation to the college was also found to be a very important issue for students (Simoes&Soares, 2010). First-generation adult learners often seek institutions that will fit into their schedules because of their jobs and family responsibilities. It is not uncommon for non-traditional students to shop around for colleges and universities that are affordable, accessible, and conducive to their life-style.

For some first-generation adult learners, community colleges are the first place that they begin their college experience. Due to recent changes in the economy, community colleges are now able to offer training skills to adults who are preparing for future careers (Hinkson& Butler, 2010). Some adults are looking for programs that will allow them opportunities to compete with the changing pace in the workforce. Half of adults age 30 and older who enroll in higher education institutions are enrolling in 2-year degree and certificate programs (Spellman, 2007). There are many different reasons why first-generation adult learners decide to attend a 2-year college.

Some first-generation adult learners search for programs that can offer them training in the shortest time-span. Adults are usually drawn to community colleges for training programs that can be completed in 2-years; they do not have to pursue a year degree (Hinkson& Butler, 2010). According to Frey (2007), scheduling conflicts, high cost of tuition, time required for the program, and environments that do not address adult learning styles are obstacles for adult learners. First-generation adult learners might find

the environment and the culture of campus life to be challenging. The academic setting have a major effect on whether or not a first-generation student is emotionally able to assimilate, find support, and accomplish their academic goals at the institution (Fisher, 2007; Inkelas et al., 2007). For some students, the adjustment phase in higher education is not a simple process. The transition to college for students can be thought-provoking and demanding (McCoy 2014).

According to McCarron and Inkelas (2006), 52% of first-generation students were attending community colleges and had plans to transfer to a four-year higher education institution. First-generation adult learners might decide to attend a community college to build their reading and math skills that will prepare them for a 4-year institution. Inadequate reading skills is one factor that contributes to individual, intellectual, and societal challenges that often prevent adults from completing a degree (Marschall& Davis, 2012).

Jehangir (2010) completed a qualitative longitudinal study that explored the influence of a multicultural learning community project on first-generation students. The study was developed to test their experiences of separation and ostracism. There were 128 participants, 65% females and 44% males. The data produced from the study revealed that first-generation students felt more supported and were more connected to the institution when their culture was integrated into the classroom environment.

There has been years of research focused on student retention and the importance of faculty utilizing more diverse teaching methods that ultimately allow students

opportunities to become more involved in their educational and social experiences (McKay &Estralla, 2008). There was a great deal of prior literature that has explored the andragogy techniques developed for adult learners to address academic barriers.

Faculty members are also often confronted with meeting the special needs of adult learners. Many instructional strategies have been examined, but those based on andragogy seem to be most effective adult learners, (Day et al., 2011). Not all faculty members are comfortable working with adult learners. Faculty members can become advocates for adult learners; they can create educational settings where they are able to incorporate theory and research on the adult population and bring awareness to the need for more programs on university grounds (Blair, 2010).

Degree Completion: First-Generation Adult Learners

Student retention is directly related to the success of a higher education institution accomplishing its overall objectives (Sorey& Duggan, 2008). In 2013, 6-year completion rates for students age 24 or younger was at 63%; comparison to 44.5% students entering college at 25 or older who reported completing a degree (Davidson & Holbrook, 2014).

The barriers that prevent students from enrolling in college are sometimes similar to the ones that prevent them from completing their degrees (Spellman, 2007). Most institutions are concerned with attrition and retention rates for first-generation adult learners; the reality is that most adults cannot take on full-time schedules due to other family and work responsibilities (Kasworm, 2012).

When students are not prepared academically for higher education, they might require additional services to complete their degree. Adult students enroll in college with different academic backgrounds; some have been out of school for several years and did not require remediation courses, while others need additional instruction, social support, and more (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Shuck, 2014). According to Engle and Tinto (2008), in comparison to their peers, first-generation students are four times more likely to drop out of higher education institutions. Adult students also struggle with degree completion, financial problems, lack of support, and family are some environmental issues that make it difficult for adults to finish their education (Bergman et al., 2014). Concerns about finances have been one of the primary reasons why adults do not complete their education, and financial aid continues to be an ongoing problem (Kasworm, 2012).

There are different variables when determining a student's socioeconomic status; colleges and universities have different policies regarding a student's economic status. The low-income and adult student status varies depending on the situation and is usually determined by how the institution defines the student (Milheim& Bichsel, 2007). Low-income students usually do not have access to additional income, which makes it difficult for them to get an education without economic obstacles (Milheim& Bichsel, 2007). Not finishing a degree program entails both economic and opportunity costs (Olfield, 2012).

Due to the many barriers faced by first-generation adult learners discussed above, they often find it a challenge to follow through with their academic goals. In a report

related to approaches focused around adults completing college, Time is the Enemy (Complete College America, 2011) suggest that there should be more of a push to get students to take on full-time status due to low completion rates for those enrolled on a part-time basis. The inability to assimilate into higher education institutions and lack of social supports has been linked to the reasons why first-generation students fail to matriculate to postsecondary higher education institutions; too few of these students actually earn their degree (Aldeman, 2007).

There is limited research on first-generation students that never complete their goals to achieve a doctoral degree; however, Gardner and Holley (2011) completed a qualitative study on the experiences of 20 first-generation Ph.D. students in order to gain a deeper understanding of their perception related to education and how they confronted the challenges they faced while in higher education. The bulk of first-generation doctoral students fall under the category of minority females (Gardner & Holley, 2011), and have attended a community college at some point. The participants were selected from two higher education institutions that are in the tenth percentile of universities in the United States that recognize first-generation adult students. The researchers found out through in-depth interviews with the participants that first-generation Ph.D. students often felt the pressure of being the first one in their family to graduate, worried about the debt from student loans, and lacked knowledge about the resources available to them in higher education.

Adult Learners and Student Engagement

Adult learners usually bring life experiences to the classroom which allows them opportunities to apply theory to real-life situations. Some authors praise the presence of adult learners in the class because of their acquired wisdom and knowledge (Kasworm, 2008). Developing innovative ways to engage the adult learner in the classroom is not a new concept for higher education institutions. In the 1960's, there were several higher education institutions that were regarded as non-traditional colleges because of their understanding of the educational needs of adult students that included experiential learning as well as training and delivery strategies; they offered independent learning classes, prior learning evaluations, and other groundbreaking ways that afforded adult learners opportunities to acquire skills outside of the classroom (Kasworm, 2012).

Higher education institutions are now faced with the dilemma of developing programs for first-generation adult learners (Adams & Corbett, 2010) that will help to complete their academic goals. Due to difficulties that adult learners experience while adapting to a higher education institution, they find themselves feeling helpless and losing confidence in their ability to stay motivated. Adult students are motivated differently and sometimes they need to be engaged in creative ways in the classroom. The way the information is delivered and the student's perceptions of his own ability are important aspects of becoming a self-determined learner (Kemmer, 2011/12).

For some students, on-line courses allow them opportunity to be part of a classroom activity without face-to-face contact. Higher education institutions are offering courses for adults that not only support independent learning, but also respect

their busy schedules. It is not uncommon for first-generation students to enroll in online courses due to their work and personal responsibilities. Instructors as well as students are receptive to online courses. Heaton-Shrestha, May, and Burke (2009) revealed that students were more receptive than faculty about the role of virtual learning settings because they improved their overall learning experience. Diaz and Entonado (2009) articulated the importance of faculty perceptions of online courses; they felt like they were able to connect with their students more via online courses because it broke down the stress related to time constraints.

Breaking Intergenerational Cycles

Breaking academic generational cycles is not an easy process, especially when first-generation students lack social support (Gofen, 2009). In a study done by Jenkins, Belanger, Connally, Boals, and Duron (2013), social support, posttraumatic stress, depression, and life fulfillment were compared between first-generation and non-first-generation students. The participants included a sample of 563 men and 1,084 women from a psychology course at Southwestern University; the students received partial credit for the course for their participation. The results from the quantitative study revealed that first-generation students reported limited support from family and friends, an increase in traumatic stress, depression, and a dissatisfaction with life when compared to non-first-generation students.

In another study, Bergman et al. (2014) examined attrition rates among adult and traditional students in an empirical study between years 2004 through 2011. Data were

collected from 437 adult students between the ages of 25-67 enrolled in an undergraduate program. The results revealed that adults had higher attrition rates than traditional students and educational goals, institutional receptiveness, and family support were important for overall retention and graduation rates. First-generation students attending higher education institutions are viewed as "barrier breakers," because they are tearing down obstacles in order to successfully complete their academic goals (Blackwell &Pinder, 2014). Being the first one in the family to obtain a degree is not always welcomed by those in the family that do not value education, which makes the process even more overwhelming. According to Tate, Williams, and Harden (2013) first-generation college students might experience anxieties associated with becoming more successful than their families, friends, and parents which contributes to decreased graduation and increased attrition rates.

The first culture of education experience begins in the home, and if these students are not exposed to education early on it makes it harder for them to embrace higher education settings even when they are well into their adulthood. When students are the first in their families to attend a higher education institution, they often find it difficult to successfully transition in an environment that they are unfamiliar with. If parents did not attend college, it is difficult for them to prepare their children about the different procedures and needed resources involved in attending a higher education institution (Fann, Jarsky, & McDonough, 2009).

First-generation adult learners represent a distinct group and may find themselves in roles that require them to manage various responsibilities such as: single parents and work full-time jobs (Jehangir, 2010). First-generation students devote a lot of time learning about the different aspects of higher education without guidance from anyone in their home with prior experience of college settings (Bryan & Simmons, 2009). This often requires that they face their own fears and anxieties associated with attending a higher education institution while transitioning from one phase of their life to another. If you add aforementioned problems and their status as first-generation students together, the shift to college becomes more intimidating for these students (McCoy, 2014).

For some first-generation adult learners, entering college may not automatically bring on the feelings of achievement as they might have expected, especially when they have to deal with other problems. Simply getting into college does not automatically mean success for first-generation students; even though they may be determined to complete their degree, the problems they face may become a hindrance for them (Eitel& Martin, 2009). When first-generation adult learners decide to attend higher education institutions, they may not be equipped to handle the requirements.

Need for Supportive Services in Higher Education

The students in the current study might have experienced certain barriers as a result of the lack of resources available to them in higher education institutions and their ability to successfully transition to the academic setting. One issue that concerns most students today is the cost of attending a university or college. Due to financial constraints

and state policies, the cost of tuition and state appropriations for higher education institutions can have a direct impact on whether or not adults decide to attend a college (Titus &Pusser, 2011). Institutions are now faced with developing programs for first-generation adult learners (Adams & Corbett, 2010) that will help them to complete their academic goals. First-generation adult learners often need assistance with enrollment, adapting to the academic environment, and time management.

When first-generation adult learners start college they are often not prepared for the demanding academic environment and in some cases lack family support. If they have to work a full-time job and manage other personal responsibilities, they find themselves overwhelmed by their personal circumstances that often take precedence over their required course work. When these students are not able to handle the different obstacles they face, it often impacts their ability to learn and complete their education. Unlike the traditional student, first-generation adult learners often lack support from their family and friends and are not cognizant of the different educational and financial aid available to them while attending higher education institutions (Merritt, 2010). It is important for college administrators, faculty, and students to understand different legislative programs related to incentives for education. For example, the Veterans Assistance Act was passed on June 30, 2008, and has been in effect since August 1, 2009; this bill promotes retention and allows veterans to use tuition reimbursement benefits with the option of passing them on to their spouses or children (Ritt, 2008).

As discussed earlier, colleges and universities continue to transform and the number of adult learners continues to rise (Giancola et al., 2008). Despite the increase in first-generation adult learners enrolling in higher education institutions, the barriers they face will continue to be a problem for higher education institutions. It is also known that adults learners face many different barriers while attending higher education that often include problems associated with time management, financial aid, and supportive services offered in higher education institutions (Kasworm, 2012). However, it is not known what the full impact that these barriers have on first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions and how they break intergenerational cycles. Higher education administrators, faculty, and staff servicing the first-generation adult learner can profit from what is learned from the current study by having a better understanding of how to improve retention rates among these students and by developing services to address the unique needs.

Summary

Many first-generation adult learners come to higher education institutions as the first one in their families to take on the challenges of a college student. Moreover, some of them are not prepared to take the required courses in addition to their family responsibilities. Nevertheless, higher education institutions need to develop supportive programs that will assist this population in meeting their academic goals. Ritt (2008) point out that there will remain a gap in the development of services needed for

underserved students until American higher education institutions develop a widespread and unified system to gather and share important data on adult populations.

The literature review indicate that there is limited research about the impact that personal, professional, and academic barriers have on the completion rates for first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions. The perception of the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners and higher education institutions awareness of how these barriers impact retention and graduation rates have not been well documented. The current research study provided a deeper insight of the experiences of first-generation adult learners and their specific needs in higher education institutions. The present study also provided insight into the awareness of the impact of personal, professional, and institutional barriers have on first-generation adult learners. The availability of supportive services offered at higher education institutions was also explored as well as the overall success rates for first-generation adult students.

Chapter 3 describes the qualitative research design methodology that was used in this study. The qualitative data that was gathered and analyzed for the study came from first-generation adult learners that have attended a non-traditional college. The data was collected from a qualitative inquiry (unstructured individual interviews). Student volunteers and purposeful sampling was used to select the interview participants.

The study results were reviewed in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 provides a detailed discussion of the study results and concluding statements from the final analysis, as well as any recommendations for additional research.

Chapter 3: Research Method

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study is to find meaning from the experiences of first-generation adult learners who experience barriers and their depiction of the impact the barriers have on their ability to complete their academic goals. The phenomenological paradigm is designed to capture their point of view and provide data that will produce summaries that are rich and descriptive in explaining the phenomena of barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. The implications for social change include a better understanding of the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending colleges and universities, the development of effective programs, and the impact they have on retention and attrition rates.

Personal, professional, and institutional barriers have a tendency to complicate the first-generation adult learners' ability to complete their education (Jensen &Jetten, 2015). Nontraditional students might be confronted with issues that make it difficult for them to complete their degree while attending higher education institutions such as, cultural barriers, financial constraints, and extenuating family responsibilities (Spellman, 2007).An examination of the literature found some studies (Engle & Tinto, 2008; Ritt, 2008; Spellman, 2007) rely on aligning barriers with complex issues related to retention rates to describe different experiences of first-generation adult learners in colleges and universities.

As indicated in Chapter 2 personal, professional, and institutional barriers have a negative impact on the success of first-generation adult learners in higher education

institutions. I also discussed the positive impact that supportive services offered at higher education institutions have on the attrition and retention rates of first-generation adult learners. The study was approached with the assumption that first-generation adult learners can provide insight into how the barriers impact their ability to complete their educational goals. The overall aim of this study was to bring about awareness of the personal, professional, and institutional barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions, and services available to assist them.

In this study, a qualitative methodology was used to explore the unique barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners. Maxwell (2013) maintained that qualitative research draws its strength from people and circumstances through a subjective view rather than a statistical one. Creswell (2009) argue that "qualitative research is a method to explore and comprehend the way individuals and groups attribute to a societal or human problem" (p. 4). I examined the experiences with barriers encountered by first-generation adult learners and how they interpreted and made sense of them. In the proposed study it is not known if the students actually face these barriers, let alone understand them.

Rationale for the Methodology

A phenomenology design has been selected to examine the experiences of first-generation adult learners and the barriers they face in higher education. Interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA) is a qualitative research method dedicated to investigating how individuals make sense of those experiences in life that are important

to them (Smith et al., 2009). For example, I examined the experiences involved in the thought process and emotions of first-generation on adult learners attending a college or university, and what the barriers they encountered meant to them.

Advantages over Other Methods

After considering other methods to use in this qualitative study, IPA was more effective in providing the insight that is needed to understand what first-generation adult learners experience. For example, in grounded theory, the researcher relies on the data collected in order to create a theory (Leedy&Ormrod, 2005). There are currently several learning theories used to describe the experiences of adults in higher education, but the andragogy theory was able to capture the experiences of first-generation adult learners. In ethnographical studies, the main approach is field inquiry in traditional anthropology and focus on a group with common cultural characteristics (Tavallaei&Talib, 2010).

The current study was informed by a study conducted by Gardner and Holley (2011); an ethnographical approach was used to explain the experiences of 20 first-generation doctoral students. This appeared to be effective because the study was limited to a pool of specific participants. Even though ethnographical methods have been used in prior qualitative studies to illustrate the experiences of first-generation students in higher education, this method was not suitable for this particular study. The population was confined to first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution.

The final method of consideration was a case study. A case study explores how a problem is revealed in one or several cases within a restrictive system within a particular

time (Tavallaei&Talib, 2010), but this type of study will provide limited data based on case-by-case experiences and will only capture the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners within a particular time. Out of the other methods discussed, a case study could possibly be more relevant to the proposed research. Nonetheless, this approach was not selected because the proposed research will not be focused on what is happening over time but more concerned about the present experiences of first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions. After considering other methods to use in this qualitative study, IPA was considered to be more effective in providing the insight that is needed to understand first-generation adult learners' experiences while attending higher education institutions.

Participants

Participants consisted of 6-first-generation adult learners selected from a purposeful random sample of first-generation adult learners who have attended Sojourner-Douglass College. IPA sampling provides an understanding of the participant views of the specific research subject (Wilde & Murray, 2009). Even though there might be different things that inspire the researcher when selecting participants for an IPA study, there are no restrictions in choosing the sample size (Smith & Osborn, 2003). A sample size of 6-first-generation adult learners was selected, and the interviews lasted up to one hour, which produced a maximum of at least 12 hours of taping. Glasser and Straus (1967) refer to saturation of data, as the point when no new data is identified bythe

researcher. Saturation of the data was reached. For the purpose of this study, the participants must have attended the college within the past five years.

The pool of participants was recruited from a non-traditional college located in the urban community. The non-traditional college was selected to aid in participant selection that will serve as a clear indicator of their non-traditional status. Studies have suggested that most adult students attend college on a part-time basis due to their overwhelming personal responsibilities (Spellman, 2007).

For the purpose of spreading the word about the study, a meeting with the staff at the college to discuss the details of the study and ask for assistance in identifying participants was scheduled after obtaining approval from the Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs. The staff was also asked to inform others about the study. When considering the data collection process, researchers must be cognizant of any harm that may result from the research and must respect the participants and the environment where the research will be conducted (Creswell, 2009). In order to maintain confidentiality, the names of the participants were not used. Opening up a discussion about the proposed study with college staff and administrators afforded the researcher the opportunity to identify a population of first-generation adult learners who have attended the college and also encourage support for the study.After the college identified potential participants, a letter was mailed to them explaining the details of the study (Appendix B). The college administrators and staff received a separate letter to share with others about the study (Appendix C).

Measures

The phenomenological study used in-depth interviews of six first-generation adult learners who have experienced personal, professional, or academic barriers while attending a higher education institution. This work will signify an investigation of the experiences of the participants and will result in a depiction of the barriers they faced. Informal interview questions will be the method of data collection, which will include a series of open-ended questions (Appendix D & E) The purpose of this study is to identify how first-generation adult learners view the barriers they experience in higher education.The following research questions were used in this phenomenological study to help provide a better understanding of the students' experiences:

Research Questions

The following research questions will be used in the phenomenological study:

1. What barriers do first-generation adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?

2. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?

3. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?

4. What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners?

Procedures

The following procedures will serve as a sequential guide to recruit and inform participants, collect and analyze data, and validate findings.

1. I obtained approval from Walden University's Institutional Review Board (Approval # 11-25-15-0178530/Exp. 11/26/2016).
2. I contacted the college Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs by telephone to explain the purpose of the study and was given permission to meet with staff about the research project.

3. The first meeting was conducted with College staff (Records and Registration) after getting approval from Provost/Vice President of Academic Affairs to ask for assistance in identifying potential participants for the study. The Provost/Vice President Academic Affairs designated meeting locations in the college administration building.

4. A letter describing the details of the study inviting them to contact me if they were interested in participating was sent to first-generation adult learners identified by the college via mail. The college provided mailing addresses for the participants.

5. After the participant contacted me, a time to meet with the participant for the first interview was scheduled. I emphasized to the participant that their participation was voluntary and confidential. They were also informed that my contact information was on the letter if they had any further questions about the study.

6. When the participant arrived for their first scheduled interview, I confirmed whether or not the participant met the eligibility requirements, discussed the purpose of

the study, reviewed the informed consent and conducted the interview. The participants were asked specific questions that eventually led to the second interview that was scheduled before the participant left.

7. The data collection methods that were used during the initial interview were unstructured interviews.

8. During the second scheduled interview, I reviewed the analysis (member-checking).

9. At the conclusion of each interview, participants were given the opportunity to ask me questions relating to the research study. If participants had questions related to their academic records, they were referred to the college administrators. If they requested additional supportive services, a list of community resources were provided for them (Appendix B).

10. At the conclusion of the study, I shared the results of the study with the Sojourner-Douglass College administrators and staff at a monthly staff meeting. In order to maintain confidentiality, the names and identifying characteristics of the participants were not shared with anyone.

11. I adhered to all ethical standards in order to protect the participants.

Data Collection

The data was collected through two in-depth interviews that lasted approximately one hour followed by debriefing. The interview process in a qualitative interview is done for the purpose of starting a discussion that allows the participants the opportunity to tell

their story in their own way (Smith et al., 2009). The first interview was centered on the participant's past and present personal experiences. I was able to build a relationship with the participants and collect current information about the individual's life experiences. In order for the interview to be useful for the study, I asked questions about particular events and activities instead of those that will produce hypothetical views (Maxwell, 2013). I also reviewed the consent form with the participant and inquired about any questions they had before they signed it.

The interview questions in IPA are arranged through a schedule method that allows the researcher to ask the questions in a way that they would like to ask them and in the direction that will be most suitable for the participant (Smith et al., 2009). The facts collected during the first interview offered some insight into the different educational experiences of the first-generation adult learner and provided a deeper insight into the way they experience barriers in higher education. This interview also allowed the researcher the opportunity to connect with the participant by sharing personal experiences related to being a first-generation adult learner. The researcher listened to the participant's experiences in an unbiased way.

The research questions in the study was the focus of the second interview and included specifics of the participant's present day experiences. In regards to developing a data collection method to use in a qualitative study, IPA was employed because it is more suitable for creating questions that center on the present day experiences and also allows participants to elaborate on their experiences (Smith et al., 2009). How does the

participant describe the different types of barriers they face while attending a higher education institution? Has the participant experienced barriers that impact their ability to learn or take care of other responsibilities? Or, what has been the participant's experiences related to transitioning to an academic environment and maintaining other obligations outside of school? To answer the first research question, participants were asked interview questions 1 through 3 concerning their understanding of the various barriers faced in higher education.

The participants were alsoasked to identify which barriers they felt were easier to overcome than those that might prevent them from completing their academic goals. To address the second research question, participants were asked to describe the supportive services or (lack of) for first-generation adult learners in higher education institutions and whether or not the services address their specific needs. The questions were based on interview questions 4 and 5. The data collected from the third questioncame from questions 5 and 6, participants were also asked how they manage their family obligations and course loads while attending a higher education institution. The final question involved similar barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners and how they were able to confront intergenerational barriers. The participants were asked questions 6 and 7 for the purpose of revealing their feelings and awareness of issues faced by other first-generation adult learners in academic settings and their perceptions about future generations. Each question for the second interview is listed in Appendix B.

The final interview allowed the participants to describe in details what it meant to be a first-generation adult learner deciding to attend a higher education institution while being the only one in their family to accomplish their educational goals. The IPA researcher is focused on the importance of an experience in an individual's life (Smith et al., 2009). For example, first-generation adult learners might consider attending a higher education institution and connect it to something important from their past that represents a symbol of revitalization.

The interviews were completed at the college in a private room that was approved by the college administrators. The interviews were taped and then immediately transcribed. I was also able to take detailed notes about the setting and any nonverbal communication exhibited by the participant. Unanalyzed data for a qualitative study can be problematic and might create some frustration for researchers if it begins to accumulate over time (Maxwell, 2013

Due to the volumes of data collected, the researcher developed a list of all data collected, organized them into files according to subjects, and then placed them in folders; this system is maintained in my home, where it is more accessible and easier to transcribe. I read all of the transcribed material collected from the interviews while making notes and developing codes. For the purpose of creating saturation, the information will be read over and over again until no new material emerges. Maxwell (2013) suggested that reading data collected from interviews and observation notes is one

of the first steps in the analyzing process. After all of the data has been transcribed, the data will be ready to analyze.

Data Analysis

Similar to other methods used in qualitative psychology, the core of IPA is methodical; the researcher is focused on how the participant understands the problem and how they make sense of it (Smith et al., 2009). Analyzing the data takes on a recurrentprocess between the participant and the researcher. The analysis has been referred to as a repetitive and inductive cycle (Smith, 2007). The goal of IPA research is to focus on what the participant is trying to convey and can be approached through different avenues. There are various strategies used in IPA and it can be a complex but rewarding process, especially for new researchers (Smith et al., 2009). For the purpose of this study, the data was analyzed through the identification of specific emerging themes, coding, and developing a matrix. The analysis process included open, axial and selective coding. The first step in analyzing the data collected for the study to read and interpret it.

The second step the process of taking notes and examining the different meanings of the words used by the participants and how they comprehend the phenomenon (Smith et al., 2009). For example, the current research study allowed the researcher to gain a deeperunderstanding ofrelated to the participant's perceptions of the barriers they faced.The researcher's goal was to create a comprehensive series of notes and annotations from the documents (Smith et al., 2009). Both Maxwell (2013) and Smith et al. (2009) suggest using specific research tools to help the researcher identify and

highlight different themes in the data.Coding and thematic analysis was used for the current study.A table or figure can be a helpful tool to use when categorizing themes and catapult the analysis to a higher level (Smith et al., 2009). Maxwell assert that a matrix can be used to identify specific themes and further improve the data (Maxwell, 2013).

The third step in understanding the barriers that first-generation adult learners experience in higher education can be identified through the process of categorizing data. In order to interpret and understand the meaning of the data in a qualitative research study, the researcher puts the data in categories and labels it (Bergman &Coxon, 2005). The researcher labeled the meanings of specific statements collected from the participant interviews. The testimonies of the participants symbolize their feelings and emotions associated with their personal experiences related to the phenomenon.

The final step in analyzing the data involved an analysis of the transcripts for the purpose of describing the content (Smith et al., 2009). Each participant had a different meaning to the barriers they faced on an individual basis and its importance to them was highlighted. In order to become familiar with the data, each transcript was read several times. IPA is grounded in phenomenological psychology, hermeneutics, and symbolic interactionism; there is an emphasis placed on how the participants view the world that they live in and the process in which meaning takes place and is viewed through social interaction (Wilde & Murray, 2008). The different meanings were linked together in order to describe the experiences of the participants in the study. I pursued a deeper understanding of the views of an individual or group of them (Creswell, 2008) who will

provide an understanding of how first-generation and adult learners understand the barriers they face.

Verification of Findings

Several researchers contend that even though validity and quality are very important, qualitative studies have to be assessed through standards that are suitable for the purpose (Smith et al., 2009). There are a variety of strategies used when evaluating qualitative research. The current research findings was verified through the data produced from participant statements. When the researcher is able to utilize various approaches, it will increase the researcher's ability to assess the accuracy of findings and convince readers of the accuracy (Creswell, 2009). The researcher only focused and recorded the specific details of the interviews from each participant's perspective. When there is an adequate amount of evidence collected from the participant interviews, it allows the researcher the opportunity to appraise the analysis (Wilde & Murray, 2009). The themes were evaluated by reviewing the transcripts. The analysis must include several steps that include: movement from uniqueness of the participant's views to what is common among them, clarification of the experience, responsibility to supporting the participant's view, and a mental focus on personal meaning within a specific setting (Smith et al., 2009).

An explanation of researcher bias was extremely important in the present study. When doing a qualitative study, the researcher might be concerned about how their own morals and ethical principles affect the conclusion of the analysis (Maxwell, 2013). Creswell (1998) point out the need for the person reading the study to comprehend how

the researcher is related to the topic. The researcher is currently considered to be a first-generation adult learner who has experienced different academic barriers in higher education. The researcher has been able to break intergenerational cycles within her family and understands that these challenges are not easy. While attending past higher education institutions, the researcher has experienced a series of stressful events that have impacted the overall academic experience. This researcher has experienced personal, academic, and institutional barriers while in higher education. Trying to balance work, family responsibilities, and academic demands became reality. The researcher acknowledged the experiences and was able to separate them appropriately.

Member Checking

The current study completed two in-depth interviews for each participant for a period of one-hour. During the last interview, the researcher will be allowed to respond to the participants' respective data and provide any additional insight with regards to other responses. Bryman (2003) and Lincoln and Geba (1985) define member checking as a way to ask for participant opinions of the results produced from the data. In addition, participants received a copy of their transcripts by mail to confirm the feedback on the data. All of the participants were in agreement with their transcripts and did not request any changes to be made.

Informed Consent and Ethical Considerations

The researcher must consider any ethical concerns that might stem from the research process (Creswell, 2009). Researchers should always respect the rights of their

participants. The researcher was able to develop a trusting relationship with the participants and protect them against any wrongdoing that might be a reflection of the association or participating institution and be prepared to handle any new issues (Creswell, 2009). The participants in the study were required to sign an informed consent that will be accompanied by the (IRB) standards at Walden University. In a qualitative study and more specifically IPA, obtaining informed consent from the participants is not only used for the purpose of collecting data, but the researcher must be prepared to explain what might be the final outcome of the data (Smith et al., 2009). The participants in this study were all adult student volunteers who were old enough to consent to participate and was informed at the beginning of the study that they can terminate their participation at any time. This study did not produce any harm to the participants. If a participant reported any kind of harm as a direct result of the study, the researcher was prepared to refer the participant to an outside resource for assistance. The research team will be the only ones that will have access to any unedited data and this will be explained to the participants; any records that might be used comprehensively will be modified for anonymity (Smith et al., 2009). Each participant was informed of how the data will be used and collected, along with the process involved in maintaining confidential files.

The researcher also explained to the participants that the information collected will be used to fulfill the requirements of the researcher's doctorate degree in philosophy at Walden University. All files and other transcripts will be kept at the researcher's home in a locked cabinet. After the required time has passed for maintaining the confidential

files, the data will be destroyed by the researcher in a confidential manner. The only persons that will be allowed to review the records are the researcher or other corroborators that will help with validating the outcome of the data. Any information that identifies the participant was removed from the records before the data was validated. The audiotape and confidentiality statements are located in Appendix C.

Summary

Barriers faced by first-generation adult learners while attending colleges and universities can be a multifaceted problem. Non-traditional students face many barriers that might impede the enrollment process and their ability to complete their degree (Spellman, 2007). Personal, professional, and institutional barriers have a direct impact on first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. The problem is the effect that barriers have on first-generation adult learners' retention and graduation rates attending higher education institutions. There are various dynamics that add to this problem, such as: family responsibilities, lack of academic skills, and time constraints that put them at risk of dropping out of college (Spellman, p. 67). This study will contribute to the body of knowledge the phenomenology of barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending colleges and universities by exploring the identified themes and the impact they have on degree completion.

The methods used in this study were structured in-depth interviews, including a series of open ended questions (Appendix D & E) designed to explore personal, professional, and institutional barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners and

their connection to degree completion. An interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et al., 2009) was be used to measure the understanding of the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions in order to determine the impact they have on student success rates and the need for specific programs to address the concerns of the students.

The first-generation adult learners who have experienced barriers while attending a higher education institution. A cooperative effort with college administrators was used to identify potential participants. The number of participants was 6 unless saturation of data was not achieved. Based on the review of the current literature, there have been many studies that have focused on barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending colleges and universities but few have documented how they overcome their barriers and the impact it has on degree completion(Collins, 2014). The analysis, using the IPA process of the experiencescollected in the studyproduced various themes and a rich description of barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending colleges and universities. The implications for positive social change include a better understanding of the barriers that first-generation adult learners face in higher education institutions, availability of supportive programs, and the impact they have on thetheirability to complete their degree.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to uncover and capture the opinions of first-generation adult learners' perception of the barriers they faced while attending a higher education institution and how they impact their ability to overcome them and graduate from a 4 year institution. In order to gain and capture their opinions, I selected a phenomenological methodology of 2 in-depth interviews. The phenomenological paradigm is meant to take this point of view and facilitate

myproduction of intense summaries and narrative of the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners in colleges and universities.

The subject matter was a direct result of my personal interest in the first-generation adult learner population. The gap identified in the current body of literature include a lack of literature that focus on how first-generation adult learners overcome barriers they face in higher education institutions.The implications for social change include a better understanding of the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions, its influence on retention and graduation rates, and the potential to expand and develop programs that support the needs of underrepresented populations attending colleges and universities.

Additionally, the literature review guided my process in selecting the research method and study design. Based on the literature review, I selected a qualitative methodology with a focus on IPA through the use of in-depth interviews.

The interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) was used in this study to address the gap surrounding lived experiences of first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). This chapter presents the findings from interviews of first-generation adult learners who attended a four-year higher education institution on a full time basis. This study represents an exploration of the experiences of first-generation and adult learners. It also produces a wealth of data rich in description of the barriers they face in colleges and universities.

The method of data collection used was through two in-depth structured interviews, including a sequence of open ended questions (available in appendix A and B) intended to allow the participants to articulate their own life experiences regarding barriers they faced while attending a higher education institutions "as suggested by [Smith et al.] [(2009)]." In order to have a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by first-generation learners, I decided to use IPA to gain an understanding of how students make sense of the barriers they faced while attending a higher education institution (Smith et al., 2009). I analyzed the data for this qualitative study by extracting specific themes and central words related to the participants' experiences while attending a higher education institution. The responses taken from the interviews were examined for similarities and variations utilizing the coding process. More specifically, I identified common themes from the participants' experiences.

Research Questions

The following research questions shaped the background for the questions asked during the in-depth interviews:

1. What barriers do first-generation and adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?
2. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?
3. How do barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?

4. What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners?

After reviewing the literature, the research questions were developed to explore the research topic. The first of the four research questions focused on examining the experiences of first-generation adult learners and the various barriers they faced while attending a higher education institution.

In the second question, I wanted to expand on how the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners affected them while they were in the college setting and outside of the college. Those different experiences were similar to those identified in the literature. For example, when students experience high levels of stress, it has the potential of affecting them academically and personally. The third RQ examined a combination of factors related to the experiences of first-generation adult learners; the students's educational background and their own personal struggles and other experiences that influenced their decisions to stay focused and complete their education. The final RQ raised the question of the availability of services that are uniquely designed to address the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution. The researcher sought to obtain responses about their experiences related to the availability and awareness of supportive services in a higher education institution.

The interview questions were created as open ended questions which allowed the participants opportunity to expand on their answers, reflect on prior questions and connecting responses when applicable.

Interview Procedures and Settings

Before the in-depth interview process began, I expressed gratitude toward the participants for taking the time out to participate in the study. The interview took place in a office space at Sojourner-Douglass College. The college is located in an urban community and has been serving those in the community and surrounding areas for the past 40 years. The college offers various academic programs designed for upper mobility for the student population interested in entering the job market. The setting was conducive for a confidential interview and the participants appeared comfortable answering the questions. The participants were briefed on the details of the study. The participants were also reminded that the interviews would be recorded and that they would receive a copy of the transcript. I also informed the participants that they had the option to withdraw from the study at any time.

The in-depth interviews were all taped and later transcribed with a digital recorder. The transcriptions were shared with the participants for evaluation and copy editing purposes. All but one of the participants were fine with the documentation. This o participant suggested a minor change in the transcript that involved a correction to her name and the change was made immediately. The researcher was cognizant of the infornation discussed during the interveiw with the participants and repeated the interview questions for clarification when needed. If the participants wanted to discuss their post graduate experiences, they were allowed time to elaborate on them.

In order to make sure that everything was consistent with the protocol for the research question, a guide was used to introduce the interview questions. The questions in Chapter 3 were used to further investigate the topic of first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. The longest interview lasted for 45 minutes and the shortest interview lasted 60 minutes.A table was created to keep track of the themes and the coded data while completing the analysis.

Participant Demographics

Table 1 provides a brief description of the participants. The table includes general information about the participants including their specific area of study. Each participant was coded with an ordinal number. The numbers did not reflect the order of the interviews. Participant demographics were kept confidential; the table includes only basic demographic data that was provided during the interview sessions. The recruitment of the participants took approximately 3 weeks. A staff representative from the college identified the students and provided addresses for potential participants. After identifying first-generation adult learners that met the criteria for the study, letters were mailed to the participants inviting them to participate in the study. The study criteria for participation in the requirements included students that were: (a) between 18 years and older, (b) first-generation adult learners, and (c) attended the college within the past 5 years.

All of the participants were willing to participate in the study but there were a few obstacles. One of the participants recently moved to Pennsylvania but was willing to drive 2 hours for the interview. Another participant did not receive her invitation letter in

the mail but heard about the study from another student and contacted the researcher and was willing to participate after hearing the details of the study. The researcher anticipated that students would not be easy to contact via mail due to limitations surrounding address changes. These challenges are discussed in the limitations of the study with suggestions for future studies. The interview questions did not need to be altered; the tool used for the interviews were sufficient enough for the study.There was no immediate risk or harm to the participants while participating in the study.

Table 1
Summary of Demographics

Participants	Gender	Age	Academic Major
Participant 1	Male	56	Addictions
Participant 2	Female	60	Human Services
Participant 3	Female	47	Administration
Participant 4	Female	48	Human Services
Participant 5	Female	60	Nursing
Participant 6	Male	55	Psychology

Note. The mean age of the participants was 54.3.

The participants were 6 first generation adult learners who attended Sojourner-Douglass College. All of the participants attended the college within the past 5 years. Demographic data collected from the participants included their age, gender, and academic majors. Out of the 6 participants, 2 of them were men (P1 & P6) and 4 were women (P2, P3, P4, & P5). Participant academic majors included Addictions,

Administration, Human Services, Nursing, and Psychology. Invitation letters were mailed to 10 students; six replied and actually participated in the study which allowed. In an IPA study, a smaller sample size is adequate because it focuses more on understanding a problem in a specific setting (Smith et al., 2009, p. 49).

The average age for the womenparticipants (n=4) was 53.8 and the men participants (n=2) was 55.5. The difference between the women and men participants' average age indicated a 1.03 years separation in age. The male participants were 1.7 years older than the female group. The average age for the sample population (n=6) was 54.3 years.

Ethical Considerations

According to Merriam (2009), all methods in a qualitative study generally include data collected through interviews (p. 87). After obtaining permission from the college Vice President/Provost of Academic Affairs via a signed Letter of Cooperation (see Appendix C), I was able to work with a college representative. The representative assisted with identifying the participants and I sent letters to selective participants. The letter discussed the details of the study, sample questions, and the participants were informed that all information discussed would remain confidential. It was important to send the letters to the participants to start the process of building a relationship with them. After the participant contacted and communicated that they wanted to participate, the participant was scheduled to come in for the first interview. When the participant came in for the first interview details of the study were discussed, eligibility was determined by

the researcher, and the consent form was reviewed and signed. The second interview was scheduled before the participant left. The participants were also informed that the interviews would be taped.

.**Data Collection Procedures**

The data collection began with identifying potential participants with the assistance of staff at Sojourner-Douglass College as described in chapter 3. After the potential participants were identified by college staff, the researcher reached out to the participants via mail inviting them to participate. After the participants agreed to participate in the study, theycontacted the researcher to schedule a time to meet at the college. Consent forms were reviewed and signed by each participant. Thepurpose of the study was describedand explained to the participants' as being a student dissertation study. Lastly, participants were informed that the information collectedwould be maintained in a confidential file.

Throughout the interview the participants answered questions associated with barriers they faced while attending Sojourner-Douglass College. During week 2, follow-up questions were focused on issues related to the educational and personal barriers experienced by first-generation and adult learners, which allowed the researcher to concentrate on the phenomenology of the participants lived experiences, which is consistent with IPA. Along with the notes, all data was maintained in an Excel 2010 spreadsheet that included codes and themes that emerged from the data.

Data Analysis

The data analysis started by reviewing the notes and tapes of the participants in the current study.The data was analyzed immediately after the interviews and then reviewed twiceto become familiar with the data. The data was analyzed using interpretative phenomenological analysis (Smith et. al., 2009). IPA is a systematic approachanalysis and allows themes to emerge (Smith et al., 2009). The interpretative phenomenological analysis includes the following objectives: (a) identifying what is distinctive to the participant and shifting to things shared among other participants, (b) reviewing how the participant describes and make sense of the experience, (c) the researcher's awareness of the participants' perspective and, (d) the emotional aspect of the personal meaning (Cooper, Fleischer, & Cotton, 2012).

The first stage of the analysis included the researcher reading the data, identifying, and noting phrases that stood out among participants. I was able to identify central words, expressive phrases, and similes that provided insight into the participants' words.During the second stage of analyzing the data, I was concerned with how the participants' made sense of the transcribed data. I focused on comprehension and meaning associated with specific words in the data.The third step of the analysis involved reviewing words that were repetitive and expressive; these represented the girth of the data, and were maintained in a chart created in an Excel 2010 file. The final stage of the analysis involved rereading the data several times and developing themes. Table 2gives a

brief summary of the themes that highlight the impact of academic and personal barriers experienced by first-generation students.

Table 2 Specific Themes
Themes Regarding Participants' Barriers Confronted in College

"Comments Relating to"	DataParticipants	
1. Lacked academic skills	5 out of 6	(P1, P2. P3, P4, P5)
2. Balanced life & college	5 out of 6	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5
3. Education changed my life	4 out of 6	(P1, P2, P3, P5)
4. The challenges were a part of life	6 out of 6	(P1, P2, P3, P4, P5, P6)
5. Utilized tutoring services	4 out of 6	(P2, P2, P3, P5)

Note. The participants were defined using the alphabet P and a number (e.g., 1-6).

Research question 2 is addressed through the summary of the barriers participants faced while attending a higher education. All of the participants agreed that the challenges they faced while attending the college were simply a part of life. Five out of the six participants indicated that they were able to create a balance between their personal and academic life. Four out of six of the participants reported that they needed and used the tutoring services offered at the college. All of the students reported that they struggled with their writing skills. All but one of the students indicated that they used the writing lab and other tutoring services offered at the college and were satisfied with them. Four out of six participants agreed that the education they received from Sojourner-Douglass College changed the quality of their lives.

The data illustrated in table 2 produced rich information around academic themes that were related to the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners that attended Sojourner-Douglass College. The themes are organized by the research questions and their relationship to each other. The results produced rich data describing academic and personal barriers faced by first-generation adult learners. The discussion is presented in Chapter 5.

Evidence of Trustworthiness

There are a variety of ways to establish validity in qualitative research (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). As discussed above, it was very important that the researcher understood the different steps in analyzing the data, including reviewing the data collected from first-generation adult learners for accuracy, becoming familiar with the data and creating a matrix to develop themes and observing connections among the themes. All of the participants were a good fit for the study and met all of the requirements. I was able to develop a working-relationship with the participants and spent a time with the participants listening to responses and documenting any statements that required more clarification. I was able to separate my experiences as an adult learner and remove all biases or prejudices about first-generation adult learners attendinghigher education institutions. I also kept notes on the events that took place during the research.

Member checking is a good method to use when trying to avoid any discrepancies about what the participant is trying to convey to the researcher (Maxwell, 2013). In order to validate the data, member checking was done by reviewing the information collected

from both interviews with the participants. After the initial interview was completed, I reviewed the answers to the questions with the participant and during the second interview the process was repeated; all of the participants confirmed their answers to the questions.

Results

The results of the study grew out of the IPA process, and is a reflection of lived experiences of first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution and how they make sense of the barriers they faced (Cooper et al., 2012). The research study was intended to describe the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and the impact it has on retention and graduation rates in higher education institutions. The participants were asked questions regarding barriers they experienced while attending a higher education institution and how they overcame the barriers.

In the following section of this chapter, I present examples of direct answers derived from the participants' response to the open ended questions. Thirteen interview questions were asked in two separate interviews. First-generation adult learners shared their experiences in higher education and the impact of the challenges they faced while attending. The following are the themes that emerged from the data obtained from the second interview questions.

Research Question 1

What barriers, if any, do first-generation and adult learners face when attending a higher education institution? Two themes matrierialized from this question and provided an explanation of their experiences with barriers.

Theme 1. First-gerneration adult learners experience barriers related to fear and anixiety associated with overcoming their own academic and personal paradigms. All of the students graduated from Sojourner-Douglass College. The initial theme emerging from the data was related to experiences they had with specific personal and academic barriers that led to anxiety. The students reported academic anxieties associated with: (a) learning new skills, (b) writingand math skills, (c) balancing work schedules, and (d)family responsibilities. Out of the six participants, five reported that they experienced anxieties associated with their writing skills. Regardless of the barriers, they all reported that they confronted their barriers and were serious about completing their academic goals. Examples of these themes follow.

> The most challenging barriers that I faced had to do with me returning to school after 20 years, it was very hard for me but I had to take more time to study. I felt like I was lost, I had to learn everything all over again because grade school did not prepare for me for anything, I felt like I did not know anything. It is harder to learn when you are older, so that was one of my challenges. (P1)
>
> My writing and math skills were a problem for me and I could not catch up with the tutors. Whenever I went for help they were not there, our schedules did not

agree. My personal life was not going well because I got fired while in school and my car was repossessed and I had to catch the bus which caused me to miss some classes. Thank God for teachers that worked with me; they were very understanding. I also had to go and see a counselor to deal with my relationship problems with my children. The counselor really helped me deal with some problems that I could not get past. The problems stopped me from completing my assignments at times. I had a lot of problems with math; it was a subject that I always struggled with. Math is tough and it is a subject that has always been a problem for me and probably always will haunt me. I was able to pass it, barely, but I did. I almost dropped out of class because I could not grasp math. I also was a little embarrassed when the instructor called on me and asked me to work out a problem at the board. Even though the college was a setting for adult learners, there were times when I just did not feel comfortable. I remember one time when I was in class, my instructor called on me and I went blank. Thank God, for the young lady that was sitting next to me because she was able to help me out. (P3) The most challenging barriers were finding someone to help me with my assignments, I could not reach the tutors or when I arrived at school they were gone. It was hard for me because I did not have the best writing skills. I needed someone to talk to about my personal problems but did not have anyone at the school to reach out to. My husband was very sick while I was in school and I had to take care of him. One day I picked my husband up from the hospital after he

had a kidney transplant and I left him in the car while I went to class and did a presentation. During the presentation, I could not concentrate and did not do a good job and had to do it at a later time after I told my instructor about my problem. I was determined not to take a break from school, while taking care of my husband. Although, I loved my husband, I was determined to complete my education. After he got better, he decided to leave me because he was jealous of me going to school. He did not want me to make more money than he did and started to act out. He became angry and bitter towards me but I was not going to let my personal life stop me because I had worked too hard to get where I was and had to overcome my fears. (P4)

Even though I was homeless for a while when I was attending college, I was also goingthrough a big transition in my life. I moved to Baltimore from Florida with the hopes of starting over again and it was harder than I thought it would be because I did not think I was actually going to be in college. My biggest challenge was making the transition to a new area and going to college for the first time in my life. I had a lot to learn because I had been out of school for the over 20 years. I also had to work while I was attending college and complete my assignments while worrying about a place to live. I had a lot of problems with my writing skills; I don't think high school prepared me for college because I did not know how to formulate my sentences. My biggest barrier was my writing skills, I had to learn how to write in the APA format and that was a big challenge for me. It took

me 2 1/2 years to learn how to write and I still struggle with mywriting. I never thought that I would be able to write good enough to pass my English class. I took English 101 2 times before I actually passed it and when I did, I received a low C but that was good enough for me because I passed it. It was also hard to find the time to write on my own between working and living in my car because I did not have the appropriate place to write. I did utilize the computer lab and writing tutors whenever I had time to get to the college before my classes started. (P2)

Theme 2. Adapting to change and trying to overcome the barriers and managing their time between school and family responsibilities. The second theme that came out was how the students overcame the barriers they were confronted with while attending college. One of the issues that first-generation adult learners face is how to maintain school and other responsibilities. The theme is related to Question 2 which also included Research Question 2, which focused on how the barriers impact their academic and personal life. When asked how they overcame the barriers, most of them reported that they were determined to accomplish their academic goals. Examples of this theme follow.

I was determined to complete college in spite of the many problems that arose when I was in school. I was able to overcome my barriers through prayers and perseverance. I had to create a balance between school and my personal life (P3)

The challenges were part of the process; I did not expect that college would be easy, especially at this age. I did not have anybody that I could go to and talk to

about my problems because I did not have any friends that were in school or family members that could relate. I wanted to create a balance in my life. I was able to overcome them through perseverance and prayer. I prayed a lot and I know that my prayers were answered because I made it and I am really proud of myself. I was determined to finish what I started. (P4)

One of the participants felt like she did not have to overcome any unusual barriers while attending college and responded with the following:

Challenges are part of life, if you don't have any problems, then you are not living in reality. Whether or not I was in school or not, I would've been dealing with some kind of problem, so those challenges I faced were no different than anything else in life. (P5)

Seeking clarification, the researcher asked the following question, "How do you define challenges?" First of all, where I grew up at, I faced challenges every day of my life. My definition of facing a challenge might be different for me. I have seen death on a regular basis, the only challenge that I can envision is death because you can't bounce back from that. Some students felt that some challenges were more challenging than others. It was concluded that these first-generation adult learners faced more specific challenges related to their academics and found different ways to address them, even their faith. The most challenging barriers that I faced had to do with me returning to school after 20 years, it was very hard for me but I had to take more time to study. I felt like I was lost, I had to learn

everything all over again because grade school did not prepare for me for anything, I felt like I did not know anything. It is harder to learn when you are older, so that was one of my challenges but I prayed my way through. (P1)

The most challenging barrier was dealing with financial issues while attending college. It was hard to stay focused in school while trying to figure out where I was going to live permanently. But I was able to overcome and stay in school through my faith in God. (P2)

Taking care of my husband while he was sick, but I had to find the time to manage both while working on my degree. I was able to make a list of things to do first and then ask for help which was very difficult for me because I am accustomed to taking care of everything myself. (P4)

The most challenging barrier was dealing with financial issues while attending college. It was hard to stay focused in school while trying to figure out where I was going to live permanently. But I was able to overcome and stay in school by trusting God. (P5)

The most challenging barrier was overcoming my fears in math class; I was never good at math and I feared the class and the instructor but I was able to confront my fears eventually and ask for help through the tutoring services. I can’t do anything without God; he gets all of the credit. (P6)

Research Question 2

How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life? The third theme emerged as the participants reflected on the challenges they were able to overcome and the impact of education on their personal and academic life. The information also provided insight into how their educational experiences changed their lives. The participants expressed their gratitude for returning to school even though they experienced obstacles while attending college.

Theme 3. The students viewed education as a way out of their present situation and welcomed the positive impact that academics would bring to their life.

> College was refreshing to me because it literally changed my life. I did not like the person I was before going to college because I had a lot of problems that stemmed from my childhood and eventually led to me using drugs. Even though I came from a good family, I rebelled against my upbringing and wanted to make fast money but I did not consider the consequences of my behavior. I decided to come to school after standing outside of the college and looking at people go into the building that looked like me and I thought that if they could do it, I could do it. I used to sell drugs and do drugs, so this area was my territory, yep; I sold drugs right across the street from the college. One day I decided to check out the building and went in and started talking to people and before I knew it I was registered. I never thought that I would be attending college but look at me now, I

am on my way to graduate school; God is good! (P1 began to get emotional as he discussed his experiences). (P1)

After my parents passed away, I wanted to do something for myself. I took care of my father when he was sick and after he died I had a lot of time on my hand and wanted to start my life for me. I dedicated my life to taking care of my father and when he passed away, I felt empty and college was the very thing I needed to fill my time. If it were not for me deciding to go back to college, I might have gone into a deep depression. I learned so much about myself when I was in college and improved my self-esteem. It was not easy but I was able to start where I left off in high school with my learning process. I was able to take what I learned in college and improve my reading and writing skills. I was homeless but now I have a job, car, and my own apartment and I am not going to stop here, I am going back to get my Masters in Public Health. I never thought that education would change my life because we never spoke about the importance of education when I was growing up. (P2)

I have been working at Johns Hopkins for the past 10 years as a housekeeper and I wanted more for myself. I always knew that I could be a manager but did not have the degree. I just want to get paid for my skills because I know that I am smart and could make more money. I always wanted more for myself but did not know how to improve myself and never thought about going back to school. Getting my education has improved my whole outlook on life because I learned so much and I

have improved my writing skills that I need for my job today. My relationship with my family has also improved since they could see that I could do more and actually take care of my family without asking them for anything. (P3)

I attended college right out of high school but I did not finish because I had responsibilities. I was on drugs for a while but eventually got myself together and it pushed me to do better. I was determined to change my life and get an education. I wanted my children to understand the importance of getting an education and I had to set the tone for them. (P4)

One of my mentors encouraged me to go to college. I never received the respect that I craved until I went to college. I had a lot of different jobs and wanted to make more money and wanted a career, college helped me to obtain both. I want to return to school and will do so in another year. (P5)

I was on drugs and homeless. I stayed at the Helping Up Mission for men and was able to get clean and focus on my academic goals. I was able to get my high school diploma and then finally decided to go to college. I heard about the college from other people and took the big step to enroll in the college and it was the best thing I could have done. (P6)

Research Question 3

How do barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree? As the participants discussed their experiences, the fourth theme emerged that supported the notion that the obstacles they faced in higher education

presented some challenges but did not stop them from completing their degree. The majority of the participants perceived their challenges as part of the process of completing their degree. The data collected provided insight into how first-generation adult learners persevere through their challenges.

Theme 4. The students did not perceive the obstacles they faced in college no different than the obstacles they were already dealing with in their personal life. They also referenced the college setting as part of the reason why they were able to stay focused on their goals.

I did not think that I was going to make it across the stage because I had so many things going against me. When I first enrolled in college, I did not think that I would be eligible to get financial aid because of my past life experience. When I found out that I was able to get a loan, it was the best day of my life. I also had other problems associated with my academics but I was able to overcome them. I did not think that I would be able to learn and apply new skills but I was and feel good about it. The most rewarding was when I was able to walk across the stage and get my degree. I was so happy when I walked across the stage and was able to accomplish my goals because most people counted me out when I was really young. No one ever thought that I would be a college graduate. The college setting also allowed me the opportunity to see people that looked like me with the same goals. I was locked up for most of my life and felt good because my parents

were there to see me get my degree and not going to jail. I went in as a boy, and came out as a man! (P1)

The most rewarding aspect of attending college was graduating from college and starting a career. It was not an easy process because I thought I was not going to be able to graduate, it took me 5 years to complete my degree. I started school and then had to stop because of my personal problems but eventually came back to finish. I knew starting college would be difficult for me due to my personal problems and academic challenges but I was able to persevere due to my faith in God and myself. The barriers I faced while in college had a huge impact on the way I felt about completing college and the reality of completing my goals. Realistically, I was not able the normal college student, I was a lot older than some of the students and did not have the resources I needed. My parents never completed things they started and I thought that I would be the same. I was really proud of myself because I finally finished something instead of quitting. (P2)

The most rewarding was accomplishing my goals, I was able to get my degree and my life changed for the better. I have a career now and it has made a big difference in my life for me and my family. I remember when I decided to return to school, I thought about my personal problems and then decided that I was not ready. It was not until I discussed the option of returning to school with my boyfriend that it became clear to me that I could do anything that I set out to do as long as I gave it my best. I had so many personal problems that I was dealing with

when I started on top of trying to figure out how I was going to be able to keep up with the other students. I wanted to make sure that I went to a school that offered services to adult learners. The college setting was different in a good way. I saw people that were my age and had the same goals that I had, everyone supported each other. As I attended the college, I was able to see myself graduating from college and accomplishing goals that no one else in my family was able to do. College only challenged me to do more for myself. I think I made it because I was not going to let anyone or anything get in my way. (P3)

The most rewarding aspect was getting the degree and watching my kids watch me complete my goals. I really think that I was able to persevere because of the instructors and my peers. I know that I had personal problems and I knew that I would struggle through my courses but I was determined to finish. I started and then stopped several times, but I eventually finished with the help of others. I see problems as a way of life and going to college was no different than dealing paying bills with money I do not have, raising my children in the ghetto, or dealing with my dysfunctional family. In other words, the challenges did not stop me. (P4)

Completing my degree was the most rewarding part for me. It was a challenge but it was all worth it. I learned a lot such as writing, research, and understanding different life views. The obstacles were no different than the other ones I faced in my everyday life. (P5)

One of the participants felt like going to college would make all of their other problems go away because they were finally doing something for themselves.

> P6 shared, I always wanted to graduate from college but did not feel like I could because of my children. I never did anything for myself and this is something that I wanted to achieve that no one could take away from me. I did not want to think of my children when I went to school, as a matter of fact, I would not even talk about my children. I lived a life as a traditional student when I went to college, I did not have any worries. When I went home, I was able to be a parent, but while I was in school, I did not have any worries because I was finally doing something for myself. The most rewarding was getting to the point of graduation. I never thought I would graduate from college.

Research Question 4

What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners?The students discussed their experiences related to the assistance they received while attending Sojourner-Douglass College. As a result, the final theme emerged that revealed that the participants recognized the necessity of supportive services offered in higher education institutions. It also provided an understanding of the type of services they needed to be successful in college.

Theme 5. The students appeared to have thought about the services that were available to them in a higher education institution and they made a difference in the

college they chose to attend. It also provided insight into the services that were unique to first-generation adult learners.

All but one of the participants appeared to be grateful for the services that Sojourner-Douglass College offered their adult learning population. Each participant reported that they used the supportive services on the campus and believed that the services impacted their ability to graduate. The supportive services included a wellness center, individual tutoring, disability services, and childcare. Examples of this theme follow.

> There were several services available and I used all of them, especially the writing center. I also worked with a tutor that really helped me. The tutor took her time to sit with me and teach me how to write. I wish there were more people available in the tutoring services and available during the time I needed them. If I had to change anything about the services, it would be the time that they opened the offices. I could not always complete my paper on time because the writing center was not open by the time I got off work and made it to the college. The times when the center was open, I had to go to class and it made it difficult for me to be in 2 places at the same time. (P1)

> All of the services were good for me. I was able to get help from the tutors with my writing and math skills. The tutors were very helpful. I was even able to get assistance with finding housing and counseling from the Wellness Center. The supportive services were right on-time, and really helped me out. (P2)

> I think I used the tutoring services more because I had some papers that I needed to work on. I also used the Wellness Center when I needed to talk to someone. The college was a good school and I would recommend it to any adult learners. (P3)
>
> I had the support of my teachers and other services such as the writing lab and wellness center. Without the services, I don't think that I would have been able to graduate on time. My daughter is now in college and she does not need additional services like I did. I think it is important for people to have additional services if they have been out of school for a long time because you just need the extra support. The instructors did not have a lot of time to work with me on an individual basis but the writing center was there just for that, they worked directly with me. (P4)
>
> I think I used all of them because I needed the extra help. I used the Writing Lab, Work Study Program, and the Wellness Center and they were all very helpful. I don't know what I would have done without the extra services. (P5)

At least 5 of 6 participants felt they benefited from the supportive services but there was one student that did not find that the services were useful. Participant 6 felt that even though the services were available, they did not meet his specific needs.

> I remember when I had to bring my granddaughter to school with me because my I was babysitting and my daughter did not get home in time to get her before my class started. I took her in the class with me and was told that children were not

> allowed in the classroom. I went downstairs to see if I could leave her there until class started but it was closed. I know that my class did not start until 8 pm but I thought the daycare would be open late since students were still taking class. I was really upset and found out what my daughter had to go through when looking for a babysitter. This experience left a bad taste in my mouth regarding the services at the school. I did use the writing two times but I was not impressed with the tutors because they did not appear to understand the APA process. I believe that the college could have offered more services that are available to meet the needs of an adult learner. (P6)

Summary

The phenomenological study of student experiences, specifically barriers faced by first generation adult learners attending a higher education institution revealed relationships and various meanings among the participants. Using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis, I identified five emerging themes that represented the lived experiences of six first generation adult learners and the barriers they faced while attending Sojourner-Douglass College: (a) students faced personal and academic barriers, (b) experiences adjusting to college and managing their personal life, (c)education was key to improving their quality of life, (d) obstacles were perceived as normal challenges in life, and (e) availability of supportive services were essential.

The results of this study support findings from previous research on barriers experienced by first generation adult learners attending higher education institutions.

Participants in this study experienced various obstacles while attending a higher education institution. This includes personal, academic, and professional barriers (Ritt, 2008). The participants confirmed the feeling of being overwhelmed by personal responsibilities which ultimately impacted their academic goals (Kasworm, 2014). Participants also expressed their anxieties associated with becoming the first one to graduate in their families and achieving success (Tate, Williams, & Harding, 2013). Their optimism is similar to the accounts of other first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions who have described themselves as "barrier breakers" and overcoming their obstacles (Blackwell &Pinder, 2014). In addition, the participants also conveyed the need for additional supportive programs that will assist them with their academics while attending college (Bergman, Gross, Berry, & Schuck, 2014). Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the results and how they can be used in future studies on first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

This dissertation addressed the gap in literature related to awareness of and the impact of barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. Iwantedto understand the challenges the participants faced and how they coped with them. I was also interested in learning how higher education institutions prepare to address barriers faced by first-generation adult learners. Understanding how barriers impact first-generation adult learners will assist colleges and universities develop programs specifically designed for them.

The participants in this study were first-generation adult learners, 18 years of age and older, attending a higher education institution. First-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions are confronted with various barriers included, personal, academic, and personal. The findings from the study depictthe barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and how they overcame the boundaries and was able to persevere.

There were four research questions that were used to understand the phenomenon of first-generation adult learners and the challenges they encountered while attending Sojourner-Douglass College.

1. What barriers do first-generation adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?

2. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?

3. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?

4. What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners?

Six first-generation adult learners that attended Sojourner-Douglass College within the past 5 years were interviewed for this study. The unstructured interview questions produced information about unique barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and how they overcame them to meet their academic goals. I also examined the impact the barriers had on the students ability to complete their degree and the supportive programs available to them in higher education. According to Hardin (2008), barriers faced by non-traditional students may inhibit students from completing their academic goals. In contrast, the current research study found that first-generation adult learners were resilient and perceived the barriers in a different manner and was able to finish college in-spite of the barriers they faced.

The data analysis generated the following five themes

1. First-gerneration adult learners experience barriers related to fear and anixiety associated with overcoming their own academic and personal paradigms.

2. First-generation adult learners' ability to adapt to change and trying to overcome the barriers and managing their time between school and family responsibilities.

3. First-generation adult learners viewed education as a way out of their present situation and welcomed the positive impact that academics would bring to their life.

4. First-generation adult learners did not perceive the obstacles they faced in college no different than the obstacles they were already dealing with in their personal life. They also gave credit to the college setting as part of the reason why they were able to stay focused on their goals.

5. First-generation adult learners appeared to have thought about the services that were available to them in a higher education institution and they made a difference in the college they chose to attend. It also provided insight into the services that were unique to first-generation adult learners.

The identified themes will be explained in the view of the andragogy and the social cognitive learning theory, examined in chapter 2. Researcherssupport the use of the andragogy theory for adult learners attending colleges and universities (Halx, 2010) while the social cognitive career theory expanded on the barriers faced by first-generation students (Lent et al., 1994, 2000). The themes also demonstrate the relationship between the contemporary literature on first-generation adult learners and their experience with specific barriers they face while attending higher education institutions. The results and the impact they have on social change and suggestions for impending studies are

discussed. First-generation adult learners ages 18 and up appear to be aware of and have a different perspective of the barriers they face while attending higher education institutions. Although they face barriers in college, they are determined to complete their degree.

Results

The findings from this study were generated by using the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) method. The results highlight the lived experiences of first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution and their perception of the barriers they faced. First-generation adult learners in the study seemed aware of the barriers they faced while attending the college and were able to overcome them and accomplish their academic goals. Even though they experienced some personal, academic, and professional challenges while attending college, they were able to endure them and complete their objectives.

The analysis process produced 5 themes that included: feelings associated with the barriers they experienced, overcoming the barriers, positive aspect of achieving academic goals, staying focused on goals, and using supportive services. The results were linked with the research questions and the emerging themes from the student responses were examined.

Research Question 1

What barriers, if any, do first-generation adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?

Theme 1. First-gerneration adult learners experience barriers related to fear and anixiety associated with overcoming their own academic and personal paradigms.All of the participants in this study attended Sojourner-Douglass College within the past 5 years. Obtaining a degree can be perceived by most people as a stepping stone to a better life but gaining access into American institutions can be inhibited by barriers such as finances, gaps in learning, and uncertain student paths (Ritt, 2008, p12). Even though first-generation adult learners experienced barriers when they return to college, they are still enrolling in college at alarming rates. Within the past 10 years, there has been a 50% increase in non-traditional students enrolling in higher education institutions (Bye et al., 2007; Newbold et al., 2010). When asked about the most challenging barriers they faced while attending college, 99% (5 out of 6) of the participants in the current study suggested that they experienced anxiety associated with academic and personal problems, mostly because they do not feel like they are prepared for the challenge. This finding is consistent with previous research indicating that typically first-generation students are not mentally or financially prepared for college (Jehangir, 2010).

Non-traditional students experience high rates of stress related to various responsibilities they encounter in school as well as outside of school (e.g., Richards, 2008; Tones et al., 2009). Even though, it was important for the participants to achieve

their financial goals, two of the participants believed that the challenges they faced in college were no different from what they experience in a normal day of life. All of the participants stated that the challenges they faced were difficult but believed that they would be able to overcome them through their faith in God. They wanted to work hard to overcome the barriers they faced in school and in their personal lives as well. Non-traditional students manage pressure by applying different methods when coping with stress (Forbus et al., 2011). They chose to attend Sojourner-Douglass College based on the adult setting and their connection to other students with similar experiences.

Five of the participants said they had fears related to their lack of academic skills and all of them reported that they had personal problems. Two of the participants discussed their fears associated with returning to school later in life and not feeling confident about their academic skills. Both of the participants reported that they had not been in school for over 20 years and felt like they had to learn everything all over again and did not think that they would be able to learn new skills. One of participants reported that he not only had to learn how to apply academic skills but also had to learn life skills while in college because he was locked up for most of his younger life. In this instance, he had no other choice but to learn how to start his life all over again. A second participant was transitioning from one city to another and found herself homeless while trying to balance assignments and work a full time job. This participant was looking for a new start to life and she found herself enrolling in college for the first time in her life.

A third participant lost her job and her car. As she dealt with losing her primary finances and transportation, she faced a great deal of stress but did not want to give up on her dreams to complete her degree. None of these incidences affected the students' ability to complete their academic goals. Non-traditional students have been able to cope with barriers they encounter because they view obstacles as something that they can overcome (Giancola et al., 2009).

Theme 2. The students were able to adapt to change, overcome the barriers and manage their time between school and family responsibilities.Research has shown that non-traditional students are naturally more motivated to meet their academic goals, which is related to their perseverance (Bennett et al., 2007; Bye et al., 2007; Hoyert& O'Dell,2009; Njumbwa, 2008; Ross-Gordon, 2011; Scott & Lewis, 2012). Motivation can impact an individual's ability to process new ideas and their performance (Schunk, Pintrich, &Meece, 2009); it is vital to the success of working adults in higher education (Lee & Pang, 2014). There are many factors that account for a student's ability to overcome their challenges and persevere. Adult learners may drop out of college for reasons surrounding internal or external factors that sometimes overlap with each other (Park & Choi, 2009). For example, even though adult learners often find themselves dealing with academic and personal responsibilities, these obstacles might actually help them discover innovative ways to adjust while learning new skills.

When adults decide to attend college, they face many different challenges. There are different interpretations of barriers; some may view them as difficulties that prohibit

some populations from participating while others may view them as obstacles that may decrease the degree of participation but may not completely rule them out (Saar, Taht, &Roosalu, 2014). Despite the barrier, if adult students can rise above them, they would participate in life-long learning (Rubenson, 2011). The present study found that the participants overcome the barriers they faced and adapted to the college setting with little or no problems. Out of 6 participants, only one felt like she did not have any barriers that were not part of a normal day of life. Despite the challenges, the students indicated that they persevered and completed their academic goals. Five out of six participants believed that their faith and spirituality helped them get through their challenges. One of the participants felt that she would not have made it without her faith in God. In order to deal with the stressors of life, students might rely on prayer, reflection, faith in God and other mind soothing activities to as a way to cope (Moore et al., 2011). The majority of the participants in this study reported that they were determined to overcome the barriers they were confronted with attending college.

The role of a higher education institution means something different depending on the student. Colleges and Universities in the United States have become a support system for a sustainable economy in the future (Kasworm, 2011). Several participants believed that their perception of a higher education was what they expected. The first-generation adult learners in this study reported that they perceived college as a place that would be very challenging and did not expect to receive as much support from the instructors and their peers.

In answer to research question 1, the present study provides data about the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and how they overcome them. The previous research in this area did not indicate how their life experiences assisted them in adjusting to the college environment and overcome the barriers. This study found that these first-generation adult learners had some fears and anxiety about returning to college related to their academics and ability to stay focused and complete their academic goals but the fears they experienced helped them to push through the barriers and stay on track. The first-generation students reported that the challenges they experienced were no different from what they experience on a day to day basis and they only way to overcome the anxieties was to confront them head on. The participants in the current study recognized that they received some support from their family and services available to them in the college, which was attributed to their success story. All of the participants reported that they were able to become the first person in their family to achieve academic success in a higher education institution which indicates that they were able to learn and apply new skills as an adult learner.

The comments suggest that the participants' experience with the barriers produced some stressful emotions. They experienced some anxiety at different levels that eventually moved to a level of confidence as they acquired more academic skills. Most of the participants experienced some range of emotion related to the barriers they faced.

Research Question 2

How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?

Theme 3. The students viewed education as a way out of their present situation and welcomed the positive impact that academics would bring to their life**.** This study explored barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending a higher education institution and how those barriers impacted their ability to complete their academic goals. Throughout this process, first-generation adult learners were committed to complete their degree regardless of the problems that they faced. When the students initially returned to school, they were not sure what to expect and had some fears of the unknown but welcomed the process. None of the participants reported that they took any college preparatory courses before starting school; they just knew that they wanted to change their current situation. One of the participants reported that she felt stuck in her job and did not feel like people respected her at work because she did not have a degree. Most of the participants reported that their academic experiences changed the course of their life.

Previous literature reported that many first-generation adult learners were in the lower socioeconomic status and were motivated to attend college to increase their income (Seay, 2011). Similar to prior research, the present study found that the majority of the participants in this study reported that their education changed their employment and financial status. These students felt that their education enhanced their skills enough

where they were able to apply for other employment opportunities and make more money. One of the participants reported that they were homeless while attending college and attending college changed their entire life. Two of the participants reported that they were on drugs before attending college and needed a change in their life; they believed that education would open other doors for them.

All of the participants felt that their ability to obtain a degree helped them improve the overall quality of their life. Academic success for adult learners who obtain a degree is equal to personal and financial gains, which ultimately support and benefits society (Ritt, 2008). The present study found that these participants did not allow personal and financial barriers to get in the way of them completing their degree as believed in the current literature because they lacked social supports and were not able to adapt to the academic arena (Aldeman, 2007). The participants also believed that attending college would improve their quality of life. Participant comments suggest that the students' experience with the barriers they were faced with involved making sense of the barriers by relating them to prior life experiences.

Research Question 3

How do barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?

Theme 4. The students did not perceive the obstacles they faced in college any differently than the obstacles they were already dealing with in their personal life. They

also gave credit to the college setting as part of the reason why they remained focused on their goals.

According to Jameson and Fusco (2014), personal, academic, and professional barriers can prevent adult learners from going to college or finishing their degree. The current study indicated that the barriers the students faced while attending college had a significant impact on their life. However, the idea of not completing their degree was not an option for them due to their desire to obtain their degree. The first-generation adult learners also reported that they received support from their peers and instructors when needed. All of the participants in the study were confronted with many of the barriers in the literature, such as family responsibilities, limited academic skills, and financial problems (Jehangir, 2010). Most of the participants felt that these barriers were difficult but manageable. The past life experiences that these students faced helped them to not only gain confidence in their academic abilities but also create a balance in their personal lives while attending Sojourner-Douglass College.

Previous research revealed that most adult students face personal, professional, or institutional barriers when they decide to return to college (Ritt, 2008). These barriers have a significant impact on their ability to complete their degree; it is difficult to keep these students motivated and focused on their studies (Petty, 2008). One of the participants in this study indicated that it took her 5 years to complete her degree; she had to stop for a while due to some personal problems but eventually returned to school. Other research suggest that diversification and making education affordable is the biggest

predictor of a decrease in institutional barriers, which are fundamental (Saar et al., 2014, p. 1). Participants in this present study admitted that they also experienced financial barriers, in addition to other challenges, while attending the college. The different roles that adults are responsible for can impact their interest in higher education; 54% of adult learners are married (Kasworm, 2012) and 56% had children or relatives that they were taking caring for (National Center for Education Statistics, 2010b). This study examined the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners 18 years and older. This research also suggested that adult learners might lack information literacy skills. Adult learners need skills that will assist them in researching reliable and trustworthy information that will enhance critical thinking skills that can be applied in their profession (Rapchak et al., 2015). The students in this study did not indicate any of the problems listed.

The students were also confident in their ability to complete their degree and Sojourner-Douglass College created an environment for them that were conducive for learning. One of the participants believed that even though she received support from her instructors and peers, she thought her parents' past history of not completing things they started would impact her ability to complete her degree, but it was just the opposite and she was able to complete her goals. Another student revealed that being able to attend college with students that were also adult learners created a friendly environment and allowed her to see herself graduating. Most of the students agreed that the most rewarding aspect of going to college was accomplishing their academic goals and

walking across the stage. In contrast, previous research indicated that adult learners were more likely to drop out of college due to the barriers they experienced (Bergman et al., 2014) and first-generation students were four times more likely to drop out in comparison to their peers (Engle & Tinto, 2008). All of the participants in the current study were able to cope with the barriers they experienced and also complete their degree. Participant comments suggest that the students' experience with specific barriers included making sense of them by relating it to life experiences in general.

Research Question 4

What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners?

Theme 5. The students appeared to have thought about the services that were available to them in a higher education institution and how they made a difference in the college they chose to attend. The participants also provided insight into the services that were unique to first-generation adult learners.

The final theme that the researcher identified in the analysis was how students view the supportive services available to them and the college setting. When first-generation adult learners decide to return to school, one concern they may face is what institution would offer the best course of study for them and meet their specific needs. In comparison to traditional students, nontraditional students are not likely to ask for assistance in fear of being viewed as unprepared, leaving the institution responsible for making supportive services available and accessible to them (Lehman, 2011). Even

though all of the participants in this study were aware of the supportive services available to them at the college, the times that the services were open for them was not always convenient for them. One of the participants noted that she used the Writing Lab for tutoring services on a regular basis but the lab was not always open when she needed. She reported that there were times when she missed the due date for an assignment because the lab was only open during the times she had class. Another student reported that she used the math, writing, and wellness center services and did not have any problems accessing them.

In order to accommodate non-traditional students, colleges and universities must be creative and proactive in their plan to attract and retain these students. Many institutions made some major changes in the way they admit students and designed their academic programs to be accessible for adult learners (Plageman, 2011). Some changes that can be seen in higher education institutions across the United States include an increase in the amount of online courses, classrooms with more space, and the use of more adjunct faculty (NEA, 2009). While first-generation adult learners face many obstacles when returning to school, supportive services in higher education institutions can assist the students in a smooth adaptation and transition to the environment.

When institutions provide secure environments that makes adult learners feel confident that they will receive the support they need, this has a positive impact on student retention (Fischer, 2007; Grant-Vallone, Reid, Umali, &Pohlert, 2004); Milheim& Bichsel, 2007). Previous research reported that the same barriers that often

prevent students from attending college are sometimes the same barriers that prevent them from graduating (Spellman, 2007). In contrast, the present study found that all of the participants in this study were satisfied with the services offered to them in the college except one. One participant indicated that she needed the extra services and did not believe that she would have successfully completed her academic goals without the supportive services. Another student reported that the supportive services were not very helpful to him and he also suggested the need for more services that meet the unique needs of all first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. Participants' comments suggest that experience with the supportive services available to them at the college involved understanding the need for supportive services designed specifically for first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions.

Implications for Social Change

The implications for positive social change include a better understanding of barriers experienced by first generation adult learners attending a higher education institution, its impact on graduation and retention rates and the ability to reduce the negative effects and increase the potential positives. Even though prior research indicates that first generation adult learners experience many barriers while attending higher education institutions, the impact of the barriers depend on factors associated with the inadequate finances, single parenting (Deggs, 2011), work schedules, and obstacles to learning (Blakely & Tomlin, 2008; Giancola, Grawitch, &Borchert, 2009).This was evidencedby the results of this study.

The fact remains,even though the participants were unique in their own way, the barriers they experienced while attending Sojourner-Douglass College were very similar. Research indicates that nontraditional students experience increased levels of stress and anxiety when compared to traditional students (Rico, Beale & Davie, 2010) and are more likely to drop out of college. On the other hand nontraditional students cope better with stress because of their ability to rise above it (Giancola et al., 2009). Several of the participants reported that they needed and valued the extra support with their academics that the college offered.All of the students reported that they encountered various barriers while attending the college but was determined to complete their academic goals.

The participants in the study verified the emotions of being overwhelmed by the challenges they faced while attending a higher education institution (Li & Seale, 2007;

Raddon et al., 2009). It is possible to limit some of the barriers experienced by first generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. To decrease the negative influences and maximize the positive experiences related to the barriers experienced by first generation adult learners,colleges and universities must have a better understanding of what the needs are for underserved populations.By assisting colleges and universities to have a better understanding of the needs of first generation adult learners may help in decreasing the barriers and improve the positive outlook for first generation adult learners. As a result, the study not only promotes the development of supportive programs for nontraditional students in higher education but will also improve overall retention and attrition rates for this population. Higher education institutions that gain more knowledge about the specific needs of first-generation adult learners will be equipped to meet the needs of underserved populations.

This study supports the findings of previous research on the barriers faced by nontraditional students attending higher education institutions while adding to the literature on this topic. The study will help administrators and faculty understand the specific needs of non-traditional students for the purpose of developing supportive programs for these populations. When administrators are aware of and committed to serving this growing population, they will be able to hire and train professional staff that can meet the needs of nontraditional students and incorporate adult learning theories into their pedagogy.

This study serves as a means of determining the needs of underserved populations attending higher education institutions and also explores the barriers involved in developing supportive programs for first generation adult learners. The outcome of the studywill impact the attrition and retention rates of nontraditional students in higher education in a positive way. The findings from this study provide a deeper understanding of the barriers faced by non-traditional students attending colleges and universities and their strategies for overcoming them. This experience will also impact future generations of first-generation adult learners enrolling in a higher education institution. First-generation adult learners will be optimistic about enrolling in higher education institutions through increased supportive services that help decrease their barriers.

Recommendations for Actions

I would recommend that colleges and universities providing services to non-traditional students evaluate their current supportive programs for effectiveness and continue to improve programs that will meet the needs of underserved populations. The programs will assist college administrators and faculty in enhancing the services available to first generation adult learners and foster an environment that is conducive to their learning. The results of the research will be disseminated to the faculty and staff at Sojourner-Douglass College, the participants and other interested parties in publication form. The findings from this study hold implications for higher education institutions providing services to first-generation adult learners related to the barriers they face. In lieu of the point that first-generation adult learners are at risk of experiencing some kind

of barrier while attending a higher education institution that they eventually overcome, the researcher recommends that colleges and universities provide services that are designed to address their needs and are easily assessable upon entering the college/university. It is also important for administrators and faculty to have a better understanding of how adult learners learn. All of the participants believed that Sojourner-Douglass College was designed for adult learners and was able to create an environment that was beneficial for their learning needs. The participants indicated that the faculty assisted them in achieving their educational goals. As a result of the study, my perception of the barriers experienced by first generation adult learners became more compelling.

Researcher's Experience of the Study

As a first-generation adult learner and a social worker that has provided services to this population, the researcher was passionate about this topic. This study has provided an understanding of the barriers that first-generation adult learners faced while attending Sojourner-Douglass College and how they were able overcome them. However, the data was based solely on qualitative interview data from 6 first-generation adult learners at Sojourner-Douglass College. Although the literature in the in this study validate the findings, there is a need for more studies to address this phenomenon. While completing this study, I developed my own theory about first-generation adult learners from my own personal experiences but was able to dissociate when interviewing the participants and collecting the data to avoid any biases. I spent several hours listening to the audio tapes

and relating the experiences back to the participants in order to interpret the data without any interference of my own feelings.

This has been a very interesting experience for the researcher; I gained a deeper respect and understanding for the barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. These students are resilient and motivated to complete their academic goals despite of the challenges they face and have incorporated their life experiences into overcoming the barriers. I gained a deeper understanding of why these students push themselves so hard to create new directions for their lives through education. One participant indicated that he was simply curious about the professional African Americans that were going in the college because they looked like him and decided to step out on faith and enroll. A second participant reported that graduating from college improved her dysfunctional relationship with her mother. A third participant reported that her husband divorced her after she graduated from college because he became jealous of her success; she felt that her education was worth the loss. The participants also commented on their early on educational experiences in grade school and this helped me understand the importance of educating young people about going to college. I was impressed with the willingness of the participants to share their experiences with me.

The participants in this study appeared to have learned through life experiences how to complete their academic goals while managing stressors. They were motivated to learn and break intergenerational barriers related to education. However, first-generation

students that have not been able to complete their academic goals due to the barriers they faced might provide different aspects of their experience while attending a higher education institution. The culture of the college or university might be a strong indicator of the academic barriers that these students face. There is a need for more studies related to the unique needs of first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions and the various barriers they face. Additional research will assist in developing effective programs for them.

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Appendix A: Letter to College

Student's Name: Date:
Address:

Dear (Name),

My name is Paulette Williams and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. Currently, there are a vast number of studies that have focused on the first-generation and adult learners in higher education institutions, but there still remains a gap in the literature related to how these barriers impact their ability to complete their degree. This research will provide insight into what the students experience while attending higher education institutions and the availability of services offered in higher education.

Your assistance in conducting this research is very important. I will need for you to identify first-generation and adult learners that present with barriers. Identification of these students within the college will provide a way for me to contact the students. When they are identified, I would like to meet with them to discuss the nature of the study. The participants in the study had to attend the college within the past five years and experienced some barriers while in college. The participants are free to choose whether or not they want to participate and can discontinue participation at any time. Any information provided by the participants will be kept strictly confidential.

I would like to discuss any concerns that you may have concerning this study and your preference in identifying the participants; please feel free to contact me. I can be reached at 443-204-7144 or emailed at paulette.williams@waldenu.edu.

Sincerely,

Paulette Williams
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix B: Letter to Participant

Name of Participant
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Paulette Williams and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. Currently, there are a vast number of studies that have focused on the first-generation and adult learners in higher education institutions, but there still remains a gap in the literature related to how these barriers impact their ability to complete their degree. This research will provide insight into what the students experience while attending higher education institutions and the availability of services offered in higher education.

I realize that your time is very important and I would appreciate your consideration to participate in this study. In order to fully understand your experience, we will need to meet on two separate occasions for at least one hour. We can meet at the college and it will not require you to do anything out of your comfort zone. The purpose of the meetings is to get to know you and learn about your experience as a first-generation adult learner attending a higher education institution. All of the information collected during the interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet. My telephone number is 443-204-7144. You can also email me at paulette.williams@waldenu.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Paulette Williams
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix C: Letter to Administrator/Staff

Name of Participant
Address

Dear (Name),

My name is Paulette Williams and I am a doctoral candidate at Walden University. I am conducting dissertation research on the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners attending higher education institutions. Currently, there are a vast number of studies that have focused on the first-generation and adult learners in higher education institutions, but there still remains a gap in the literature related to how these barriers impact their ability to complete their degree. This research will provide insight into what the students experience while attending higher education institutions and the availability of services offered in higher education.

I realize that your time is very important and I would appreciate your consideration to assist me with this study. I will need your assistance with identifying first-generation adult learners that have attended the college within the past 5 years. We can meet at the college and it will not require you to do anything out of your comfort

zone. The purpose of the meetings is to share information with you about the study and get your assistance with identifying potential participants. All of the information collected during the interview will be kept strictly confidential.

Please contact me at your earliest convenience to schedule a date and time that we can meet. My telephone number is 443-204-7144. You can also email me at paulette.williams@waldenu.edu. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Paulette Williams
Doctoral Candidate
Walden University

Appendix D: Participant Demographics

Subject # _____ Researcher _____

You may leave blank, any item(s) that you do not wish to answer.

Your age _____

Your gender _____

Your race _____

Your Chosen Major of Study_____

APPENDIX E: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

DATE: _____

LOCATION: _____

NAME OF INTERVIEWER: _____

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE: _____

INTERVIEW NUMBER: One

1. Please tell me how would you describe your family educational background?

2. How would you describe your role as a student?

3. How would you describe your peers and professors?

4. What type of experiences did you enjoy in middle and high school?

5. How did you decide to attend college and what were your experiences leading up to this point?

APPENDIX F: INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Interview Protocol

Date: _____

Location: _____

Name of Interviewer: _____

Name of Interviewee: _____

Interview Number: Two

1. How did you experience academic and personal barriers while attending a higher education institution?

2. What were the most challenging barriers you faced while attending a higher education institution?

3. What is the most rewarding aspect of attending a higher education institution?

4. How do you describe the role of a higher education institution and is this different from what your learned about education growing up?

5. If employed, how do you manage personal and academic responsibilities while attending college?

6. How do you feel your family perceives you as an adult learner attending a higher education?

7. What are your experiences when interacting with family members who did not attend college?

8. What supportive services were available to you at your institution, do you feel has helped you complete your degree?

Appendix G: Validity Matrix

Validity Matrix for a study of Unique Barriers faced by First-Generation Adult Learners in Higher Education

What do I need to know?	Why do I need to know this	What kind of data will answer the questions	Analysis Plans	Validity Threats	Possible Strategies for dealing with validity threats	Rationale for strategies
RQ 1: What barriers, if any, do first-generation adult learners face when attending a higher education	There is limited understanding about student perceptions of the barriers they face and how they overcome them. Also	Unstructured Interviews	Digital Recording, transcription, content analysis, coding, re-reading and examining individual data	Participating in the interview at the college might provoke socially desirable responses because of the setting	Use of open ended questions (script) that limits researcher bias	Open ended questions allowed the participants to be open and honest about their responses.

institution?	there is limited known about how the barriers they encounter might impact their ability to create their degree.			that the interview will take place in.		
RQ 2. How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their academic and personal life?	If assessing first-generation adult learners in higher education, it will also require some understanding of how these barriers impact their performance.	Responses collected from unstructured interviews.	Digital Recording, transcription, content analysis, coding, re-reading and examining individual data	Participating in the interview at the college might provoke socially desirable responses because of the setting that the interview will take place in	Use of open ended questions (script) that limits researcher bias	Open ended questions allowed the participants to be open and honest about their responses.
RQ 3: How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?	First-generation adult learners who experience barriers while attending higher education institutions might not complete their	Responses collected from unstructured interviews.	Digital Recording, transcription, content analysis, coding, re-reading and examining individual data	Presence of staff may influence opinions about the institution.	Observation of student's emotions as they answer the questions.	Open ended questions allowed the participants to be open and honest about their responses.

	academic goals.					
RQ 4: What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners	It is important for higher education institutions to understand the need for supportive services to address the barriers faced by first-generation adult learners.	Responses collected from unstructured interviews.	Digital Recording, transcription, content analysis, coding, re-reading and examining individual data	Potential for lack of expression or emotion or reactions to lack of services that were available to the students.	Observation of student's emotions as they answer the questions.	The literature emphasizes the importance of supportive services for underserved populations in higher education. Open ended questions allowed the participants to be open and honest about their responses.

Appendix H: Original Coding Themes

ORIGINAL CODING AND THEMES # 3 separate sets of coding to secure themes - 8 themes were originally found and the final theme count is 5.

REPEAT Response to Questions (1st& 2nd interviews)	**Theme**
All responses had an explanation to Questions 1 Please tell me how would you describe your family educational background?& 4 What type of experiences did you enjoy in middle and high school? The connection here is that they all graduated from high school and were encouraged to attend college even though there parents did not attend college. These responses respond to part of the topic of the	**Impact of early on experiences with education.**

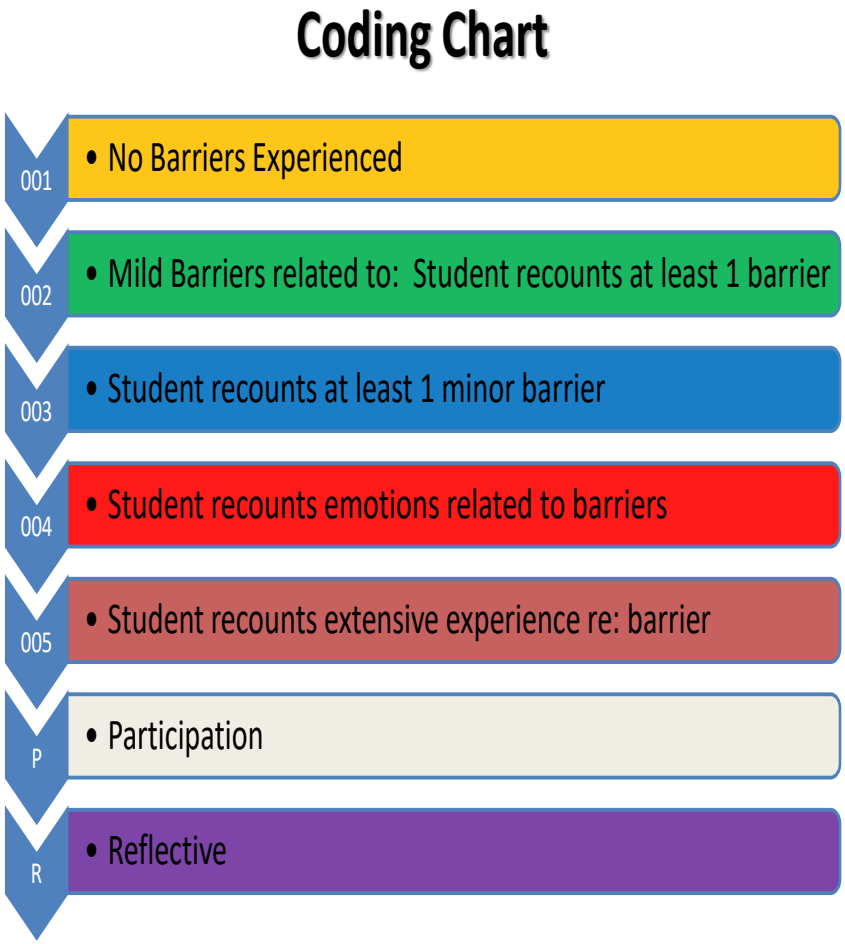
study.	
2 & 3 how would you describe your role as a student? 3 How would you describe your peers and professors? The connection here is that Response to 2 & 3 is that most of the students described their role as a leader/model/good student and gave positive responses regarding faculty support,	**Roles of Faculty and Peer Relationships**
5 How did you decide to attend college and what were your experiences leading up to this point? The connection here is that each of the participants provided reasons surrounding career change, financial gain, and wanting a change as a reason to return to school. These responses respond to part of the topic of the study.	**Benefits of Returning to School**
1 & 2 (second interview) how did you experience academic and personal barriers while attending college? 2 What were the most challenging barriers you faced while attending a higher education institution? The connection here is that each participant stated there barriers and perception of them –Consistency in laying out there barriers as well as repeating the word "barriers" and each participant had an explanation regarding the barriers they faced. These two questions are connected because they are a major part of the research topic.	**Barriers: Experience with academic and personal barriers in higher education and conquering them.**
3 (second interview) what is the most rewarding aspect of attending a higher education institution? 5 out of 6 of the participants stated that the concept of becoming a college graduate was a rewarding experience-Consistency in feeling obtained from gaining a degree.	**Benefits of returning to college**
4 How do you describe the role of a	**The role of a higher education institution-(no consistency in responses**)

higher education institution and is this different from what your learned about education growing up? Each participant gave their own definition related to the role of a higher education institution. No consistency in the role of a higher education institution but the connection will show the perception of a higher education institution and what it means to them.	
5 If employed, how do you manage personal and academic responsibilities while attending college? Each participant gave different answers on how they manage academic and personal barriers. The connection here is that responses speak about the employment status of the participants; they all worked while attending college.	**First-generation and adult learners work while attending college.**
6 & 7 How do you feel your family perceives you as an adult learner attending a higher education?7 What are your experiences when interacting with family members who did not attend college? Each participant response was showed little variation. The connection is that the participants showed a positive relationship with their family members and their opinions about them as adult learners.	**Family members opinions about first-generation adult learners who attend college**

8 What supportive services were available you at your institution; do you feel has helped you complete your degree?	**Needed Supportive Programs**
Frequent Words used in interview responses	
Challenges	Other tools used
Creating balance	Barriers
Feeling overwhelmed	Skills
Seeking support	Completing degree
Math and writing skills	Responsibility

What stands out is that each response stated the above words throughout each individual interview. While transcribing, using the matrix, listening to audio tapes, typing and re-reading them out aloud allowed me to go line from line and bolding words and sentences manually.

Appendix I: Original Coding Themes



Research Question 1: What barriers, if any, do first-generation and adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?

Academic Skills	Time Management	New Skills	Family Responsibilities	Balancing Work Schedule	Participation	Reflexive
* Writing and math Skills	Balancing time between work and school Prioritizing	*Learning new skills Adapting to college setting	* It was very challenging "College changed my life"	Spirituality Reliance on God Feeling drained, tired	* Students were willing to Participate * Timing of interview was good for participants	Researcher was amazed at how students perceived the barriers as a part of life
CODNG						
001	**002**	**003**	**004**	**005**	**P**	**R**
No Barriers Experienced	Mild Barriers related to: Student recounts at least 1 barrier.	Student recounts at least 1 minor barrier.	Student recounts emotions related to barriers.	Student recounts extensive experience	Participation	Reflective

Category Coding & Theme Matrix

The following categories illustrated categories & questions related to barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending S-DC and the final theme that emerged from them. **RQ1**: **What barriers, if any, do first-generation and adult learners face when attending a higher education institution?**

Student experiences with barriers and their awareness about the barriers							**Final Theme**
Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
Code	**002**	**002**	**005**	**002**	**005**	**001**	
Academic Barriers	The most challenging barriers that I faced had to do with me returning to school after 20 years, it was very hard for me but I had to take more time to study. I felt like I was lost, I was scared. I had to	My biggest barrier was my writing skills, I had to learn how to write in the APA format and that was a big challenge for me. It took me 2 1/2 years to learn how to write and I still struggle writing sometimes. I never	My writing and math skills were a problem for me and I could not catch up with the tutors. I had a lot of anxieties. Whenever I went for help they were not there, our schedules did not agree. My personal life was not going well because I got fired while in	The most challenging barriers were finding someone to help me with my assignments, I could not reach the tutors or when I arrived at school they were gone. I was scared because I thought I would fail. It	The most challenging barrier was dealing with financial issues while attending college. It was hard to stay focused in school while trying to figure out where I was going to live permanently. I went to school every day	I don't recall any real barriers. I was able to work as a work study student while attending school and living at the shelter that is right up the street. I was not good in math but I was	**Theme One**: First-gernerati on adult learners experien ce barriers related to fear and anixiety associate d with overcomi ng their own academic and personal paradigm s

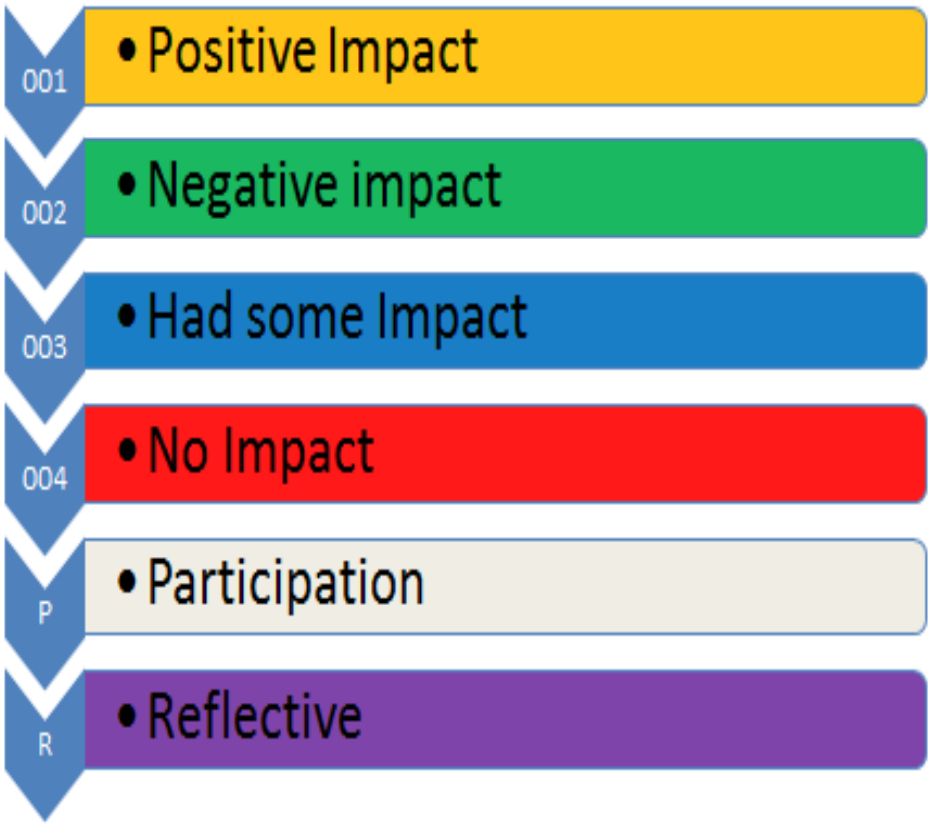
	learn everything all over again because grade school did not prepare for me for anything, I felt like I did not know anything. It is harder to learn when you are older, so that was one of my challenges. (P1)	thought that I would be able to write good enough to pass my English class. Out of fear, I took English 101 two times before I actually passed it and when I did, I received a low C but that was good enough for me because I passed it. It was also hard to find the time to write on my own between working and living in my car because I did not have the appropriate place to	school and my car was repossessed and I had to catch the bus which caused me to miss some classes. Thank God for teachers that worked with me; they were very understanding. I also had to go and see a counselor to deal with my relationship problems with my children. The counselor really helped me deal with some problems that I could not get past. The problems stopped me from completing my	was hard for me because I did not have the best writing skills	I fear of sleeping in my car. But I was able to overcome and stay in school through by trusting God. : I did not have a personal life. I could not go out with my friends, everything was about college	able to get extra help. Personally, I was okay because I had a place to live. The most challenging barrier was overcoming my fears in math class; I was never good at math and I feared the class and the instructor but I was able to confront my fears eventually. I can't do anything without God; he gets all of the credit.	

		write.	assignments at times. I had a lot of problems with math; it was a subject that I always struggled with. Math is tough and it is a subject that has always been a problem for me and probably always will haunt me. I was able to pass it, barely, but I did. I almost dropped out of class because I could not grasp math. I also was a little embarrassed when the instructor called on me and asked me to work out a problem at the board. Even				

			though the college was a setting for adult learners, there were times when I just did				
Coding	001	005	003	003	**002**	**002**	
Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
Adapting & Overcoming Barrier	I prayed my way through. I was determined to complete my goals.	I was determined to complete college in spite of the many problems that arose when I was in school. I was able to overcome my barriers through prayers and perseverance. I had to create a balance between school and my	It took me 2 1/2 years to learn how to write and I still struggle writing sometimes. I never thought that I would be able to write good enough to pass my English class. I took English 101 2 times before I actually passed it and when I did, I	The challenges were part of the process; I did not expect that college would be easy, especially at this age. I did not have anybody that I could go to and talk to about my problems because I did not have any friends that were	Challenges are part of life, if you don't have any problems, then you are not living in reality. Whether or not I was in school or not, I would've been dealing with some kind of problem, so those challenges I faced were no different than	The most challenging barrier was overcoming my fears in math class; I was never good at math and I feared the class and the instructor but I was able to confront my fears eventually. I can't do anything without	**Theme 2:** How students overcame the barriers they were confronted with while attending college.

		personal life	received a low C but that was good enough for me because I passed it. It was also hard to find the time to write on my own between working and living in my car because I did not have the appropriate place to write. I prayed a lot and utilized the computer lab and writing tutors whenever I had time to get to the college before my classes started.	in school or family members that could relate. I wanted to create a balance in my life. I was able to overcome them through perseverance and prayer. I prayed a lot and I know that my prayers were answered because I made it and I am really proud of myself. I was determined to finish what I started.	anything else in life. Challenges do not stop you from completing your goals.	God; he gets all of the credit. I was able to persevere with God.	

Coding Chart I I



Research Question 2: How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners' impact their academic and personal life?

College Experience	Improved Quality of Life	Improved Skills	Financially Stable	Participation	Reflexive
*Positive Impact Improved Self-Esteem	Improved finances New Career	* Learning new skills Adapting to college setting	I was able to make more money "College changed my life"	* Students were willing to participate * Timing of interview was good for participants	Researcher was glad to hear about the positive impact that college had on students.
Coding					
001	**002**	**003**	**004**	**P**	**R**
Positive Impact	Negative impact	Had some Impact	No Impact	Participation	Reflexive

Category Coding& Theme Matrix

The following categories illustrated categories related to barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending S-DC and the final theme that emerged from them
RQ2: How do barriers faced by first-generation adult learners' impact their academic and personal life?

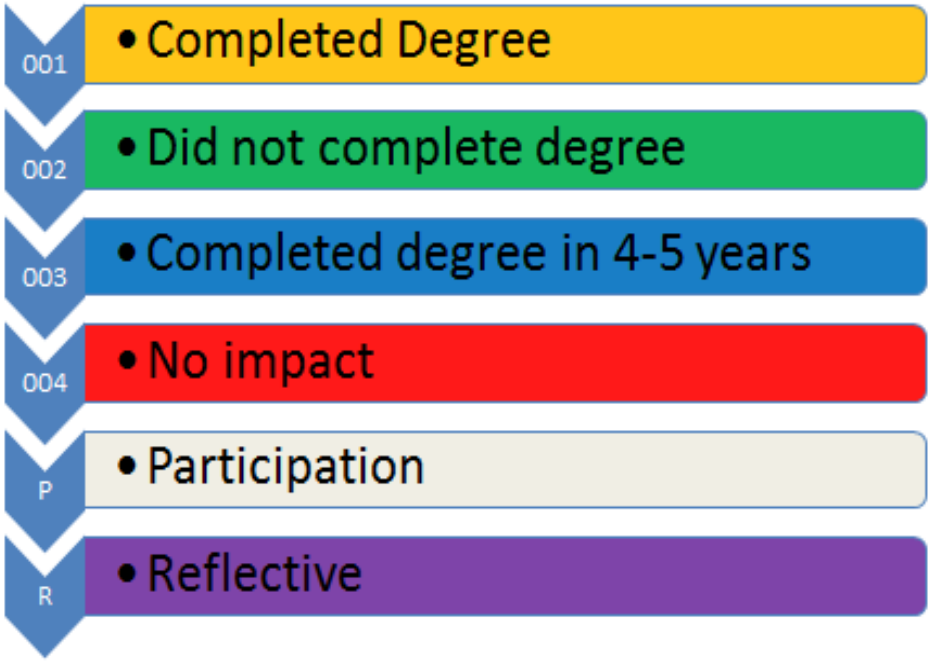
The impact of barriers on student academic and personal life.							**Final Theme**
Coding	001	001	001	001	001	002	
Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
Impact of Academic Barriers	College was refreshing to me because it literally changed my life. I did not	I learned so much about myself when I was in college	I always wanted more for myself but did not know how to improve	I made through all of my challenges, I attended college right out of high school but I did	Completing my degree was the most rewarding part for me. It was a	I was on drugs and homeless. I stayed at the Helping	**Theme three**: How participants reflected on the challenges they

	like the person I was before going to college because I had a lot of problems that stemmed from my childhood and eventually led to me using drugs. Even though I came from a good family, I rebelled against my upbringing and wanted to make fast money but I did not consider the consequences of my behavior. I decided	and improved my self-esteem. It was not easy but I was able to start where I left off in high school with my learning process. I was able to take what I learned in college and improve my reading and writing skills. I was homeless but now I have a job, car, and my own apartment and I	myself and never thought about going back to school. I overcame my obstacles. Getting my education has improved my whole outlook on life because I learned so much and I have improved my writing skills that I need for my job today. My relationship with my family has also improve	not finish because I had responsibilities. I was on drugs for a while but eventually got myself together and it pushed me to do better. I was determined to change my life and get an education. I wanted my children to understand the importance of getting an education and I had to set the tone for them	challenge but it was all worth it. I learned a lot such as writing, research, and understanding different life views. The obstacles were no different than the other ones I faced in my everyday life;I overcame them just like I overcame the barriers in college.	Up Mission for men and was able to get clean and focus on my academic goals. I was able to get my high school diploma and then finally decided to go to college. I heard about the college from other people and took the big step to enroll in the college and it was the best	were able to overcome and the impact of education on their personal and academic life

	to come to school after standing outside of the college and looking at people go into the building that looked like me and I thought that if they could do it, I could do it. I used to sell drugs and do drugs, so this area was my territory, yep; I sold drugs right across the street from the college. One day I decided to check out the building	am not going to stop here. I am going back to get my Masters in Public Health. I never thought that what I learned in college and improv e my reading and writing skills. I was homele ss but now I have a job, car, and my own apartme nt and I am not going to stop here. I was able to	d since they could see that I could do more and actually take care of my family without asking them for anythin g			thing I could have done. I don't recall any real barriers. I was able to work as a work study student while attendin g school and living at the shelter that is right up the street. I was not good in math but I was able to get extra help. Persona lly, I was okay because I had a	

	and went in and started talking to people and before I knew it I was registered. I never thought that I would be attending college but look at me now. I was able to overcome my barriers. I am on my way to graduate school; God is good! (P1 began to get emotional as he discussed his experiences).	persevere through my challenges.				place to live.	

Coding Chart III



Research Question 3: **How do barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners impact their ability to complete their degree?**

Student Ability to complete degree	Ability to stay focused	Time frame to complete degree	Normal Life Challenges	Participation	Reflective
* Students initially did not feel confident about completing college until they were able to overcome their barriers	Motivated to walk across the stage College setting was conducive to the adult learning environment.	Normal years spent in college was 5 years	Barriers were perceived as a normal part of life. Most rewarding was walking across the stage.	* Students were willing to participate * Timing of interview was good for participants	Researcher was glad to learn that the students were able to complete their academic goals.

CODING					
001	**002**	**003**	**004**	**P**	**R**
Completed Degree	Did not complete degree	Completed degree in 4-5 years	No impact	Participant	Reflective

The following categories illustrated categories related to barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending S-DC and the final theme that emerged from them
RQ3: How do barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners' impact their ability to complete their degree?

Student experience with barriers do not impact their ability to graduate							**Final Theme**
Coding	001, 003	001, 003	001, 003	001, 003	001, 003	001, 003	
Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
Perception of Completi	I did not think that I was	It was not an easy process	The college setting was different in	The most rewarding aspect was	Completing my degree was the	The most rewarding was	Theme 4: Student

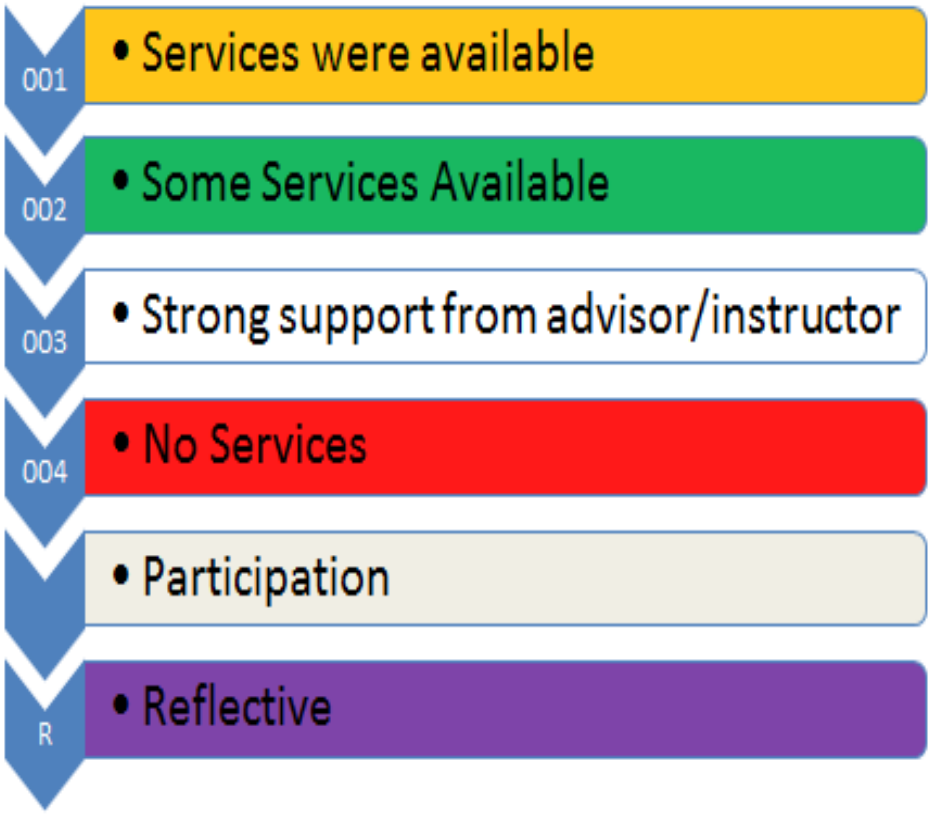
ng Degree	going to make it across the stage because I had so many things going against me. When I first enrolled in college, I did not think that I would be eligible to get financial aid because of my past life experience. When I found out that I was able to get a loan, it was the best day of my life. I also had other problems associate	because I thought I was not going to be able to graduate, it took me 5 years to complete my degree. I started school and then had to stop because of my personal problems but eventually came back to finish. I knew starting college would be difficult for me due to my personal problems and academic challenges but I was able to persevere due to my faith in God and myself.	a good way. I saw people that were my age and had the same goals that I had, everyone supported each other. As I attended the college, I was able to see myself graduating from college and accomplishing goals that no one else in my family was able to do. College only challenged me to do more for myself. I think I made it because I was not going to let anyone or anything get in my way	getting the degree and watching my kids watch me complete my goals. I really think that I was able to persevere because of the instructors and my peers. I know that I had personal problems and I knew that I would struggle through my courses but I was determined to finish. I started and then stopped several times, but I eventually finished with the help of others. I see problems as a way of	most rewarding part for me. It was a challenge but it was all worth it. I learned a lot such as writing, research, and understanding different life views. The obstacles were no different than the other ones I faced in my everyday life.	getting to the point of graduation. I never thought I would graduate from college. The most rewarding was getting to the point of graduation. I never thought I would graduate from college. The challenges were normal.	s did not perceive the obstacles they faced in college no different than the obstacles they were already dealing with in their personal life

	d with my academics but I was able to overcome them. I did not think that I would be able to learn and apply new skills but I was and feel good about it. The most rewarding was when I was able to walk across the stage and get my degree. I was so happy when I walked across the stage and was able to accomplish my goals because	The barriers I faced while in college had a huge impact on the way I felt about completing college and the reality of completing my goals. Realistically, I was not the normal college student; I was a lot older than some of the students and did not have the resources I needed. The barriers were no normal for me. My parents never completed things they		life and going to college was no different than dealing paying bills with money I do not have, raising my children in the ghetto, or dealing with my dysfunctional family. In other words, the challenges did not stop me			

	most people counted me out when I was really young. No one ever thought that I would be a college graduate. The college setting also allowed me the opportunity to see people that looked like me with the same goals. I was locked up for most of my life and felt good because my parents were there to	started and I thought that I would be the same. I was really proud of myself because I finally finished something instead of quitting					

	see me get my degree and not going to jail. I went in as a boy, and came out as a man!						

Coding Chart IV



Research Question 4: What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners?

Availability of Services	Types of Services	Support from Instructors	College Setting	Participation	Reflexive
Math & Writing Services	Tutoring, Daycare, Wellness Center	Instructors were very supportive	The college was conducive to learning		The students had a lot of fear associated with academic skills.
CODING					
001	**002**	**003**	**004**	**P**	**R**
Services were available	Some services were available	Strong support from advisor/instructor	No Services		

The following categories illustrated categories related to barriers experienced by first-generation adult learners attending S-DC and the final theme that emerged from them **RQ4:**What supportive services offered in higher education contribute to addressing the barriers faced by first-generation and adult learners?

Students understand the importance of supportive services.							**Final Theme**
Coding	001	001	001	001	001	004	
Participant	P1	P2	P3	P4	P5	P6	
Availability of Supportive Services							Theme 5: Students believed the services that were available to them made a difference.
There were several services available and I used all of them, especially the writing center. I also worked with a tutor that really helped me. The tutor took her time to sit with me	All of the services wereaccessible and good for me. I was able to get help from the tutors with my writing and math skills. The tutors were very helpful. I was even able to get assistance with finding housing and counseling	I used think I used the tutoring services more because I had some papers that I needed to work on. I also used the Wellness Center when I needed to talk to	I had the support of my teachers and other services such as the writing lab and wellness center. Without the services, I don't think that I would	I think I used all of them because I needed the extra help. I used the Writing Lab, Work Study Program, and the Wellness Center and they were all	I remember when I had to bring my granddaughter to school with me because my I was babysitting and my daughter did not get home in time to get her before my class started. I took her in the class with me and was told that		

and teach me how to write. I wish there were more people available in the tutoring services and available during the time I needed them. If I had to change anything about the services, it would be the time that they opened the offices. I could not always complete my paper on time because the writing center was not open by the time I got off work and made it to the college. The times when the center was	from the Wellness Center. The supportive services were right on-time, and really helped me out. (P2)	someone. The college was a good school and I would recommend it to any adult learners. (P3)	have been able to graduate on time. My daughter is now in college and she does not need additional services like I did. I think it is important for people to have additional services if they have been out of school for a long time because you just need the extra support. The instructors did not have a lot of time to work with me on an individual basis but the writing	very helpful. I don't know what I would have done without the extra services.	children were not allowed in the classroom. I went downstairs to see if I could leave her there until class started but it was closed. I know that my class did not start until 8 pm but I thought the daycare would be open late since students were still taking class. I was really upset and found out what my daughter had to go through when looking for a babysitter. This experience left a bad taste in my mouth regarding the services at the school. I did use the writing two times but I		

open, I had to go to class and it made it difficult for me to be in 2 places at the same time. (P1)			center was there just for that, they worked directly with me (P4)		was not impressed with the tutors because they did not appear to understand the APA process. I believe that the college could have offered more services that are available to meet the needs of an adult learner.		