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Supports and Services Helpful to Working Adult Nursing Students

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This is to certify that the doctoral study by

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Walden University
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Abstract

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Cheryl Murray Green

MSN, Indiana Wesleyan, 2007

BSN, Spalding University, 1988

Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

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Abstract

The United States has experienced historically low graduation rates in public and private 2-year, degree-granting institutions. Many of these institutions are community colleges, which account for 60% of all student enrollment. This study was conducted to explore supports and services that may be helpful to working adult students over the age of 25 enrolled in a 2-year associate degree nursing program in a community college. Tinto's interactionalist theory of student persistence and retention and constructivist theory were the conceptual frameworks for this qualitative case study. The two guiding questions were focused on the types of support that would be helpful for degree completion and service improvements that would most effectively assist students to graduate. Data were collected using semistructured interviews and observations with 10 participants who volunteered from a bound system. Requirement for participation included being over the age of 25 and enrolled in the 2-year associate degree nursing program. Data were analyzed using a phenomenological reduction process and cross-sectional analysis to identify convergent and divergent themes in the data. The findings of this study highlight 5 overarching themes as described by the participants: support system, barriers to education, effect of work, engagement in school services, and recommendations for college improvement. The findings of this study could be helpful to administrators and policy makers in developing supports and services that promote retention and degree completion of students in the 2-year associate degree nursing programs. Completion of a 2-year associate-degree nursing program promotes financial viability and meets the workforce needs of the community.

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Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

I explored supports and services that might be helpful to working adult students (WAS) over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associate degree program in a local community college. Although enrollment in postsecondary institutions has increased, graduation rates have remained low across colleges and universities in the United States (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2016). WAS over the age of 25 now constitute over 60% of the postsecondary student population (Smith, Engelke, & Swanson, 2016; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Compared with younger students, WAS experience additional barriers to degree completion more frequently such as obligations to work and family (Stevens, 2014). Because the supports and services that WAS need to be successful in higher education differ from those that are helpful to younger students, researchers have expressed the importance of exploring the needs of this segment of the student population (Rabourn, Shoup, & BrckaLorenz, 2015). Understanding the needs of WAS can be helpful to administrators in community colleges as they develop supports and services that promote successful degree completion for this student population.

Background

Despite increasing enrollment, the overall graduation rate for public 2-year degree-granting institutions is 20%, and the overall graduation rate for private 2-year degree-granting institutions is 58% (NCES, 2016). Barriers to degree completion may be of particular concern to WAS over the age of 25, who now represent over 60% of the postsecondary student population (Smith et al., 2016; Staley & Trinkle, 2011).

Compared with younger students, WAS experience additional challenges to degree completion, including work and family obligations (Stevens, 2014); however, few researchers have investigated the factors that promote or detract from degree completion for WAS. Anders, Frazier, and Shallcross (2012) suggested that community college students need personalized student services to promote retention. Further, researchers have identified a need for additional research to explore the supports and services that will promote retention and degree completion for community college students and WAS (Ellis-O'Quinn, 2012; Fontaine, 2014; Lo, Reeves, Jenkins, & Parkman, 2016).

Problem Statement

Evidence of the Problem at the Local Level

Consistent with national trends, WAS constitute 70% of the student body at the study site of interest (NCES, 2013). According to the study site's administrator, the graduation rate was 40% for the academic year ending in 2014. Students completed degrees at this low rate, despite several retention initiatives implemented by the college, including enhanced student services and increased faculty support of students. Faculty support activities included 1-hour weekly review sessions that were scheduled outside of class time, review of current students' Health Education Systems Incorporated scores, meetings with assigned at-risk advisees, and involvement of at-risk students within committees in the classroom. Health Education Systems Incorporated scores are a reliable predictor of student success throughout the program and passing the National Council Licensure Examination for Registered Nurses (Knauss & Willson, 2013). The school also provided web-assisted classes, remediation for all students, and a nurse student

success coordinator. Nonfaculty employees were available to students to provide explanation of and direction to available supportive resources.

WAS represent the majority of students enrolled in the 2-year associate-degree nursing program at the study site. Despite scheduled reviews, individual appointments, and student success programs, the WAS tend to use services the least; low use of school support services may suggest that available services do not fully meet the needs of WAS (Jameson & Fusco, 2014; Smith et al., 2016).

Evidence of the Problem from the Professional Literature

Researchers have reported poor degree completion rates at community colleges, and some have discussed the challenges WAS experience in higher education (Jameson & Fusco, 2014; Karsten & DiCicco-Bloom, 2014; Stevens, 2014). However, few researchers have explored the challenges to degree completion experienced by WAS at community colleges enrolled in a 2-year associate degree nursing program. Jameson and Fusco (2014) measured math anxiety, efficacy, and self-concept among traditional and nontraditional students and found that nontraditional students had lower self-efficacy and increased anxiety as compared to the student under the age of 25 with no or minimal nontraditional characteristics. Additionally, Jameson and Fusco claimed that age of the student increases the relationship between anxiety and efficacy devoid of an identified major, thus impacting student retention. Steven (2014) identified barriers and constraints of traditional and nontraditional students and found the nontraditional student struggled with life and family events that decreased the time available to study. Further, nontraditional students face challenges in areas such as finance and technology.

Realizing the trend in higher education enrollment, college and universities should be prepared to identify and focus on the supports and services identified by the WAS. Smith et al. (2016) studied student retention in a 2-year associate nursing program, finding a significant relationship between the presence of a support system, remedial courses, family obligations, and work in students between 26 to 30 years of age. My research supports the findings of previous studies.

Specific challenges for adult learners. Older students can be served more effectively if school leadership considers students' circumstances (Stevens, 2014). Adult learners might not have enough exposure to technology that is regularly used in colleges and universities. Most adult learners have reported working full-time hours, which create demands on their time that interfere with studying. Adult learners have also reported conflict between family obligations and school requirements (Stevens, 2014). Jameson and Fusco (2014) found that adult learners were more likely to have lower academic self-efficacy and higher anxiety associated with education which created barriers to academic performance specific to the adult learner group. Other characteristics of adult learners is that they tend to have higher levels of academic engagement, are more likely to enroll part-time, and are more likely to take their courses online compared with younger students (Rabourn et al., 2015). Overall, the findings regarding adult learners have indicated that they experience greater life demands compared with younger students, and more research is needed to understand ways in which college leadership can better support students to reach success (Rabourn et al., 2015; Stevens, 2014).

Student services and retention of community college students. In a study that included "nearbies" or students who almost finished their degrees at community colleges, Bers and Schuetz (2014) found that participants reported poor quality advising services. Participants suggested that higher quality advising would have helped them to identify and register for courses that counted toward their selected degree programs (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Participants also expressed that scheduling with advisors was challenging and often required long waits (Bers & Schuetz, 2014). Those in this student population have also expressed that the types of student services available to them were not helpful (Wang, 2013). Ellis-O'Quinn (2012) found that enrollment in an orientation course in the first semester was not associated with retention. Anders et al. (2012) suggested that community colleges need to provide outreach services to support students to manage the effects of stressful life events as a means of promoting their academic success.

Retention programs for two-year nursing students. Addressing students' academic needs encourages retention (Barra, 2013). Barra (2013) discovered that by providing a free, noncredit, medical mathematics class, along with individualized tutoring African American students who participated regularly in the medical mathematics intervention were significantly more likely to complete the licensed practical nurse program successfully compared with African American students who did not receive the intervention.

Research has been conducted on retention programs; however, the results are not always conclusive. Fontaine (2014) investigated the effects of the Northern Nevada

Nursing Retention Program, a comprehensive retention program for 2-year nursing students. The Northern Nevada Nursing Retention Program included multiple supports for students, including orientation, learning communities, mentoring, counseling, tutoring, and an individualized academic plan (Fontaine, 2014). Although students who participated in the intervention had higher retention rates, Fontaine found older students were less likely to finish the program compared with younger students. Additionally, Fontaine could not determine specific aspects of the intervention that were effective in promoting retention.

Multiple barriers to successful degree completion for WAS and community college students is noted in research (Anders et al. 2012; Barra, 2013; Fontaine, 2014). Older students are more likely to experience greater demands on their time, which creates challenges to academic progress. Community college students have reported poor student services and advising and suggested that these had adversely affected their academic progress. Inadequate academic preparation was associated with low degree completion rates in community colleges and found that students at community colleges are more likely to experience stressful life events that adversely affect their academic progress (Anders et al., 2012; Barra, 2013; Fontaine, 2014). The literature did not provide clear insight into the specific supports and services of WAS attending community colleges as they work toward a 2-year associate degree in nursing. Therefore, this study addresses supports and services that nursing students in a 2-year associate degree nursing program felt would be helpful to assist them through some of the barriers they faced while attending the program.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study was to explore supports and services that are helpful to WAS over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associate degree program in a local community college. The study design is a qualitative case study using a bound sample. A case study provides insight and an in-depth understanding as determined by the participants closest to the area of interest (Lodico et al., 2010). I explored the perceptions and insight of participants while attending a 2-year associate degree nursing program

Research Questions

The overall question that guided the research was the following: What type of supports may be helpful as students work toward completion of a 2-year nursing degree program? At the local site, as well as on a national level, postsecondary students graduate at a low rate despite school services and supports to promote their success. Older students experience different life circumstances compared with younger students; therefore, different types of services and supports from the college are needed to promote their educational success. There has been insufficient research on the barriers to retention for WAS in a 2-year associate degree nursing program and the support this student population needed to complete degree programs successfully. The following research questions guided the exploration of WAS perspectives regarding their needs for support and assistance from the college:

RQ1: What types of support would be helpful to WAS to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

RQ2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS toward completion of a

2-year associate nursing degree?

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework that guided my inquiry and analysis for this study was

Tinto's (1993) interactionalist theory of student persistence and retention. Tinto

proposed that students enter higher education with a variety of personal characteristics

that affect their initial commitment to the school. These characteristics include individual

factors (i.e., age, gender, and race), background variables (i.e., socioeconomic status),

and previous academic achievement experiences (Tinto, 1993). Tinto posited that a

student's initial commitment to the institution is positively or negatively affected by the

degree of social and academic integration the student experienced. According to Tinto's

theory, students who experience greater degrees of integration both socially and

academically are more likely to persist in their studies resulting in higher rates of

retention compared with those less integrated. Students' learning and persistence are

positively influenced by involvement with faculty and peers both inside and outside of

the classroom (Tinto, 1993). Social and academic integration within the classroom is

especially important because outside obligations (i.e., work, family) limit adult students'

availability to achieve social and academic integration outside of the classroom (Tinto,

1997). Tinto's (1997) proposition that adult students must cope with obligations that

create obstacles to persistence and degree completion is consistent with research (e.g.,

Braxton, Bray, & Berger, 2000; Stevens, 2014). Tinto's theory provided a framework for

examining ways in which desired services and supports can enhance persistence and

degree completion by promoting social and academic integration for WAS enrolled in a 2-year associate degree nursing program.

The constructivist theory also guided this qualitative case study. Cognitive or radical constructionism as a theory began with Piaget (1960) and was concerned with the individual process of constructing knowledge, which researchers have believed to be constructed or discovered "idiosyncratically" (Liu & Matthews, 2005). Cognitive or radical constructivists believe in learner or discovery centered learning and hold the conviction that perception is indeed reality.

Nature of the Study

I sought a learner-centered, inquiry-based approach to data collection, as participants were asked to describe what they required for the successful completion of their degrees or certificates in a 2-year nursing program. Using the self-generated responses, I sought to use the constructivist model of inquiry, which was modeled to observe participants' feelings, behaviors, and attitudes within the setting. Because there was no "true" knowledge according to constructivist theory, the extent to which the data were transferable, dependable, and confirmable as valid perceptual responses determined the validity of the study data.

Definitions

Adult learning: Adult learning is a process in which an adult (over 20 years of age) acquires knowledge and expertise in a subject area (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 2005).

Graduation rates: Graduation rates refer to the number of students who graduate from a 2-year degree-granting, certificate-granting institution, or a 4-year degree-granting institution within 150% of the normal time for completion (NCES, 2016).

Retention rates: Retention rates refer to the number of students who return to the institution the successive fall (NCES, 2016).

Support: Support signifies giving assistance, aid, or help (Levett-Jones & Bourgeois, 2015). Emotional, clinical practice, or assistance with theoretical understanding and/or decision-making are ways to support the nursing students (Levett-Jones & Bourgeois, 2015).

Working adult student (WAS): The WAS is considered at least 25 years of age and consumes financial responsibilities while recognizing the need to gain knowledge or expertise in a career or vocation (Knowles et al., 2005).

Assumptions

The constructivist approach indicates that knowledge is gained through experience and perceptions (Kemp, 2012). Participants answer queries, are observed in their natural setting, and the information gleaned from said observation is built using inductive analysis (Hatch, 2002). Perceptions of students who are enrolled in a 2-year associate degree nursing program in a community college can be better understood through dialogue and observation. Considering the increase in enrollment across colleges and universities of WAS, parallel enrollment at the site of study, and low retention rates, it is necessary to gain insight into the behaviors and experiences of students working toward completion of a 2-year associate degree in nursing. It is through interaction and

observation that a researcher comes to understand the perspectives through inquiry. Underlying assumptions for this study include participants being truthful and accurate, remaining unbiased as the researcher, and the confidentiality of the participants being upheld.

Scope and Delimitations

The scope of this study included an inquiry approach to data collection to explore the participants' perspective on what was needed to be successful in a 2-year associate degree nursing program. The study was limited to students in a 2-year associate degree program at a single study site. The extent to which the data were transferable was determined by the validity of the study data. The complex nature of case study data is a challenge for construct validity (Yin, 2013). In addressing this challenge, three methods were used: using different sources of data, establishing a series of verification during data collection, and requesting participants' checking of the results during the analysis of data.

Limitations of the Study

Limitations of this study include the small sampling size of participants. Although 10 participants could provide an adequate amount of data for analysis, a larger sampling size provides a more coherent amount of data that might highlight a greater complexity of needs for the WAS in a 2-year associate degree nursing program. Other barriers that the participants experienced may have been highlighted. Because of these features of the sample, it could not be assured that findings would generalize to students at other institutions or to students who were enrolled in different programs.

Second, the demographics of the study was from one local community college. This information might be construed incorrectly if applied as a generalization for this group of students. A larger sampling size would provide a better analysis. There might be institutional factors more than demographic factors. Colleges with higher retention rates must extend knowledge to colleges with lower retention rates.

The study was only inclusive of participants who were currently enrolled WAS. WAS who were not successful in the completion of their degrees might offer important perspectives. These perspectives could include the factors that influenced them when they were enrolled in community college. Because it was outside of the scope of the current study to recruit such participants, these perspectives were not included in this study.

Significance

Enrollment in higher education was at its highest in 2014 in 2-year degree-granting and certificate-granting institutions that were both public and private (NCES, 2016). Private for-profit institutions have seen an increase in enrollment by 81% for the period 1996 through 2010 and are projected to increase by another 15% through the year 2023 (NCES, 2016). The number of students aged 25 and older were projected to increase by 20%, as compared to 12% for students who were under the age of 25, by the end of 2023 (NCES, 2016). The study site experienced this same phenomenon, as approximately 70% of the students enrolled at the time of this study were 25 years of age or older.

A lack of evidence exists for the factors that reduce attrition and promote completion for WAS in a 2-year associate degree nursing program. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge for the WAS in nursing, by identifying support services that are helpful for this population. The U.S. Bureau of Statistics (2014) projects the current number of nurses will not meet the future demands of the profession within the decade. Improvement and addition of available support services for the WAS will promote completion and strengthen the needed workforce.

Summary

The low degree completion rate at the study site, and in colleges and universities nationwide, indicate that many students faced challenges as they worked toward their goals of obtaining a higher education. Students who complete their 2-year nursing program degrees will be better positioned to gain meaningful and specialized employment. An increase in the number of nursing program graduates would help to address the nationwide nursing shortage. Both students and the community must understand ways in which colleges could promote successful degree completion for WAS in the 2-year nursing program.

WAS face challenges with balancing school, family, and work, which increase the potential to be at-risk for completion (Stevens, 2014). Based on the needs of adult learners in comparison to traditional aged students, Stevens (2014) suggested that older students would be served more effectively if administrative and faculty leadership considered their circumstances. WAS identified the need for higher quality advising when choosing subjects and degree programs (Bers & Schuetz, 2014; Karsten & Dicicco-

Bloom, 2014). Researchers have suggested that future research be focused on the

different kinds of supports and services that might increase retention and course

completion for community college students and WAS (Ellis-O'Quinn, 2012; Fontaine,

2014; Lo et al., 2016). The literature review did not show clear insight into the supports

and services of WAS attending community colleges as they work toward their degrees. I

addressed this gap in understanding by conducting the current study.

This chapter provides an overview of this problem at both the local level and as

described in the research literature. The purpose of the study, the research questions

guiding the study, and the identified theoretical frameworks were also discussed. This

chapter provided a brief review of the research literature that is relevant to these research

questions.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Recent economic downturns, an aging workforce, longer lifespans, and a shifting economy that has adjusted its focuses from industry to service and information, has resulted in a demographic shift of college enrollment that favors learners ages 25 and older. Most return to postsecondary instruction to obtain skills and certifications in areas such as service and technology to gain a competitive edge in the work force (Aslanian, 2001; Bryant, 2016; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Specific to institutions of higher learning in the United States, this demographic shift includes significant increases in the enrollment of nontraditional students who are now predicted as the fastest growing population for the future. Many seek training and skill acquisition either to pursue new employment opportunities or to advance in their careers without having to quit their current jobs or put undue strain on their families (Bryant, 2016; Kimmel, Gaylor, Grubbs, & Hayes, 2012). The elevated enrollment of nontraditional learners has led to college and university leadership attempting to adjust to the growing demand, and adult learners seeking their places within a system designed to meet the needs of traditional learners (Colvin, 2013; Gordon, 2014; Northall, Ramjan, Everett, & Salamonson 2016).

The lower cost and ease of entry into community colleges has meant that adult students are entering these educational institutions at record rates, and community education is working to make it easier for adult learners to juggle work, family, and school more effectively. To meet this need, colleges and universities across the country have expanded their programs to include distance learning and other nontraditional degree programs with varying success (Castillo, 2013; Kimmel et al., 2012; Pontes &

Pontes, 2012). In recent years, researchers have begun to look at programs and processes that mitigate challenges to persistence and stimulate academic motivation to assist in the retention of adult learners (Barra, 2013; Cummins, 2014; Howley, Chavis, & Kester, 2013; Kasworm, 2014).

In light of the current state of the economy and the American workforce, current researchers have suggested that the healthcare industry would need over 1 million registered nurses to fill the projected vacant positions across the United States by the year 2020 (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013; Chard, 2013). The problem that this study addressed was poor rates of retention and degree completion of working adults in community colleges and at the study site. Less than 30% of study site students completed the 2-year associates degree, and as the study site's student body's average age increases, issues of attrition and retention became more complex (Fontaine, 2014; Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System, 2015).

The gap in practice was related to a lack of research linking the problem of adult learner attrition with nursing education. Although extensive research was conducted over the last decade to observe the problem of adult learner persistence, retention, and attrition, there was a lack of empirical research connecting both nursing education and strategies for adult learner course and degree completion. The goal of this study was to gain an understanding of nursing students' attitudes and beliefs about retention and to gain insight into strategies that the students at the study site considered effective in raising graduation rates.

Literature Search Strategy

I used the online databases Academic Search Premier, Business Source Complete, EBSCO host, Education Research Complete, Educational Resource Information Center (ERIC), Google Scholar, and ProQuest Education Journals to write the literature review. The key search terms used in the various databases included *adult learners, adult students, working adult students, nontraditional learner attrition, community college, retention strategies, and rates of attrition, nursing education, Tinto's interactionalist theory,* and *constructivist theory*.

The majority of works in the review were published between the years of 2012 and 2018 to ensure that the information was relevant to the current state of the literature. Research on WAS retention in the field of nursing was scarce. The research found resulted in the use of earlier and seminal works relevant to the current study. Seminal works that included the barriers to success and motivation of adult students and the relation to persistence and retention were used to account for gaps in the research.

The first section of the review is focused on research studies related to the theoretical framework, which includes Tinto's (1993) interactionalist theory of student persistence and retention as well as constructivist theory. Subsequent themes will provide discussion of (a) changes in college enrollment among WAS, (b) community colleges and attrition, (c) barriers to retention, (d) WAS and persistence, (e) promoting retention of WAS, and (f) nursing education and retention of WAS. The final section of the literature review will include the summary and conclusion.

Conceptual Framework

Vygotsky (1967), a leader in the social or realist constructivism, proposed that learning was a result of a learner's "acculturation into their learning environment" while finding their role within the environment (Liu & Matthews, 2005, p. 20). The constructivist theory indicates that knowledge of the phenomena is gained through the participants in the study and the researchers; this theory involves a concern for the legitimacy of this knowledge. The theory posits that when decisions about procedures are made in compliance with the researcher's intention to present legitimate knowledge and concern for the verification of issues related to the inquiry, knowledge can be deemed legitimate. The extent to which the knowledge gained is acceptable, according to the constructivist theory, relates to transferability, dependability, and confirmability (Kemp, 2012).

Researchers should adhere to the constructivist idea of praxis, integration of theory and practice, during the research process. Praxis is concerned with social change, and studies, by nature, promote change. Researchers must ensure that the Western idea of praxis does not harm participants, particularly in the international arena where western ideals are not the "norm" for political, social, and ethical change (Kemp, 2012).

Researchers who are using qualitative inquiry can use the constructivist theory to ensure that their data are viewed as legitimate and the methodological criteria are trustworthy and authentic, thereby assisting with its acceptance in the research and academic communities (Kasworm, 2010). Researchers who use a constructivist

theoretical framework often use a qualitative approach and collect data through interviews, case studies, surveys, or narratives as datasets.

Examples of researchers using a constructivist approach include Shackelford and Maxwell (2012), who used a social constructivist theoretical framework in their study on building an online community within graduate online education and made note of Vygotsky's (1967) understanding of learning as a process in which "a learner constructs new meaning through active involvement" (p. 4). The authors used the constructivist framework to examine how to use a learner-centered approach to knowledge acquisition through learner-learner interaction (Shackelford & Maxwell, 2012). Moreover, Kasworm (2005) used social constructivist framework theory to explore student identities and the way they are culturally and socially mediated (p. 3). As is typical of social constructivist research, qualitative study data are obtained through learner descriptions of their perceptions of the phenomenon understudy.

Educational research, such as the current study, must be "transparent, theoretically appropriate, and methodologically and analytically strong" to gain acceptance of their findings, and the constructivist theoretical framework provides that legitimacy (Johnson, 2014, p. 100). Charmaz (2000) determined that the researcher must stay near to the participant by stating their words as they said them and maintaining their story as truth throughout the study. Because I sought validity of student-centered experiences, a constructivist approach was used.

Review of Relevant Literature

Literature on WAS attrition shows the changing demographics in U.S. colleges and universities. Economic uncertainty and job loss have led adults to enroll in postsecondary educational institutions at record numbers, a trend that is not projected to slow in the next four years (Kimmel et al., 2012), pushing colleges and universities to adjust to a new reality. Most adult learners are now attending community colleges across the United States, and the resulting issues of persistence, retention, and degree completion are at the forefront of the movement within postsecondary schools as leadership adjust to the influx of adult learners. The available literature indicates that adult learners come with complications that young adults do not, such as inflexible work schedules, childcare, and family time concerns. Leadership in community colleges are trying to determine the best way to ease these concerns. Researchers have indicated that programs designed to increase persistence and slow rates of attrition are not necessarily helpful to adult students (Rabourn et al., 2015). Future researchers should examine programs that assist in the improvement of learner persistence, retention, and certificate and degree completion.

Changes in College Enrollment among WAS

The recession of 2008 to 2009 has sparked a renewed interest in college enrollment for young and adult students (Kimmel et al., 2012). In 2009, as U.S. unemployment reached its peak, community colleges had an influx of new enrollments, as the young and old sought to gain skills or credentials to obtain employment in more secure areas of the U.S. job market (Kimmel et al., 2012). Though the recession has

resulted in significant increases in young adult student enrollment, the 2008 to 2009

recession was cited as causing the U.S. baby boomer population to struggle to gain access

to retirement (White & DiSilvestro, 2013). This lack of certainty about the future has

resulted in an increase in the enrollment of students aged 65 or older as they return to

school in search of skills to enter new careers or to update skills necessary to maintain

their current employment (White & DiSilvestro, 2013). In addition, nontraditional

students aged 25 and over have overtaken young adults in the predicted percentage of

future enrollments (Phillips, 2013). The NCES (2013) predicted a 19% increase in adult

student enrollment by the year 2017, and studies have shown that over a third of students,

now enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities, are aged 35 and above (Aslanian, 2001;

Dill & Henley, 1998; Kimmel, Gaylor, & Hayes, 2014a; Phillips, 2013).

The lower cost of attending community colleges or online degree programs, rather

than at typical 4-year institutions has played a role in the increase of adult students in

postsecondary education, which addresses the high rates of unemployment, a tightened

credit market, and the rising cost of living (Kimmel et al., 2012). The lower tuition cost,

advances in global competition and new parameters designed to make student loans more

obtainable, has meant more adult learners have begun to take advantage of and enter

community colleges and other institutions of higher learning at much higher rates

compared to in the past (Kimmel et al., 2012).

Community Colleges and Attrition

Traditionally, community colleges in the United States were akin to junior

colleges and were housed in local high schools as a low-cost way to further the high

school education (Topper & Powers, 2013). Although Americans in the 21st century tend to think of community colleges as a way to enlarge the population of students who have access to postsecondary education, community colleges were originally designed to limit access to higher education through vocational training (Beach, 2012). Community colleges eventually became the brick and mortar institutions of today. These institutions are most known for presenting students with both vocational and academic training related to local industries and for providing low cost higher education (St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Topper & Powers, 2013).

Community colleges are a vital component of the American system of higher education. These serve about 30% of the college population and are the only institutions of higher learning open to all people regardless of academic skill, age, gender, religious affiliation, sexual preference, or ethnicity (Schneider & Yin, 2012). However, community colleges are not graduating students at an acceptable rate, as about 15% of those who enroll continue to degree completion (Schneider & Yin, 2012; Topper & Powers, 2013). Pruett and Absher (2015) used data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement to study the responses of 23,665 community college students in a 3-year 2013 cohort. Their results indicated that community colleges have the lowest retention rates among institutions of higher education, a difficulty likely related to open door or open admission policy, convenient locations, and comparatively low costs (Pruett & Absher, 2015). These factors often result in a student body that is disproportionately represented by students who are more likely to be low skilled academically, from a lower socioeconomic class, and socially disadvantaged (Pruett & Absher, 2015; Yu, 2015).

Open enrollment may be a factor affecting enrollment and retention rates at community (Bailey, Jeong, & Cho, 2010). According to Bailey et al. (2010), at its highest, 58% of community college students were not college ready after enrollment and were assigned to at least one remedial course. Between 33% and 46% failed to complete their remedial coursework (Bailey et al., 2010). The large number of students entering college without the skills necessary for completion could explain the high rates of attrition of community college students. This indication is supported by Northall et al. (2016), who found WAS lacked writing skills and were not prepared to meet the technology challenges to keep up with learning modules.

In 2009, President Barack Obama proceeded with a plan that was designed to increase the number of college graduates in the country by 5 million graduates by the year 2020 (St. Rose & Hill, 2013). This plan meant that community college graduation rates would need to double in just 11 years. Although community colleges enroll close to 11 million students each year, the rates of transfer and certificate or degree completion lag behind other postsecondary institutions. Of the 11 million enrolled students, only 15% or 1.54 million students earn a degree or certificate within 3 years, and within 6 years, an additional 21% or 2.3 million students completed their programs (Topper & Powers, 2013). These numbers mean that about 7 million students drop out before completing their program of study, making student retention and degree completion major areas of focus for community college administrations. To meet President Obama's timeline, leadership in community colleges must make drastic changes to their programs

and policies, focus attention on the issue of retention, offer solutions where possible, and adjust to meet the demands of changing demographics.

Researchers have argued that issues of retention and attrition in the community college can be linked to the recent policy of U.S. government that burdens local colleges with the responsibility for most remedial education classes (Pruett & Absher, 2015). A large portion of the student population in the United States, in both 2- and 4-year programs, has only basic literacy skills. Although all colleges admit students who may be lower functioning, the community college population maintains the highest attrition rates of all student populations, a fact that puts community colleges in a poor competitive position regarding student retention (Fincher, 2010; Pruett & Absher, 2015).

Based on data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Pruett and Absher (2015) sought to determine the extent to which 10 variables affected retention of developmental education students in community college. The 2013 survey included 400,000 students and respondents ranged in age from 18 to 65 and older. Pruett and Absher concluded that academic engagement was the second most impactful factor on retention, and as older, nontraditional students were more likely to be assigned to developmental education classes on reentry and less targeted by engagement models compared to traditional students, the authors added an important contribution to the research literature regarding retention strategies that affected nontraditional learners. Although college and university leadership have seen an increase in enrollment in the past 7 or 8 years, particularly of nontraditional learners, they still struggle with the issue of retention. Due to their high population of developmental education students,

community college leadership are often influenced by the trend toward adult-student certificate and degree completion programs and the current designation of nontraditional students as an at-risk population. The charge to provide developmental education, which appears ineffective, could be causing the community college leadership to fall behind in their efforts to retain both traditional and nontraditional students (Pruett & Absher, 2015).

Mooring (2016) suggests no single intervention as the key to retention practices, instead colleges and universities should invest in creative advising strategies and curriculum changes that focus on soft skills. Mooring suggests soft skills such as "decision making, coping strategies, emotional security, time management, conflict resolution, and effective communication" (p. 207) are the skills needed to be successful and the skills employers seek. Advising should be by trained faculty with resources and knowledge to meet the student where they are.

Low attrition rates continue to be of concern across the United States (Harris, Rosenberg, & Grace O'Rourke, 2014) and the need for nursing services will continue to rise as the current baby boomers reach retirement age (U.S. Labor Bureau, 2014). Harris et al., identified 19 out of 152, at risk students, enrolled at a midwestern college, in a 2-year associate degree nursing degree program, 18 enrolled in a voluntary student success program (SSP). The SSP was concurrent with the 16-week nursing course NUR 101, students meet every other week and were taught learning modules, had 1- hour group meetings, and had individual mentoring with the program director. Concurrently the authors developed a faculty program on methods of learning styles and pedagogy for the nontraditional learner, and changes were made in the admission criteria. Students,

faculty, and researchers evaluated each area of change. The outcome of the SSP suggested improvement was needed. Of the 18 that voluntarily participated 10 failed Nur 101, and 10 students who weren't identified as being at risk failed Nur 101. Analysis of the student evaluations showed that the SSP was time intensive and many students did not meet the 80% attendance goal. Faculty reported that they were continuing to use various modalities for instruction at 6 months out. Currently there were no data available on the new admission criteria and the impact on retention.

Academic need and retention of community college students. Bremer et al. (2013) suggested that lower degree completion rates for students of community colleges compared with university students reflected community college students' relative lack of academic preparation. The strongest predictor of retention was higher math scores of developmental students in a community college (Bremer et al. 2013; Jameson & Fusco, 2014). Researchers have investigated different retention strategies that were targeted at addressing students' academic needs. Faulconer, Geissler, Majewski, and Trifilo (2014) described a technology-based early alert system that notified students when their academic standing was in jeopardy. In an evaluation of the pilot test of this program, student participants expressed that the system was helpful to them in identifying when their performances were problematic and helping them to seek assistance from faculty and other school staff (Faulconer, et al. 2014).

Barriers to Retention in Higher Education

There are barriers to student retention and graduation. Different groups of students experience different barriers, and discussion will be framed around student groups. These include gender, race, and traditional versus nontraditional age.

Gender-related barriers to retention. For learner retention to be a priority in community education, the concerns of adult female students must be addressed. According to Bryant (2001), women make up 58% of the adult learner population in community colleges, and their concerns must be considered by the institutions they attend if retention is to be a priority. Issues related to childcare, financial stress, flexibility of classes, work schedules, parenthood and health concerns, are stressors associated with being an adult female student (Bryant, 2001).

Yu (2015); Pike (2013); and Calcagno, Crosta, Bailey, and Jenkins (2007) all concluded that having more female student enrollment in community colleges was negatively linked to degree completion rates. Conversely, Scott, Bailey, and Kienzl (2006) and Webber and Ehrenberg (2010) found that female enrollment had a positive impact on graduation rates. The impact of female student enrollment can be partially explained because most female students attend part-time, a factor that is associated with low completion rates, whereas the proportion of full time students is positively linked to retention and degree completion rates (Pike & Graunke, 2015; Yu, 2015). This conflicting statistical message can be explained by examining the tracking rates of retention based on cohorts. When a female enters a 2- or 4-year college program, her expected date of graduation is determined to be 2 or 4 years into the future, respectively,

and her date of completion is based on the number of female students who entered at the same and who have full time student status. The problem is that when a female student studies part-time, the number of years it takes to complete her degree is extended. Because she will not graduate with her cohort, the denominator on female student enrollment is decreased at the time the full-time student graduates. However, when females, who make up a larger proportion of the student body than males, attend full time, they are positively linked to retention. Both statistics are true, and slightly misleading.

Adult female learners have barriers to degree completion, and in community colleges, many of the female students (61% in 2001) attend part-time, a status linked positively to attrition (St. Rose & Hill, 2013). Women reported that lack of access to or the ability to afford eldercare and childcare as significant barriers to completion of their associates degree or certificate program (Kimmel, Gaylor, & Hayes, 2014b; St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Yu, 2015). Adult female nontraditional learners struggle with risk factors that all adult learners face, including delayed enrollment, lack of a high school diploma, being a single parent, and full-time employment, making degree completion less appealing. (St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Wladis, Conway, & Hachey, 2015).

Kimmel et al. (2014b) examined the motivations and barriers to college/university success of adult learners based on gender. The authors compared two studies: one from 2004 to 2005 and one from 2009 to 2010. There were 683 student participates in the 2004 to 2005 survey, and 530 respondents from the 2010 survey. The conclusion that women are more motivated to pursue a higher education based on interactions with and a

desire to be a role model to children or interest in obtaining a new career showed factors that could be used by academic institutions to assist with the retention and degree completion of women. Barriers to learning included concern about loans, childcare, caregiver role, time away from family, lack of grants or scholarships, and the age of other students in their program.

Bryant (2001) determined that males made up about 42% of the 2-year associate degree or certificate programs in community colleges across the United States. However, identified stressors that led them to seek postsecondary education were significantly different compared to those of female students (Kimmel et al., 2014b). Their motivation for seeking a degree or certificate was contingent on maintaining their employment or advancing in their current career (Kimmel et al., 2014b). Barriers to male enrollment include fears about student loan debt, inflexible work schedules, convenience of class location, and financial assistance (Kimmel et al., 2014b). Knowledge gender can inform the way that leaders in community colleges recruit learners and retain their student populations. The creation of policies and programs that address the concerns of the student population could assist with the retention of all students.

Race and barriers to retention. During the most recent economic recession, the unemployment rate in the United States fluctuated between 10% and 4.4%, and as minority populations were hit hardest by the loss of employment, enrollment in postsecondary schools rose (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Along with an increase in the adult student population, the numbers of minority students enrolled in community college increased. By 2007, more than 50% of 469 postsecondary institutions, largely

community colleges, were made up of minority students, and the numbers are growing
(Smith, Chesin, & Jeglic, 2014). Currently, one third of all college students in the United
States identify themselves as belonging to a racial or ethnic minority; the question of
retention of minority learners is critical (Smith et al., 2014). Yu (2015) identified that
minority enrollment was positively associated with degree or certification program
completion rates, while Pike (2013), Schrum (2015), and Webber and Ehrenberg (2010)
argued that the opposite was true, and the proportion of minority students within a cohort
was negatively related to graduation rates. Whether minority enrollment negatively or
positively affects retention, community colleges may be compelled to work hard to retain
nontraditional students of color to meet demand and fulfill their mission to provide
education and training to all who seek it.

Kimmel et al. (2014a) suggested that enrollment for adult learners of color
showed a 311% increase (specifically for Black students) in the last 35 years. Kimmel et
al. surveyed 683 students and 530 students, respectively. The researchers concluded that
from 2004 to 2005 and 2009 to 2010, students of all ethnicities exhibited increases in
their motivation to enroll in higher education. The students' motivation stemmed from
factors such as career, family, and relationship. The increase in barriers on students of
color includes anxiety about employment, childcare, and the convenience of class times,
while white students were more concerned with low confidence and parental
discouragement. As leaders of an institution attempt to determine ways to heighten
enrollment and retention of adult learners, studies (e.g., this study) show an accurate look
at variables that affect the enrollment and retention of students when ethnicity is a factor.

Nontraditional student status and barriers to retention. The most common definition of a nontraditional student refers to those who have risk factors that include delayed enrollment, have not earned a high school diploma, are not enrolled as full-time students, are financially independent, are caring for dependents, are single parents, or working full time during enrollment (NCES, 2013). One or all these characteristics are held by students aged 24 and over, placing WAS in the at-risk student category. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System data for 2012 to 2013 showed an overall increase in the number of students attending community colleges who were over the age of 25 (National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Students aged 25 and above are considered nontraditional students in postsecondary education in the United States; currently, students aged 35 and over make up one-third of the students enrolled in U.S. colleges and universities (Aslanian, 2001; Kimmel et al., 2012). Staley and Trinkle (2011) reported the WAS to comprise over 60% of enrollment in higher education. The traditional student is no longer enrolling in college right after high school (Staley & Trinkle, 2011).

Older students from the baby boomer generation are returning to school to receive degrees to start new careers. The demographic shift in community colleges is changing the way that institution of learning must interact with the student population. Parks, Evans, and Getch (2013) used the experiences of seven adult students aged 62 and over who were attending a tuition reduction program at a southwest university to extrapolate themes, such as integration into campus life, integration with traditional students, and isolation. The study was limited by the exclusion of race/ethnicity, gender, and

socioeconomic status as variables. The authors found that older students faced barriers to education related to integration.

Munich (2014) identified student ability and motivation to learn online. The results of the study supported that nontraditional students, mostly women, required informational, instrumental, emotional, and affirmational supports for successful completion in their online nursing courses for degree completion. Munich identified an underlying relevant theme of social support that was an important aspect of student persistence. Social supports provide concern and compassion (emotional support), advice and information (informational support), help and resources (instrumental support), and positive feedback (affirmational support).

Nontraditional aged students can have multiple roles to fulfill, such as a parent, employee, and student (Kimmel et al., 2012). Conflict between these roles can create stress within the learning environment as students struggle to maintain their separate roles (Kimmel et al., 2012). Traditional and nontraditional students often differ in their learning styles, strategies, learning skills, and motivations; placing pressure on institutions of learning to adapt their styles of teaching practice (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014). Moreover, Markle (2015) suggested that when compared to full time traditional students, full time nontraditional students had disproportionately lower graduation rates within a 6-year period. However, these researchers (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014; Kimmel et al., 2012; Markle, 2015) did not make note of the growing research that showed a 22% increase in graduation rates by nontraditional students, as opposed to a 17% increase in traditional-aged learner degree completion, which indicated an upward trend (Castillo,

2013). Conversely, Xu and Jaggers (2014) indicated that older adults were more likely to

persist in both traditional and distance education programs, and to complete their degree

and certificate programs at higher rates compared to their traditional aged peers.

Community colleges are less likely to have an online component due to high levels of

low academic leveled traditional aged students, which means that many classes could not

be offered in this way (Castillo, 2013).

Contradictory opinions about the effects of student demographics on student

attrition could be summed up by Freitas and Leonard (2011), who argued no significant

relationships occurred between demographic variables and student success. Grade point

average was not a significant factor in academic success. The enrollment of WAS has

brought with it the responsibility of retention, increased pressure to assist with degree

completion, and career assistance for postsecondary institutions. Because most colleges

and universities in the United States are set up to assist traditional-aged students with

their needs, there has been an attempt to meet the needs of older students, whose time

away from school, work responsibilities, and family commitments can create a need for

solution focused educational and retention programs.

Working Adult Students and Persistence

Student persistence is a critical issue. For a learner to complete a certificate or

degree, that student must persevere until each class is completed. Intrinsic motivational

factors can affect a student's choice to enroll and persist in obtaining a college education

(Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). Nontraditional student persistence is related to a strong

desire to be seen as competent, a need for self-determination, and a need for satisfaction

gained from the college experience, factors that do not play a strong role in the motivation of traditional learners (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013).

According to Markle (2015) nontraditional students make up about a third of the population of undergraduate students in colleges in the United States. Markle used a role theory perspective to determine the factors that influenced persistence in 494 adult male and female nontraditional undergraduate students. The author concluded that factors that influenced persistence among male and female adult undergraduate students differed, there was no difference in the level of persistence between them. Markle also concluded that part-time status had a positive effect on female persistence.

Nontraditional learners have barriers to persistence and tend to drop out of academic courses at high rates when issues arise that either threaten their non-academic world or make completion a less desirable option. Gordon (2014) studied the initial attitudes of the nontraditional students who were mandated to attend an Effective Learning/Student Success course, made note of previous studies that described the theoretic framework of adult learner characteristics, acknowledging that adult learners went through periods of transition both before and after college enrollment. Self-determinant theory and cognitive evaluation theories informed this research by asking questions about what motivated nontraditional students to persist in the attainment of their educational degrees. Gordon used four student participants between the ages of 20 and 45 who were attendees of the Effective Learning/Student Success course. Information about student attitudes was collected via diaries, interviews, self-report, and participant observation by the researcher. Analysis of the results indicated that the

students had mixed feelings about taking the required course. Gordon (2014) postulated that the negative feelings about the class were the result of the perceived devaluation of the students' "maturity, experience and values". The results of the study indicated that negative attitudes about classes could play a role in hindering adult student satisfaction, which could then negatively affect persistence and retention.

Students who are not satisfied with their e-learning or distance courses are dissatisfied for varying reasons. Kuo, Walker, Schroder, and Belland (2014) used the survey responses of 221 graduate and undergraduate student participants to suggest that learner-content interaction was the strongest predictor of student satisfaction. This finding means that when students of online or distance educational courses have the time to interact fully with the course materials and participate in course activities, their levels of satisfaction are higher, and may result in higher levels of student persistence. Because negative influences at home and work can disrupt the process of persistence when taking on-line learning courses, students may benefit from withdrawing and retaking the course. When the negative influences decrease, the learner content interaction will increase. Studies indicated that students might achieve higher grades when retaking the course at a better time, indicating that dropping a course and retaking it when they can better attend to the course materials might benefit nontraditional student persistence. (Kuo et al., 2014; Wyatt, 2011).

Nontraditional students report various reasons for persevering through difficulties that threaten their pursuit of a degree or certificate. Those reasons include feelings of personal enrichment, interest in their studies, a desire for job skill attainment, aspirations

for a new career, or degree completion (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). Nontraditional learners tend to be intrinsically motivated, while traditional learners are more extrinsically motivated (Shillingford & Karlin, 2013). Knowledge of those differences can lead college and university administrators to design programs specific to the needs of each student group.

Karsten and DiCicco-Bloom (2014) explored overcoming failure in 16 WAS participants that had to repeat a nursing course in a 2-year associate degree nursing program. Results of the study revealed student surprise of the academic rigor and the complexity of content. The key concept for all participants was seeking help. Prior to failing a nursing course none of the participants had asked for help from the school or support from family and friends. Development of individualized self-help behavior plans for each participant assisted these students through completion of their 2-year associate degree nursing program. The goal of the program was to focus on learning goals versus performance goals.

Shillingford and Karlin (2013) considered the role of intrinsic motivation in the academic pursuits of nontraditional students and discussed ways in which motivation affected their achievement motivation. Thirty-five study participants, aged 25 through 49, completed the Academic Motivational Scale. Analysis of the study results indicated that intrinsic motivation (i.e., feelings of self-determination and the pleasure derived from the experience of going back to school) had a larger effect on the achievement motivation of nontraditional students than did external rewards or promises of career advancement.

In summary, retention is an issue that all college and university leadership in the United States must consider when designing programs to meet the needs of their stakeholders. The simultaneously disadvantaged and diverse nature of community college enrollment has led it to be in the forefront of retention issues, while it is behind in its ability to offer courses that may aid in the retention of adult learners, such as having advanced, upper level, or online courses.

Promoting Retention of Working Adult Students

One of the critical issues facing postsecondary educational institutions is student retention (Fincher, 2010). Because students have differing risk factors for attrition and enter and leave institutions of learning for various reasons, college and university leadership can struggle to find retention methods that work for all students (Angulo-Ruiz & Pergelova, 2013). Because not all adult learners are the same, college and university leadership have begun to look at ways in which programs and policies aid to or detract from the ability of an adult learner to complete their degrees. Issues dealing with financial aid, work schedules, and childcare or eldercare acquisition can influence an adult learner's ability to persist for purposes of retention and degree completion (Kimmel et al., 2012).

Although adult learners are statistically more likely compared to young adult students to complete their degree or certificate, their specific needs differ from those of their traditional aged counterparts (Barra, 2013; Kimmel et al., 2012). The NCES (2013) reported that 52% of students in public colleges and universities in the United States, and 88% of students in community colleges, were listed as nontraditional and have at least

one factor that classified them as at-risk. Although colleges and universities are primarily set up to meet the needs of young adult learners regarding factors that contribute to motivation, retention, and attrition, these institutions are beginning to make changes that are designed to address the adult learner's unique needs.

There is a myriad of variables which may determine why a student decides to drop out of school or leave their institution of learning in favor of another. Therefore, the goal of Angulo-Ruiz and Pergelova's (2013) study was to develop a model to assist with retention. In this study, the researchers pointed out that gaps in the previous research, while complex, failed to cross-reference the varying reasons for student attrition. The researchers used the combined components of earlier research to compare institutional dropout through school transfer to student dropout and non-return, which indicated variables that affected student success and subsequent retention. The researchers combined earlier concepts of student success and academic life integration with institutional image and brand to test the concept that commitment to schools via public image could affect retention rates. The study included 396 students from both community colleges and universities in Canada and used a two-stage cluster method to generate a random sampling of the students from among 178 cross-curricular courses in the winter 2011 semester. The results of the study showed affirmation even when accounting for conventional constructs that affected student retention; institutional commitment related significantly to retention; and institutional image had a direct effect on student commitment, which then affected, either positively or negatively, the rates of dropout and transfer. The researchers concluded that institutions would benefit from both

conventional retention methods, as well as pointed out activities to develop a positive institutional brand to influence student retention.

Kukkonen, Suhonen, & Salinen (2016) surveyed 25 participants, from 2 different schools in Finland, to ask them why they "discontinued their studies in nursing"? Data were collected using semistructured interviews and motivational interviewing techniques. Students were encouraged to discuss the reasons that influenced their decision for leaving, no other topics were explored. Demographics of the participants revealed a mean age of 31, in line with the WAS, 22 were females, 3 were males, and more than ½ of the participants had children. Employment status was not reported, however, many referenced financial burdens. The authors concluded attrition to be related to four major categories a.) students who moved to another school, b.) students who faced a life crisis such as a death, divorce, or financial hardship, c.) students who feel they made a wrong career choice, and d.) other responsibilities such as family responsibilities, caring for parents, and employment. The authors posit the generational differences of those attending nursing programs have special requirements that impact learning needs.

Kasworm (2014) provided readers with an understanding of the historical position that adult learners were difficult, and retention and enrollment were almost exclusively linked to full-time, undergraduate, and traditional learners. In the past, leaders of institutions of higher education perceived the adult learner as a high-risk student, and a nuisance population regarding enrollment, retention, and persistence (Kasworm, 2014). This historical view and the lower enrollment rates for the traditional student may have

led to a current situation in which institutions of higher education are attempting to create plans to view the adult learner as a valuable commodity.

There exists, according to Kasworm (2014), a statistical paradox, which reveals that, when mitigated to exclude full time, continuous enrollment, part-time adult students may complete their educational programs at a higher rate compared to their young adult counterparts. Kasworm suggested that leaders in educational institutions develop strategies to help adult students feel connected to their institutions. Increased engagement with the nontraditional student population may promote persistence. As enrollment of the traditional student decreases, more research is needed to understand the needs of the nontraditional student (Kasworm, 2014).

Reader (2015) explored "experiences of moral distress" (p.119) among students enrolled in a 2-year associate degree nursing program and examined strategies for educators to employ to support students through the program. Fifteen participants were recruited from four nursing programs. Participants had to meet criteria to participant and agree to two face to face interviews. The interviews were structured to focus on "moral distress among nursing students" (p. 119). The study identified four underlying themes related to moral distress and moral residue. Reader's study supports the need for educational reform, mentoring, and professional modeling for students to persist in their education and to meet the future needs of the projected nursing shortage.

In response to shifting trends in enrollment, leaders of colleges and universities have begun to take a real interest in nontraditional degree programs, such as distance learning, and developmental educational programs are being used to assist the transition

to school for adult learners who have been out of the educational arena for some time (Pruett & Absher, 2015; Silver-Pacuilla, Perin, & Miller, 2013). Programs, designed to assist young adult learners, were not always effective for older students; therefore, specialized programs to assist adult learners may be required.

Bailey et al. (2010) and Harris et al. (2014) considered the enrollment pathways of adult students over age 25, and determined remedial or developmental educational programs, while often an admissions requirement for older students, were ineffective in assisting with student retention. However, the authors stated that age of entry alone was a predictor of student success. Calcagno et al. (2007) determined remedial or developmental educational programs or classes could become a barrier to retention, as it inhibited participants from completing their degrees or certificates in a timely fashion.

Demographic challenges to enrollment of adult learners are associated with lower graduation and transfer rates. Bailey et al. (2010) study used longitudinal transcript data to compare the influence of enrollment programs on nontraditional students (those who enter college after age 25) and their traditionally college aged counterparts. Whereas Harris at el. (2014) studied the influence of enrollment programs after implementing changes to their schools' admission criteria, a student success program, and faculty development. Many college leaders use remedial classes to ensure the college readiness of enrolling students of all ages, but this practice may have a deleterious effect on matriculation rates. Nontraditional students aged 25 and above are less likely to be negatively affected by the requirement that they take remedial courses before starting their coursework. However, studies have shown that participation in remedial course

requirements can lower graduation rates for many learners regardless of age (Bailey et al., 2010; Calcagno et al., 2007; Harris et al., 2014).

Calcagno et al. (2007) used administrative data from 29,421 traditional-age students and 5,652 older students in their study. The results of this study indicated the idea of reaching institutionally designed milestones was more influential on younger students and requiring older students to enroll in remedial courses might inhibit their ability to complete coursework in a timely fashion. Calcagno et al. concluded workshops that helped older learners to refresh skills without requiring full semester long courses could help nontraditional student retention and matriculation. The researchers also suggested that because older students were more likely to matriculate, institutional leaders should consider making provisions for the external barriers to completion that faced older students, such as childcare, flexible hours, and distance learning, to mitigate the outside pressures that could derail their academic progress. More recent research studies support the same conclusions as Calcagno (Kukkonen et al., 2015; Mooring 2016). However, institutional milestones were coined as overcoming dispositional, situational, and situational factors through innovative strategies.

Past researchers of undergraduate student populations have focused primarily on the traditional young adult population to determine best practices for retention and nurturance of the student population (White & DiSilvestro, 2013). White and DiSilvestro (2013) focused on how adult students described the interaction between their learning environment and their outside lives, and how they described "involvement" within the context of their college institutions (White & DiSilvestro, 2013). The study

included 28 participants between the ages of 31 and 59 from two community colleges. The authors concluded that there was not a single adult student identity, but a diverse student body with both similarities and differences and a belief that student identity is not defined by age and maturity (White & DiSilvestro, 2013).

The study is significant because it presented data that illuminated the concept of an ideal student for adult learners is not just based on academic success and has expanded to include engagement and success in the community college as a societal agency (White & DiSilvestro, 2013). The results of this study, while limited in scope, is important to the field of research because the researchers called for present researchers to explore the concept of adult student identity to provide meaningful interventions to improve retention.

Older workers are returning to school for skill acquisition as they seek to enhance their skillset or train for a new career. Cummins (2014) sought to gain information about the extent to which community college leaders assisted these workers in obtaining the skills needed by providing relevant certificate programs or credentials and assisting older students in overcoming their barriers to success. Cummins used a multi-stage Delphi method to identify appropriate interviewees, and used the results of those interviews and site visits to explore outreach programs, retention improvement strategies, job placement, and credentialing, as these related to the older worker student population. The researcher found that programs that provided academic advising, emotional and academic support, job placement, and continuing education for skill attainment led to positive outcomes for the success of older students.

Promoting retention of female working adult students. While it is well known that issues of child and eldercare play a significant role in the retention and attrition of female students, community colleges have not offered those services. According to Garcia (2011), there are about four million college students who are also parents, and yet there are only about 1500 colleges, universities, and vocational schools in the United States that offer childcare services to their student bodies (Education Department, 2016). President Obama acted to increase the Pell grant awards, largely available to single parents; created the American Opportunity tax credit program, which allowed students who were parenting to get up to a $4,000 tax credit to assist with the affordability of postsecondary education; and created a grant that helped mothers who went to school online as a way to reduce childcare costs (Brown & Nichols, 2013).

Promoting retention of minority students. According to Kimmel et al. (2014a), minorities enter postsecondary schooling due to a desire to complete their degree, acquire new skills, earn higher wages, or to seek a promotion. Minorities are likely to seek higher education based on a friend's advice or to become a role model for their children or their communities (Kimmel et al., 2014a). This knowledge is useful because it could be used for both recruitment and retention of minority learners through marketing campaigns designed to remind them of their reasons for attending.

Wladis et al. (2015) revealed that while minority women and nontraditional students were overrepresented in online programs, Black and Hispanic males were less likely to enroll. Although community colleges and postsecondary institutions have added distance learning programs to meet the needs of nontraditional learners, these programs

may need to be reconfigured to assist minority students, specifically Black and Hispanic male students.

The Baltimore County Community College student retention program in Baltimore, Maryland has attempted to improve retention rates among African American male students. The program provided Black male students entering the college with a class entitled Academic Development: Transitioning to College (ADTC 101), which provided Black male students with Black male teachers who served as role models. The course was developed using "culturally responsive" teaching principles and provided mentorship services for the students (Johnson, Williams, & Wood, 2016, p. 23). The project indicated that retention of Black male students, specifically, and minority students must extend beyond the first semester to have the best results.

Additional programs by the Baltimore County Community College that targeted minority male retention rates suggested that men of color are more educationally focused when faculty and staff commit to providing validating messages, campus services are accessible, and when they "exhibit help seeking behaviors" (Johnson et al., 2016, p. 23). Although the study related to the retention of Black male students, programs that target the retention of other ethnic groups and women of color could also be beneficial. There is a lack of literature regarding the efficacy of said programming. However, the success of the program could open the door for future research on the retention of students of color.

While economic recessions positively correlate to increased enrollment in postsecondary institutions, specifically community colleges, in the past 10 years,

minority students have enrolled in record numbers (Johnson et al., 2016). However, adult

learners bring with them risk factors that could impede them from completing the degree

or certificate program. The specific issues faced by minority learners present a challenge

for community colleges in the United States to assist these students in achieving their

academic goals.

Formal programs to increase retention of working adult students. Retention

programs and policies have long been used by institutions of learning in the United States

to assist students in meeting their certification or degree completion goals (Bryant, 2016;

Mooring, 2016; Smith et al., 2016). While college and university leaders have developed

programs to assist students in this area, most benefit traditional aged learners and are

slow to respond to the changing demographics that favor a continued rise in adult student

enrollment, even as traditional student enrollment falls. The model for student

persistence, and the attitudes and behaviors that promote retention, involves the

integration of both the academic and social lives, the intention to make a life change, and

the goal of earning a degree or certificate (Bryant, 2016; Mooring, 2016; Smith et al.,

2016). To help nontraditional students succeed, changes to policies and programs to

increase nontraditional student retention and degree completion must occur (Bryant,

2016; Mooring, 2016; Smith et al., 2016).

As intergenerational classrooms grow, faculty attitudes toward nontraditional

aged students remain largely positive. However, educators typically treat them in the

same manner as they do their traditional aged students (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014).

Nontraditional students are typically less involved in campus activities and report that

some of their interactions with faculty members are helpful, while some are not, but that they were more appreciative of faculty member acknowledgement of their status as adult learners (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014). To help nontraditional learners to feel connected, and therefore invested in their institutions of learning, Philips (2010) suggested that service learning and college organized volunteer activities that were structured around adult learners' work and family responsibilities could help to increase feelings of engagement with the institution, an attitude that was shown to increase rates of retention and degree completion. Educators who responded to Brinthaupt and Eady's (2014) study remarked that teacher education and training that focused on the needs of nontraditional learners could help them to be more effective and might lead to increased rates of nontraditional learner retention.

Pruett and Absher (2015) noted that the two most important factors that positively affected student persistence in developmental education, a large portion of whom were nontraditional students, were cumulative grade point average and academic engagement. Barrow, Richburg-Hayes, Rouse and Brock (2014) found a positive correlation between retention and performance-based incentive programs in WAS with children. Both studies support academic engagement as an important factor in retention.

Fincher (2010) sought to identify best practices in the retention of adult students and identified that retention models should be non-standardized to address the needs of individual institutions of higher learning. Instead, individualized plans should be in a standardized format. Fincher discussed both retention and graduation measures, a routine that had seen some success in cohort-based programs. Student retention is enhanced

using four primary methods, which include (a) raising entrance standards, (b) decreasing academic rigor, (c) decreasing the pace, and (d) learning enhancement. These methods are not likely to be utilized simultaneously; raising entrance standards could bring highly motivated students who would not be satisfied with decreased academic rigor. Marek (2013) theorized assessing learning styles of students using the VARK Questionnaire and faculty mentoring, expands student capabilities that enhances student-centered learning that increases the student's potential for academic success.

Barrow et al. (2014) considered the issue of whether adult students with children were more likely to complete courses if they had the opportunity to receive incentive payments, along with counseling services. Earlier research indicated that modest gains in achievements by females at the secondary school level, and these performance incentives influenced both grades and persistence. Barrow et al. offered evidence that higher grant and scholarship awards were associated with higher enrollment and retention rates among 2-year college students. Barrow et al. used data from 1019 participants during the fall 2005 cohort. The analysis used Becker's model of economics theory to outline the hypothesis that students continued with their education when the benefits outweighed the costs and stop when the opposite is true. Data from the *Opening Doors 2004 to 2005 Scholarship Program* were analyzed, and Barrow et al. determined that the program did positively influence enrollment and persistence in low income, female community college students who were raising children. The program resulted in modest improvements in GPA scores, as compared with non-participants or the control group. The limitations of the study included the low number of male participants and the

lowered data collection related to the students' ability to participate in the program but opt out of sharing study outcomes.

Distance learning as a retention strategy. Because older students are more likely to persist in online educational programs than their younger peers, many colleges and universities are investing in distance learning programs that have the potential to provide the flexibility, level, and stringency of coursework that adult students require. However, this trend is not without its faults, as older, minority, and traditional students struggle to complete their courses online due to a reliance on self-study and low social interaction (Hermans, Kalz, & Koper, 2013). As student populations at community colleges become more diverse, these institutions are being called to advance themselves technologically. Castillo (2013) posited that modern community college leaders more often responded to an influx of adult learners whose academic and sociological needs were dissimilar from their traditionally aged counterparts. To meet the needs of these students, leaders must provide a way for these students to easily balance work, family, and academic responsibilities (Castillo, 2013). For many colleges, this means an expansion into distance or online learning. Because the missive of community colleges has traditionally been to assist poor and underserved communities in obtaining access to education, the trend toward enrollment of older adults, who bear other full-time responsibilities and younger adults who may not be educationally prepared have forced community colleges to make greater adaptations to meet the various needs (Castillo, 2013). Castillo proposed policy changes that could help community college leaders to utilize online education to meet the needs of their diverse student populations.

Because of the unique challenges that adult learners face, online programs within colleges and universities have emerged. For nontraditional students, online or distance education has been a way to obtain the needed flexibility and meet course requirements while working full time or raising a family. Student drop-out rates for online courses remain six to seven times higher than traditional programs, a fact that may mitigate the effectiveness of the programs overall (Sutton, 2014). Researchers have speculated that the high rate of attrition may be because students who choose online programs have more risk factors for dropping out compared to those who take traditional classes (Pontes & Pontes, 2012). Risk factors for undergraduate attrition are varied, and these include full time employment, part-time enrollment, delayed enrollment, nontraditional aged financial independence, being a single parent or parent, and not having graduated from high school (Pontes & Pontes, 2012).

Nontraditional learners are participating in online learning at a rapid pace, and yet the number of those students dropping from its roles is growing (Munich, 2014). Munich describes four essential areas of support identified by 29 participants who were enrolled in one of two online nursing programs. The average age of the participants were 40 years old. Analysis of data revealed students need support while attending on-line courses for nursing. The amount and type of support was found to be overlapping throughout the program as well as who they needed support from. Munich reports students need informational, instrumental, emotional, and affirmational support.

Park and Hee (2009) set out to discover whether there were significant differences between dropouts and persistent learners in online courses and to what extent individual

characteristics affected those differences. The sample consisted of 147 adult learners and

contained persistent learners and dropouts; there were more females than males, and the

participants were between the ages of 20 and 40 years old. After analyzing the data, the

researchers concluded that adult learners were more likely to drop out of online classes

when they perceived they had no familial or organizational support. The perceptions of

adult student dropouts were significantly different compared to those who persisted, with

the dropouts feeling less satisfied with or feeling that the classes were less relevant

compared to their classmates' classes.

Pontes and Pontes (2012) carried out research to determine if adult students who

took online classes were less likely to attend only part of the year. Nontraditional

students often have many demands on their time; they are more likely to attend distance

education programs that offer flexible class schedules. Pontes and Pontes used data from

the National Postsecondary Student Aid Survey (2008), with a sample of 113,500

students nationally, to confirm their hypothesis that adult students who enrolled in online

education were less likely to have enrollment gaps compared to their nontraditional on

ground peers.

Contradictory research on adult learner attrition in online and distance learning

shows that in community colleges, students of all ages, but particularly nontraditional

aged learners who are more academically prepared than those in traditional classes have

higher rates of retention. Remedial courses, which often draw younger students and

those with less academic experience, have attrition rates that make them a less viable

option for those populations (Castillo, 2013). Distance education lessens the risks for

nontraditional learners by offering flexibility of time and place; however, they continue to be related to lower rates of persistence than face-to-face classes (Pontes & Pontes, 2012). Whether this is a result of programming itself or the attributes of the adult learners who take them has not been established by the literature, and it is a subject for future research.

Nursing Education and Retention of Working Adult Students

Current predictions indicated a nursing shortage would occur by the year 2020, and over 1 million job openings for registered nurses could be vacant across the United States (Chard, 2013). The Bureau of Labor Statistics (2013) suggested healthcare was one of the fastest growing job markets. Secondary to an aging population and a retiring workforce, an increase of healthcare professionals, including registered nurses, would be needed to fill a projection of 5 million job openings across the United States in the next 5 to7 years (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2013). Considering this industry crisis, leaders in community colleges would be charged with meeting this need through increases in certificate and degree programs for nontraditional learners. The current rate of attrition associated with community colleges is not fully known and represents a gap in the literature, which can have a deleterious effect on leaders' abilities to meet the needs of both the healthcare industry and the adult, working student population.

Williams (2010) illuminated some reasons for persistence in beginning nursing students, a concept revealed by a larger study on faculty directed strategies that impact nursing student attrition and retention at the beginning phase of nursing education. After reflection on the literature and methodology used in the greater study, Williams (2010)

concluded the four major themes that characterized students who were more likely to persist were "Keeping Up, Not Giving Up, Doing It, and Connecting" (p. 362). The author concluded that positive experiences in the beginning phases of the nursing program remained with the nurses and helped them to persist in later phases, thereby improving retention rates.

Peltz and Raymond (2016) explored mentoring as an effective strategy for improving retention rates. A convenience sample was obtained of students in a 2-year associate degree program across the state of Michigan. The mean age of participants was 34 and noted to be nontraditional students. The results of the study suggest male students, full time students, and students who previously failed a nursing class were statistically significant for using mentoring services as a means of persistence. Age, race, and ethnicity were not statistically significant.

Because the gap in the literature excludes significant information regarding the connection between working adult student attrition and nursing education, conclusions drawn from the broader context of community education are applied here. The literature that exists on age, race, and gender exposes the connection between issues affecting community college retention in general and problems of retention within nursing education, as nursing education programs must also focus on matters of attrition and retention among the nontraditional student population (Ackerman-Barger & Hummel, 2015; Barra, 2013). The ways in which gender, race, and age interact within the context of community college education are central to the subject of attrition in nursing education.

Representative of the crisis in nursing education attrition is the continued low number of minority nursing students completing their degrees (Barra, 2013). Ackerman-Barger and Hummel (2015) suggested that inequality, exclusion, and discrimination still existed in the field of nursing and could influence attrition in students of color. Ackerman-Barger and Hummel suggested that identification of interpersonal interactions could assist nursing education administrators in revealing the nature of hidden inequity in their programs, thus enabling them to influence retention rates by providing positive learning experiences.

Williams (2010) indicated persistence in beginning nursing students was related to positive experiences, specifically during the beginning phases of nursing education. Barra (2013) studied the effect of medical math retention strategies and addressed the concerns surrounding the beginning experiences of nursing students. Barra suggested 50% of nursing students, enrolled in the practical nursing program, dropped out or were dismissed because of failing grades. Barra proposed steps be taken to improve grades in the medical math portion of the first three courses by having faculty work side-by-side with their African American students to help this at-risk population to succeed. The teaching of strategies such as independent, active learning techniques to improve academically and self-motivation techniques to encourage perseverance, resulted in significant increases in students who passed the course and continued to move through the program (Barra, 2013). Barra determined retention intervention programs could positively affect the academic performances of minority nursing students, and with all students, regardless of race or ethnic group affiliation. The implications of this study

indicated the importance of evidence-based programming by nursing educational administration to address barriers to retention.

Issues of gender in nursing education relate to the overrepresentation of women in the field. In 2012, 91% of all registered nurses were female (St. Rose & Hill, 2013). While this is good for women of all ages, it brings to question whether the absence of males and minorities is due to discrimination. At the same time, a lack of research on the subject means that the question cannot be fully answered at this time.

Summary and Conclusions

Postsecondary institutional leaders in the United States are experiencing significant increases in enrollment (Aslanian, 2001; Bryant, 2016; Staley & Trinkle, 2011). Adults who are unemployed or seeking to maintain or improve their status at current jobs are enrolling in community colleges at high rates, but retention and graduation rates remain low (NCES, 2016). Moreover, WAS experience barriers to retention and graduation in higher education because of employment demands, family obligations, financial constraints, and childcare needs (Kimmel et al., 2012). Leaders in nursing education programs will be charged with meeting the increasing needs of the healthcare industry soon, yet research into the specific programs that assist with the retention of nursing students is lacking. Consistent with national trends, WAS comprise 70% of the student body at this study's site of interest (NCES, 2013), with a graduation rate of 40%. Students completed degrees at this low rate despite several retention initiatives implemented by the college, including enhanced student services and increased faculty support for students.

To address the gap in the research literature related to supports and services to promote retention of 2-year associates nursing program students, the purpose of this study was to explore supports and services that might be helpful to working adult students over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associates degree program in a local community college. Findings of this study are helpful to administrators of this institution in developing supports and services that enhance retention and graduation of this program's students. Chapter three contains a discussion of the methods used to address this study's purpose.

Chapter 3: Research Method

The purpose of this study was to explore supports and services that will be helpful to working adult students over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associate degree program in a local community college. This purpose was accomplished by addressing the research questions for the study. The overall research question was: What type of supports would be helpful to you as you work toward completing your 2-year nursing degree program? I also addressed two specific research questions:

RQ1: What types of support would be helpful to WAS to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

RQ2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS toward completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree?

This chapter includes the methodology and procedures used to address the research questions associated with this study's purpose. The following sections include a discussion of the research design and approach, procedures for selecting and establishing a relationship with participants, procedures for data collection and analysis, and limitations of the study.

Qualitative Research Design and Rationale

A qualitative case study approach was used to address the research questions related to the participants' perceptions of services and supports that are helpful to WAS as they progress toward completion of 2-year degrees in nursing. Because I was interested in the lived experiences of nursing students in a 2-year associate degree program, a case study was appropriate (Petty, Thomson, & Stew, 2012). Qualitative

researchers are concerned with ways in which individuals perceive their experiences and construct meanings (Hatch, 2002). Qualitative research was a more suitable choice for this study in comparison to other approaches, such as grounded theory. Grounded theorists aim to develop theory that is rooted in data provided by observations and participant input (Charmaz, 2014). I was interested in learning about participants' experiences as WAS and the types of support that will help them to achieve their academic goals. I derived this information from the viewpoints of the participants themselves, as is central to the aim of qualitative research (Petty et al., 2012).

I had a specific interest in 2-year nursing program students within the community college chosen as the study site; because this group represented a bounded system, a case study approach was the best fit (Lodico, Spaulding, & Voegtle, 2010; Petty et al., 2012). Case studies are useful in examining the unique experiences and dynamics within a bounded system (Lodico et al., 2010). A case study approach was used to seek meaning of experiences of WAS enrolled in a 2-year nursing program.

The case study methodology is useful in obtaining in-depth information about the case of interest by using multiple methods of inquiry (Pearson, Albon, & Hubball, 2015). I used multiple methods of inquiry to gain a deep understanding of WAS experiences, barriers, and needs for supportive services; a case study approach was consistent with the aim of the study. Other qualitative approaches, such as ethnography or narrative research, would have been less appropriate. Ethnographic researchers seek to gain understanding of shared beliefs and behavior within a cultural group and narrative

researchers seek to understand participants' stories relevant to the phenomenon of interest, neither were a suitable methodology for the present study (Petty et al., 2012).

I selected a qualitative design for the study because the lack of research regarding WAS and retention within community colleges created a need for open-ended, exploratory inquiry into this topic. In comparison to quantitative research, qualitative research is a more effective approach for exploring subjects about which little is known (Maxwell, 2012). A qualitative approach allowed greater flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding retention supports and services, and it allowed for greater depth of inquiry with fewer participants (Maxwell, 2012). In contrast, quantitative research permits a researcher to obtain data that are countable to conduct interpretive statistical analyses using larger samples of participants (Maxwell, 2012). Because I was interested in data that reflect the complexity of participants' experiences and opinions, a quantitative approach was not an appropriate choice for this study. Permission was obtained through the Institutional Review Board #954146 to conduct a qualitative study.

Role of the Researcher

I built a relationship with the participants through interactions prior to the scheduled interviews and observations by explaining the purpose and approach of the study and allowing them to ask questions about their participation in the study. I created an open and comfortable relationship with participants while maintaining professionalism. For example, participants might become upset while talking about challenges in pursuing their degrees or might share negative opinions about faculty or

school staff; in such situations, I respectfully acknowledged participants' feelings without responding with counseling or advice on ways in which to manage difficult situations. Maintaining professional distance in these ways clarified the researcher–participant relationship and avoided creating impressions that I was a friend or advisor, which could create ethical concerns (Qu & Dumay, 2011).

Informed consent was obtained from participants by providing them with written information that explained the study's purpose, procedures, risks, benefits of participation, and description of confidentiality measures. The information was explained verbally to participants to assure them that their participation was voluntary and that they could revoke consent at any time. This aspect allowed participants time to ask questions about the study.

Confidentiality of participant data was maintained by storing data in locked files or password-protected electronic files; further, interview transcripts and observation notes were identified by a participant number only to promote anonymity of written data. Identifiable data were not presented in works that disseminated this study's findings; direct quotes from participants were used with permission only. Because I have a professional relationship with the college, I assured participants that I did not disclose their participation to other faculty or staff, and I did not share any information derived through observation or interviews. Data will be destroyed after 2 years by shredding hard copy materials and deleting electronic files.

Sources of harm associated with participation in this study were related to the types of information participants might share. If participants shared negative perceptions

of specific faculty, staff, or procedures of their school, they may experience the risk of retaliation or negative treatment by individuals they have criticized. I protected the participants from this type of harm by ensuring data were confidential and not identifiable in works that informed the findings of this study. Participants were at risk of emotional distress related to discussion of barriers or challenges they experience while working toward their degrees. I confirmed that participants understood their continued participation was voluntary, and I conducted the interviews in private to semiprivate spaces to minimize this type of harm to participants.

Methodology

Participant Selection

I used a purposeful sampling approach for participant recruitment. The sample size consisted of 10 WAS participants in the 2-year nursing degree program at the study site. A purposeful sample allows a researcher to obtain in-depth data that reflects the perspectives of a specific group of people (Petty et al., 2012). Because I was interested in WAS who were enrolled in a specific degree program, a purposeful sampling approach was consistent with the design of the study.

In comparison with quantitative approaches, qualitative designs require fewer participants to obtain enough data about the phenomenon of interest (Dworkin, 2012). A sample of 10 individuals yielded data saturation (Dworkin, 2012). As opposed to quantitative research, the sample size of qualitative studies is usually smaller (Dworkin, 2012). The reason lies with the focus of data collection, which is gaining an in-depth understanding of the topic under inquiry and focusing on meaning. The meaning refers

to the how and why of the study issue. Because generalization is not a main objective in qualitative studies, a large sample is not indicated as the analysis of data is focused on identifying themes and patterns (Dworkin, 2012).

Instrumentation

I used a semi-structured interview guide with open-ended questions (Appendix A). This guide ensured each key feature of the research question was addressed (Stuckey, 2013). The interview guide contained six questions that were developed based on the two guiding research questions for this study. Using the interview guide promoted consistency across all interviews with participants by ensuring the same questions were asked with each participant (Elo et al., 2014). A semistructured format provides flexibility for participants to discuss associated perspectives and thoughts as they arise during the interview (Stuckey, 2013). A semistructured approach allows for the use of probing questions to prompt elaboration of ideas that participants express, resulting in more texture in participants' expressions compared with structured interview formats (Stuckey, 2013).

I used an observation sheet (Appendix B) to record activity within the classroom. The observation sheet included cues regarding specific aspects of classroom dynamics to be observed, such as participant attendance, participant engagement, interpersonal dynamics between participants and instructors, dynamics between participants and other class members, and other observations that were relevant to the study's research questions. The observation sheet served as a guide for the data collection and served as a record of detail regarding observed interactions in the classroom. Using an observation

sheet ensured attention to the same aspects of classroom dynamics during each observation visit, creating consistency and thoroughness across data collection events (Arthur & Nazroo, 2003).

Procedure for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

I requested assistance from nursing program instructors to recruit participants for the study. Flyers were disseminated that explained the purpose and procedures of the study to request participation of WAS over the age of 25 who were currently enrolled in the 2-year nursing degree program. The current cohort consist of 64 enrolled students in the 2-year associate degree nursing program. The flyers included the researcher's contact information and invited potential participants to call or email if they were interested or had questions about participating. With instructors' permission, flyers were personally distributed to classes, a short verbal explanation of the study and its aims were presented; a personal presentation allowed for potential participants to ask questions about the study in the classroom setting. There were no volunteers during the classroom presentations. The next strategy used for recruitment was being present in the cafeteria during the lunch hour. I approached tables and confirmed they were students in the 2-year associate degree nursing program, explained who I was and what I needed, and asked if anyone would be interested. I visited the cafeteria on 6 occasions before I reached a total of 10 participants. The sample size of 10 represented a diverse mix of gender, age, and ethnicity. My sample had representative views from various races, culture, and gender (Elo et al., 2014) to include Caucasian, African American, Latino, and male and female students. The sample yielded an age range from 25-52.

Data Analysis Plan

A case study design involves multiple forms of data collection that provide rich information about the case of interest (Pearson et al., 2015). In keeping with this aspect of case study methodology, data were collected through observation of participants in their classrooms and through semistructured individual interviews. Observations of participants within classrooms informed interpersonal dynamics and provided a sense of the participant within the school context (Stuckey, 2013). Semistructured interviews provided in-depth perceptions and opinions about participants' experiences as working adult students, which will complement findings gained through observation (Stuckey, 2013).

Once participants responded affirmatively to the recruitment efforts, an initial appointment was arranged at a time and location determined by the participant. At this appointment, further opportunity was given for questions about the study and to schedule future interactions. Interviews and classroom observations were scheduled individually with participants. Each interview was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim to ensure the written data accurately reflected the participants' expressions. Transcripts were created that described the interactions observed during each classroom visit. A reflective journal was kept for keeping track of impressions and interpretations as they arose during data collection.

Analysis of data began after completion of interviews and observations. Analysis and coding was aided by use of NVivo software. Each interview and observation transcript were reviewed to derive a holistic sense of meanings before beginning

reduction or analysis (Malterud, 2012). In keeping with a qualitative approach, I acknowledged and set aside my personal biases to allow participants' thoughts and perspectives to be privileged (Malterud, 2012). I conducted data reduction with an interest in essential or core meanings participants expressed, labeling these to facilitate grouping into categories of themes or meanings (Malterud, 2012; Petty et al., 2012). Once an initial set of primary themes were established, I again reviewed the transcripts with the aim of identifying additional themes and subthemes in the data, identifying associations between themes.

Interview and observation transcripts were coded using a cross-sectional approach, seeking to identify emergent themes and subthemes within the data. The objective is to identify convergent and divergent themes within and across interviews and observations (Malterud, 2012). During the coding and analysis process, I continued to document my impressions and interpretations in a reflective journal. I extracted participant quotes that exemplified themes and subthemes; provision of quotes and rich explanation of text facilitated thick description, which supports transferability of findings (Hatch, 2002; Petty et al., 2012).

Trustworthiness

To promote trustworthiness of analysis, I maintained an audit trail to track the dynamic data interpretation process as it was being conducted (Petty et al., 2012). The audit trail provided documentation of my interpretive interactions with the data, and it promoted dependability and confirmability of findings by other parties (Petty et al., 2012). Triangulation was another means of promoting trustworthiness of analysis and

was accomplished by auditing for correspondence between data collection modalities (Pearson et al., 2015). Collecting data from individual interviews and observations provided multiple perspectives on the phenomenon of interest, which promoted trustworthiness of the findings (Pearson et al., 2015).

I engaged in peer debriefing as a means of promoting credibility of findings, which involved having another party review the researcher's coding and data interpretation to provide additional perspectives on emerging insights and analyses (Elo et al., 2014; Petty et al., 2012). The process of member checking was conducted to increase trustworthiness of findings; this involved verifying transcripts and interpretations with participants (Petty et al., 2012). Deviant case analysis increased trustworthiness of the findings and analysis; I ensured that rare or contradictory responses by participants were clearly recognized during analysis and not unjustifiably subsumed under another theme (Petty et al., 2012). Nonetheless, limitations existed for this study.

Ethical Procedures

The researcher role warranted further explanation in relation to the setting; for 8 years, I taught at this institution, and I now work in an adjunct position that involves participating in a simulation lab one day per quarter. Because of my relationship with the college, I acknowledged I might have biased views of the institution's supports and services for WAS. It was a possibility that potential participants were personally known to me because of my relationship with the college, which could have created role confusion in the researcher-participant relationship. Because these factors could have contributed to preexisting expectations about services and supports that WAS might need

to be successful, I recognized and bracketed any biases, and I avoided unduly influencing or leading participant responses during interviews (Malterud, 2012). Further, I bracketed my personal opinions during data analysis to ensure I did not allow my expectations to influence interpretations of participants' perspectives (Malterud, 2012).

Summary

This chapter provided details regarding the methodology and procedures associated with the study. A case study design was used to explore the perspectives of WAS in a 2-year nursing degree program regarding supports and services that are helpful as they work toward completing their degrees. A purposeful sample of 10 participants were recruited, and the data were collected through guided observation and semistructured individual interviews. Data reduction and coding were completed with the objective of identifying convergent and divergent themes across observations and interviews. The trustworthiness of findings is supported by conducting member checking, engaging in peer debriefing, keeping an audit trail, using multiple methods to achieve triangulation, and completing deviant case analysis.

Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of the study was to explore supports and services that are helpful to WAS over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associate degree program in a local community college. The overall question that guided the research was: What type of supports would be helpful to you as you work toward completing your 2-year nursing degree program? Additional research questions were:

RQ1: What types of support would be helpful to WAS to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

RQ2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS towards completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree?

I used a case study design. The focus of the study was on the lived experiences of the participants regarding the supports and services they perceive useful as a WAS completing a 2-year associates degree nursing program. In qualitative research, the focus is on exploring the perceptions and experiences of participants to provide meaning to the experience (Charmaz, 2014). In this study, data were collected through observations and semistructured interviews. Observations allow the researchers to remark on the interpersonal dynamics of the participants and familiarize their self with the participants within the school context (Stuckey, 2013). The semistructured interviews allowed the data to be derived from the perspectives of the participants, which was central to the aims of this study (Petty et al., 2012). Hatch (2002) similarly advocated living as a member of the group under study.

Setting

The study was conducted at a local college. Over the course of this study the selected study site has grown from a local private, specialized, community college into a BSN and MSN degree granting institution. With the study site specifically granting nursing degrees, I was able to recruit participants who met the inclusion criteria for sampling: WAS completing a 2-year nursing associate degree program, which was in line with the purpose of this study. Being able to recruit a sample who were experiencing the phenomenon under study, the participants were able to provide more in-depth data, as suggested by Petty et al. (2012). The study site does not limit admission based on race, religion, nationality, culture, or gender orientation.

Data Collection

Data were collected through observations and semistructured interviews. The observations provided an overall general sense of the participants while in the classroom setting. The semistructured interviews provided in-depth information of the participants' perceptions regarding their experiences as working adult students.

Permission from the college was obtained prior to recruiting the participants. After permission was obtained and as the participants were recruited, the nature and purpose of the study was discussed. The participants were asked to participate in an interview, allow for classroom observation, validate transcripts of interview, and permit audio recording. Interviews and observations were scheduled with each participant based on mutual availability and class times.

Prior to the interview and observation, the participants were asked to sign an informed consent form, containing the nature and purpose of the study, the confidentiality of the participants, as well as the participants' rights to withdraw at any time from the study. Each interview was approximately 60 minutes. An interview guide (Appendix A) was used to direct the line of questioning. The open-ended nature of the interview guide helped to provide structure, and it ensured the interviews remained in line with the research questions while allowing for probing questions to gain more in-depth information. The interview guide also ensured similar questions were asked of all the participants.

The classroom observations were scheduled individually. Each participant was observed once. An observation sheet (Appendix B) was used to guide the data collection. The observation included taking notes on specific aspects of classroom dynamics observed, such as participant attendance, participant engagement, interpersonal dynamics between participants and instructors, dynamics between participants and other class members, and other observations that may be relevant to the study's research questions.

Throughout the data collection, I wrote in a reflective journal to minimize bias and ensure that data collection was true to the purpose of the study and the research questions. The journal helped in bracketing personal judgments. All audio recordings and notes were transcribed to Microsoft Word files for data analysis. All participants validated their transcripts for accuracy.

Data Analysis

The data analysis procedures were conducted in four cyclical steps: (a) getting a total impression, (b) identifying and sorting meaning units, (c) condensing data, and (d) synthesizing (see Malterud, 2012). Personal judgment was suspended throughout the data analysis procedures to explore the participants' experiences based on their perspectives. Observation and interview transcripts were initially reviewed and analyzed separately, then analyzed using a cross-sectional approach. The cross-sectional approach allowed me to identify convergent and divergent themes within and across interviews and observations.

Getting a Total Impression

Malterud (2012) recommended that to begin data analysis, all the transcripts were to be read to get a total impression of the data, which is described as deriving themes from chaos. During this stage, all the transcripts were read with suspended personal bias, while identifying preliminary themes related to the research questions. After reading the transcripts, six initial themes were derived. The themes identified include support systems, barriers on studies, effect of work on studies, services received from the local college, recommended additional services, and recommended change in services. These themes were used to classify the data into groups, not to derive results addressing the research questions. The themes helped in sorting the meaning units or codes in the data, which was the second phase of data analysis.

Identifying and Sorting Meaning Units

The second phase of data analysis involved assigning codes to the data to identify and sort meaning units. To begin the second phase, the transcripts were again read and reviewed to identify texts significant to the experiences of the participants and the phenomenon under study. Data that were considered irrelevant to the experience of the participants were eliminated. For example, "My parents help me with flash cards, especially medical terminology, learning medical terminology; though sometimes being out and away from home helped me study" was labeled relevant to the "support system" experience of the participants. Support from parents appeared relevant to this participant, which was the reason the sample line was labeled "parental support." As in the data analysis guide by Malterud (2012), codes were yielded from the initial themes.

Some lines were assigned to more than one code; however, Malterud (2012) suggested that if such were the case, the codes were not distinct enough from each other, and these should be further refined. Codes have been combined or split in this study as needed. For example, several participants referred not just to their parents as support systems, but also to their siblings, spouses, and children. Therefore, the code "parental support" was combined with other codes to form the code group "family support."

Condensation of Data

As codes have been identified in the second phase of data analysis, in the third phase, the aim was to explore the meanings of the codes and code groups. After the second stage, the data were organized into a few code groups with meaning units which revealed the participants' experiences with services and support as WAS. The data were

also thematically coded; however, the data were out of context. Hence, the aim of the

third phase was to prove a systematic abstraction of meaning units from the codes and

code groups derived from the second stage. To do this aspect, transcripts were re-read to

explore the codes in the context of the language of the participants. This process is

referred to as condensation, with the quotes containing the language of the participants

that was relevant to the codes referred to as the condensates (Malterud, 2012). Meanings

were then provided to the codes in the context of the participants' perceptions of their

experiences.

Synthesizing

Finally, the data were synthesized to form one narrative describing the

experiences of the participants regarding the services and support as a WAS. The

condensates finalize the themes that addressed the research questions. The synthesis

containing the final themes, as well as condensates to provide evidence that the themes

were derived from the participants' language, are presented in the following sections.

<div align="center">

Results

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The results are organized and presented based on the finalized overarching themes

that addressed the research questions. Each theme is presented with a narrative

describing the theme as well as quotes from the participants to serve as condensates.

Subgroups within the overarching themes are also presented and described.

Theme 1: Support System

The first theme indicates the perceived support system received by the

participants as a WAS. One participant mentioned having a superior at work who was

supportive of her studies. Another participant mentioned having coworkers supportive of

her studies.   Most of the participants perceived that support is received from instructors,

school staff, classmates, and from their families.

Instructors, school staff, and classmates. Support regarding the participants'

education, the instructors, school staff, and their classmates appeared to have an influence

in the experience. Some participants expressed the desire for "more support from the

instructors." As a WAS, Participant 2 said that she used e-mail to communicate with the

instructors; however, some instructors did not respond "in a timely fashion." Conversely,

Participant 6 shared that aside from family and friends, the school, through the

instructors, provided support in her education. Participant 6 claimed to engage in "study

groups," which supported her education. I observed the classrooms of Participants 5 and

7 and saw students working together in groups of two to three. During the observation of

Participant 5, a nonparticipant student announced the day, date, and time of an upcoming

study group for anyone to attend.

Notations pertaining to the participants' attentiveness and distractedness in class

were recorded during periods of observation. Observation notes reflected most

instructors allowed cellphones on the students' desks during class, and one instructor

checked their phone during class. Some participants used their phones to text during

class.

Some participants mentioned that school staff helped support their education.

Some participants, who were going through personal problems, acknowledged the school

psychologist was an effective support. Students who struggled with classes

acknowledged that the Student Success Center provided help, such as Participant 5:

> The student success coordinator was a great friend—reinforced I could do it,
>
> made me challenge myself to be good at what I do. We made goals and made me
>
> believe in myself. One teacher had told me I was never going to make it but then
>
> another teacher would sit with me for moral support. The school was a huge
>
> support for me.

Family support. Family was perceived to provide support for the participants.

Parents, siblings, and spouses or partners were mentioned as helping the participants in

some form as they worked and studied. Participant 2 stated, "I have a support system at

home that helps me as I need it." Participant 7, who had children, claimed that her

children were understanding about her schedule. The participant expressed her family

had been "very supportive" and allowed her to "be her." Participant 5 said, "My husband

is my biggest fan, he is my support." Participant 5 said her husband helped her take care

of the children despite having to work full-time. Participant 1 said she and her sister

were both in school, and they supported each other. Participant 6 was helped by parents

in terms of reviewing lessons. Participant 6 said, "My parents help me with flash cards,

especially medical terminology, learning medical terminology; though sometimes being

out and away from home helped me study."

Theme 2: Barriers on Studies

While juggling work and studies, the participants perceived they experienced

certain barriers as a WAS. The barriers were dependent on the participants' situations.

Participants with younger children perceived childcare as a challenge. One participant

mentioned taking care of a sick parent was a challenge for her as a WAS. Two

participants claimed work was a barrier to their studies. Aside from personal problems,

most participants perceived financial challenges, and the lack of time, as barriers to their

studies.

Financial challenges. Some participants claimed that they were WAS to be able

to support the expenses of their education, or to be able to pay the bills. Participant 6

helped her sick father, while Participant 7 helped her handicapped brother. Participants

8, 9, and 10 were single mothers, and they shared similar experiences regarding expenses.

Participants 8 and 9 had no financial support from their estranged spouses. The

participants claimed a "major barrier" was providing for their children. Participant 8

shared the following:

> Yes, have to take into account all angles and feelings, separated from my spouse
>
> and dealing with the kid's emotions, and we all had to attend a counseling
>
> program that was mandatory. Awful financial barriers, no child support, no
>
> money coming in, no money to feed my children and I was turned down for
>
> government assistance.

Participant 10 claimed "keeping up the household" was a financial barrier, as well as time

consuming. Participant 10 said the following:

> Single parent-have a support group but no family here so I have no physical
>
> support in keeping up the household, like going and getting groceries. School has
>
> a strict attendance policy and with having no help it is very challenging, little

sleep. I go from school to work, I am usually gone from 5 am, and I get off work at 11:00pm. Kids are teenagers, so I don't need childcare, but they need their mama. And I had to get housing assistance. I know about barriers.

While Participant 10 did not worry about childcare, Participant 4 claimed the cost of childcare affected her family's finances. Participant 4 said, "Yes several, my father passed away and he watched my children, now I need a babysitter and the money to pay a babysitter, guilty from being away from my kids, bills need to be paid, juggling school and work."

Personal problems. The participants claimed personal problems are barriers in their status as WAS. The participants experienced fatigue, stress, distractedness, or dealt with issues at home. Participants with young children were challenged with finding childcare or the expenses for childcare.

Participant 2 claimed work was a barrier to her studies, but she "has to make money." In the observation, I noted Participant 2 appeared distracted in class. The participant was distracted by her cellphone and side conversations during lecture. The participant appeared to be asking "what did he say" during the instructor's lecture. Participant 2 went out of the classroom for several minutes and started taking notes after she came back. Participant 2 claimed, "I have time crunches, and dedication to studying is a factor at times because I am tired." Similarly, I observed that Participant 3 frequently asked, "What did she say?" to her seatmate during the instructor's lecture. Participant 3 took notes during the entire lecture.

Participant 1 felt "burnt out," and the lack of motivation was a barrier. Participant 1 expressed, "Motivation to go to school has been my biggest barrier. I am burnt out in school and terrified of getting behind. Online is stressful because of the due dates for assignments."

Participants with young children perceived childcare as a barrier in their studies. Participant 3 claimed her husband and her mother can help with childcare; but, during clinical days, childcare was challenging. Participant 4 experienced challenges finding childcare, as well as challenges with childcare expenses. Participant 4 also felt "guilty from being away from the kids." Participant 5 shared a similar experience. Participant 5 said the following:

> It was difficult, very difficult, had a baby at same time-dealing with being a mom, wife, mother, and full-time student. The study site was very stressful on me, and I had lots of difficulties. Difficult in keeping up when I didn't understand very well and then lack of time made it difficult. These are all barriers and biggest barrier is feeling guilty about not being a good mom.

Lack of time. Most participants did not have enough time for work, classes, and personal life. The lack of time resulted in stress, fatigue, lack of motivation, and tardiness and absences during class. Participants' punctuality was noted during the observations. Participants 3 and 9 came in late for class. Participant 3 was interviewed on campus prior to the scheduled classroom observation but arrived eight minutes late for class. Participant 7 reported that she experiences a lack of time dealing with the needs of her children and her handicapped brother. The participant dedicates the weekends to

studying and stated, "Every weekend is consumed with studying because I am consumed with doing my best."

Theme 3: Effect of Work on Studies

One participant claimed that work "complemented" her studies. However, most participants perceived there was not enough time; there were several matters considered a priority; and certain areas of the participants' lives are not given enough attention. Some participants claimed to feel "guilty" for not spending enough time with their children. Almost conclusively, the participants stated they have no free time, and they juggled priorities as a WAS.

No free time. As participants experienced the lack of time as a barrier in their status as a WAS, the effect was that participants experienced no free time. Participant 10 reported to have no free time for friends and experienced "hectic" schedules daily. The participants could not deal with household matters, such as chores and childcare. Participant 5 felt that she was "not being a good mom," as she tried to work, study, and take care of her children. Participant 3 reported she experienced no free time to spend with her child. The participants shared the following:

> It won't affect it too much, but I will have to spend all my free time studying, and
> my husband will have to do cooking and laundry. I won't get to play with my
> child as much; she is 3. This is where I need time management. I have been
> wanting to get my RN for a long time, too bad I couldn't have gotten it earlier but
> only 9 months to go.

During the observation, Participant 9 excused herself at about 50 minutes into the class to get to work. Participant 6 shared that finding the time to study was difficult. Participant 6 said the following:

> It is a difficult balance working and school and paying bills and eat and still have enough time to study. The study site taught time management, and I use those skills to help me have enough time to study. I would review papers while I was at work, if time permitted.

Juggling priorities.   Participants expressed they were juggling priorities. Participants with children recognized that attending to their children was the top priority, which was sometimes difficult with the demands of work and classes. Participant 10 claimed to be "very strained" and said, "[I] would be able to gain a deeper understanding but a lot of variables that keep me from studying deeper, have to prioritize based on what is needed first." Participant 8 made her children her top priority and said she felt "guilty" and "torn" between activities. She said she had to miss work or classes to attend her children's activities. Participant 4 claimed she might have to "sit out" the next quarter of school. Participant 4 said the following:

> It is very difficult, and I will have to sit out next quarter and maybe several quarters. We have to pay bills, so I need to work, and I am pregnant. Child care is very expensive, and this child will be our fourth. That's okay, though. My kids come first.

Theme 4: Services Utilized in School

The participants shared that some services and resources provided by the school were helpful as a WAS. One of the resources was the online media library. The school provided additional references through online media to supplement the course work. Another helpful service was the Student Success Center. During the classroom observations, I noted that some instructors provided PowerPoint files of lectures and supplementary materials that could be downloaded from an online learning management system. The system encouraged participative learning, interacting with the material reinforced discussion with the instructors. Participant 3 said, "[Study site] uses a lot of interactive media online and has web assisted information through the computer program we use. It's additional info to help you understand the material. I really like that, and I use it a lot." Participant 6 said library services helped with her studies. The participants shared, "Library services, the computers, printers and access to online resources and Cinahl, a database that you can access in the library, is helpful and user friendly." Participant 10 shared that the culture of the school was a resource. Participant 10 said, "[Study site] is a good school, and there is a culture there that makes you want to do well. I am challenged, and I like that."

The school counselor or school psychologist is a school service utilized by participants. Participant 10 consulted the school psychologist for her personal problems, while Participant 6 consulted with the school counselor for coaching. Participant 6 said, "Meeting with the school psychologist and discussing how to be successful in your classes." Participant 5 shared a similar experience and said, "Seeing a counselor who

worked with me on test strategies, comprehension, and coping strategies, and I got testing

accommodations." According to Participant 5, the school counselor was part of the

Student Success Center. Participant 4 recently used the services of the Student Success

Center. Participant 4 shared the following:

>I haven't had to use any services until I got pregnant. When I failed the first test,
>
>I went to the Student Success Center, they worked with me academically, but that
>
>didn't change anything for me, such as childcare and finances.

>Participants 1 and 2 claimed they have not used any of the services provided by

the school. In addition, the observation revealed Participant 2 was not participatory in

group work. During one class, the participant had a short conversation with another

student, organized belongings neatly, and left the classroom as soon as dismissed.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Additions and Changes in School Services

Like the barriers on studies, the perceived additions and changes in school

services are dependent on the needs of the participants. Some participants had no

recommendations for the improvement of school services. Some students recommended

flexibility in schedule, especially during lab assignments and clinical rotations.

Participant 5 perceived that being informed of the available services earlier and using the

service earlier would have helped her as a WAS. The participants recommended services

that would provide students with more interaction with the instructors. Financial support

and availability of onsite childcare were recommended to help WAS.

Interaction with instructors. Several participants expressed that learning could

be more effective if they had more interaction with instructors. Most participants claimed

they preferred face-to-face interaction rather than online classes; however, going to work

hindered some of the participants in becoming full-time, on ground students. Participant

2 stated, "I would not take classes on line if I did not work, and I would like that better.

Better because of face to face access to the instructor." Participant 2 also said, "I would

like for instructors to respond to questions quicker and get grades in a timely manner."

During classroom observations I noticed instructors demonstrated application of lessons

rather than reading from PowerPoints. During the observation of Participant 7, the

instructor discussed scenarios of ways in which the theories were applied to the care of a

person. During observation of Participant 6, the instructor allowed the students to "just

talk" instead of following the PowerPoint presentation for the lecture, while in the class

of Participant 1, the instructor used a model of muscles and tissues to assess the students,

as compared to giving a written exam. Participant 1 perceived that online lectures helped

with memorization. Participant 1 said, "Don't really like online but that is the only way I

can attend and work too. I would like to have a better way to understand anatomy and

physiology other than memorization."

Financial support. The participants expressed a need for financial support from

the school. The participants shared recommendations for less book expenses, affordable

services, scholarships, and grants. Participant 5 claimed being allowed to borrow books

instead of buying books helped reduce expenses. Participant 3 recommended that the

book list, provided before the start of the semester, only include the books needed in class

to avoid excessive expenses. Participant 3 said, "I would like for the book list to list only

the books we will need and not make us buy books that we won't use. Books are

expensive, even used ones." Participant 9 perceived that a computer was necessary for students and receiving support to include a computer would be helpful. Participant 9 said, "Make it [the service] more affordable, provide laptops through a lease program or for free." Participant 9 also stated that scholarship grants could help WAS.

Availability of onsite childcare. The participants with young children emphasized having onsite childcare on the campus would help in their status as a WAS. The participants claimed on-site childcare would decrease the worry about childcare, and they could see their children in between classes. Participant 1 and 4 emphasized the helpfulness of "affordable" onsite childcare. Participant 4 stated the following:

Onsite child care would be nice if it was affordable. You could be with your kids some if you need to be at school all day or get to them quicker -- all of mine are 6 and under.

Participant 9 said, "Onsite child care would be helpful or even volunteer child care at the school for study groups or to practice in the lab." Participant 10 said onsite childcare would allow her study time, especially if she needed time to spend in the library. Participant 5 said "childcare is an issue at times" due to her husband working full-time.

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Evidence of Trustworthiness

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Credibility, confirmability, dependability, and transferability were observed to increase the trustworthiness of this study. The truthfulness of the study refers to credibility. Credibility was increased through member checking, data saturation, and reflexivity. Member checking was conducted by allowing the participants to review and

make corrections in their transcripts. Data saturation was conducted through repeated engagement with the data during the analysis until no new information arose. Reflexivity was conducted through self-inquiries to keep in line with the purpose of the study and minimize bias (Creswell, 2003).

Transferability and dependability were increased through proper documentation. Transferability refers to having the study findings applicable in other contexts, while dependability refers to the consistency of the findings in future replications of the study. Proper documentation allowed for accurate cross-checking of references. Confirmability referred to the findings being derived from the responses of the participants, considering the language and the context. Proper documentation, reflexivity, and triangulation increase confirmability. Triangulation was achieved through having more than one data source (Creswell, 2003). In this study, interviews and observations were used to collect the data.

Summary

This study indicated five overarching themes in relation with the experiences of 10 WAS over the age of 25 completing a 2-year nursing associate degree program at a local community college. The first theme involved the support system, in which the participants considered their families their largest support systems, followed by instructors, school staff, and classmates. However, the participants expressed the desire to receive more support from their instructors, more financial support and onsite childcare. The second theme showed the barriers in education in terms of being a WAS. The barriers included financial challenges, personal problems, and the lack of time. The

third theme was the effect of work on studies. The participants claimed to have no free

time and had to juggle several priorities at once. The fourth theme included the services

that the participants used in school. The services included online media and the Student

Success Center. The fifth theme contained the recommendations for additions and

changes in school services. The participants recommended more support from their

instructors, receiving financial support, and the availability of an onsite childcare

program.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Although enrollment in postsecondary institutions has increased, graduation rates have remained low across colleges and universities in the United States, with the overall graduation rate for private 2-year-degree-granting institutions being 58% (NCES, 2016). The purpose of this study was to explore the supports and services that are helpful to WAS over the age of 25 in completing a 2-year nursing associate degree program at a local community college. The supports and services for WAS are different from those of younger students, and it is important to explore the needs of this population to be successful in higher education (Rabourn et al., 2015). The study was conducted due to the lack of research regarding WAS and the retention rates within community colleges. There is a need for open-ended, exploratory inquiries into this topic. Understanding the needs of WAS can be helpful to administrators in community colleges in developing supports and services to promote successful degree completion for this student population.

Summary of Key Findings

I used a qualitative case study to address research questions related to participants' perceptions of services and supports that are helpful to working adult students who are progressing toward completion of 2-year degrees in nursing. A community college was chosen for the study site, as the group represented a bounded system, making the case study approach the best fit for the research that was conducted (Lodico et al., 2010; Petty et al., 2012). Case studies are useful for examining the unique experiences and dynamics within bounded systems (Lodico et al., 2010). The study was

conducted using a purposeful sampling approach of 10 WAS 25 or older who are pursuing a 2-year nursing degree. By obtaining representative data, the purposeful sample allowed me to explore a greater depth of data reflective of the perspective of this population (Petty et al., 2012). The overall question that guided the research was the following: What are the specific needs of WAS as they worked toward completion of a 2-year degree in the study site's nursing program? The research also addressed two other questions with participants:

RQ1: What types of support would be helpful to WAS to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

RQ2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS toward completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree?

The research questions were asked at a local community college, and data were collected through classroom observations and semistructured interviews. The classroom observations provided a general sense of the participants while in the classroom setting, and the semistructured interviews provided in-depth information regarding the participants' perceptions about their experiences as WAS. These research questions led to five main themes.

Theme 1: The Support System

The first theme was the perceived support systems of participants as WAS. One of the participants reported having a superior at work who was supportive of their studies, and another participant mentioned coworkers were supportive of their studies. However,

many of the participants reported support was generally received from instructors, school staff, classmates, and families.

Instructors, school staff, and classmates. Support was perceived from the instructors, school staff, and classmates of the participants who seemed to have influenced their experiences. Some of the participants asked for additional instructional support from lecturers, with one of the participants stating they used e-mail communication with instructors; however, this communication method was not always a reliable source of support, as some of the instructors did not respond in a timely manner. During the classroom observations students were seen collaborating to share ideas and form study groups. One student announced at the end of class that an active study group could be joined, including the date, time, and place for study.

Some participants stated, school staff had supported them during their education and helped them through personal problems. Support structures within the schooling system assisted students in staying motivated. Several participants voiced the school psychologist was an effective support, including the students who discussed ways in which the Student Success Center provided help in reinforcing goals and a strong belief in the students' capabilities.

Family support. Family was perceived to provide support for the participants with parents, siblings, and spouses or partners who helped the participants in some form as they worked and studied. One of the participants expressed that having a support structure at home really assisted them, and another expressed how their children were understanding about their study schedules. Participants indicated that having support

structures at home, including assistance from their children in reviewing their class work with them, made it easier to be a working adult student.

Theme 2: Study Barriers

Participants indicated that they experienced certain barriers as a WAS while juggling work and studies. The barriers were dependent on the participants' situation at home. Participants with younger children indicated that childcare was challenging. Caring for a sick parent and having to work were challenges at home for some of the participants. Aside from these personal issues, most of the participants revealed financial challenges and lack of time as their greatest barriers.

Financial challenges as a working adult student. Some participants indicated they were WAS to support the expenses of their education and to pay the bills. Two of the participants were taking care of family members who could not fully care for themselves. Three of the participants were single mothers, and the only provider for the childcare needs. These participants claimed providing for their children was a major barrier, which included having to pay for childcare or for babysitters. These factors had a impact on their finances.

Personal problems affecting the students. Fatigue, stress, distractedness, or dealing with issues at home were the most mentioned personal problems by the participants. One of the participants was noted during the classroom observations as distracted during class time by her cellphone or by conversations during the lectures. Another participant indicated that a lack of motivation due to feeling "burnt out" and the fear of falling behind with assignment due dates made it difficult as a WAS. The theme

of providing childcare was prevalent, with three of the participants discussing the challenges of being away from their children; the stress of finding and paying for childcare; and the difficulty of being a parent, spouse, and student simultaneously.

The lack of time. Most of the participants experienced a lack of time due to juggling work, classes, and personal matters. This issue resulted in stress, fatigue, a lack of motivation, tardiness, and absence during class. Punctuality of the participants during the classroom observations revealed two of the students arriving late for class. One of the participants indicated a lack of time to deal with family needs, work, and studies. Others discussed how their weekends were consumed by studying.

Theme 3: The Effect of Work on Studies

Most of the participants expressed a difficulty in balancing working, school, paying bills, eating, and having enough time to study. Many of the participants indicated they used time management skills to schedule study time. Participants indicated that the need to pay bills and support their families was enough motivation to keep them working and studying at the same time.

Theme 4: Services Utilized in School

Participants shared that services provided by the school through the Student Success Center were helpful. Many participants used the online media library services to download lectures and supplementary material that had been uploaded by the instructors. The reading materials reinforced discussions with the instructors, which encouraged participative learning. One of the participants indicated that the online

learning management system had a lot of interactive media and web assisted information to use as a learning modality.

The school counselor or school psychologist was a service that was used by the participants. One of the participants consulted the school psychologist for personal problems, whereas another participant met with the school psychologist for coaching. Participants meeting with the school psychologist worked on test strategies, comprehension, and coping strategies.

Theme 5: Recommendations for Additions and Changes in School Services

The perceived additions and changes in the school services were dependent on the needs of the participants, much like the barriers of studies. Some of the participants indicated a flexibility in schedule would be helpful, especially during lab assignments and clinical rotations. There was consensus among the participants for more interaction with the instructors, and financial support and availability of onsite childcare would be helpful to working adult students.

Interaction with instructors. Several participants expressed their preferences for face-to-face interaction rather than online classes. However, going to work limited the participants becoming full-time students. One of the participants expressed they would not have taken classes online if they did not have to work, and they felt instructors needed to respond to electronic questions quicker. In the classroom observations, I noted instructors showed practical application of the lessons, with one of the instructors using scenarios on ways in which theories were applied in caring for a person. One of the

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participants stated they did not enjoy studying online and would like to have a better method of understanding anatomy and physiology other than memorization.

Financial support. The participants expressed that financial support from the school would be supportive for a working adult student. Many participants shared recommendations for lower book expenses, affordable services, and scholarship grants. One of the participants mentioned that by borrowing books instead of buying, she could reduce her expenses, whereas another student requested that the book list only include books that were needed. One of the participants felt support in acquiring a computer through a lease program through the college or grant would help WAS.

Onsite childcare. Many of the participants with young children emphasized the importance of having onsite childcare, as this would aid in their status as a WAS. Participants claimed they would not need to worry about external childcare, and they could see their children between classes. An emphasis was placed on affordability of onsite childcare, as it would only be viable if costs were reasonable. Three of the participants indicated that onsite childcare would assist with time management, as extramural studying could then take place on site without having to worry about their children.

<center>**Interpretation of the Findings**</center>

The theoretical framework that served as a guide for inquiry and analysis in the study was Tinto's (1993) internationalist theory of student persistence and retention. Tinto proposed that students enter higher education with a variety of personal characteristics influencing their initial feelings of commitment to the school. Tinto

ascertained that engagement in purposeful activities for educational gain promotes

persistent. Evidence of his theory was identified during the interviewing process and

during coding of the identified themes. I found five main themes that were common

among the 10 participants, which influenced their feelings and commitment to their

support systems, barriers on studies, effect of work on studies, services utilized in school,

and recommendations for change in school services.

According to Tinto (1993) personal characteristics are contributing factors to

persistence in higher education. Tinto suggests that high self-efficacy, feelings of

belongingness, and positive perception of the value of education enhances a students'

persistence. Participants identified the benefits of study groups, student success center

services and interaction with faculty. Participants who reached out to faculty and/or used

resources through the student success center verbalized they did not want to let down the

people who were investing time and energy into their learning needs. This form of

support increased feelings of self-efficacy and instilled a sense of belonging. Participants

expressed it was easier to believe they could do it when others believed you could do it

to. One participant reported she was told she would never make it, but she believed she

could. The participants' efforts of persistence increased, and the participant found a

different faculty member who believed she could. Tinto suggested believing you can

succeed is an essential component for persistence.

In studies with adult female learners to understand their unique barriers to degree

completion, many women reported the lack of access to or ability to afford eldercare and

childcare as significant barriers to completion of their associate degree or certificate

program (Kimmel et al., 2014b; St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Yu, 2015). In the research study, I noted many of the parent participants had experienced similar factors as barriers, whereby caring for their children and being a WAS was difficult. Many participants felt they were not meeting their children's needs and relied on another care giver to assist them. This extends the knowledge of the current literature (Bryant, 2001; Kimmel, et al., 2014b; St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Yu, 2015). Consideration of on-site child care in colleges and universities could reduce attrition and promote retention.

I found that parents with younger children had difficulty finding or paying for childcare while trying to study. The problem surrounding childcare is a prevalent concern for parents, resulting in financial, time, and additional stress constraints. Adult female nontraditional learners contend with risk factors that all adult learners face, including delayed enrollment, lack of a high school diploma, being a single parent, and full-time employment, making degree completion difficult (St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Wladis et al., 2015). Confirming this in the research, one of the participants expressed a difficulty in balancing work, school, paying bills, eating, and still having enough time to study. Time management was taught by the study site, and the participants indicated they used those skills to schedule study time. However, it was evident from the research that the participants found that factors, such as being a parent and having full time employment, placed strain on their commitment to studying. This study confirms and extends the knowledge in the discipline. The WAS faces barriers that traditional students do not face (Bryant, 2001; Kimmel, et al., 2014b; Schrum, 2015; St. Rose & Hill, 2013; Yu, 2015).

Financing Their Studies

Barriers to learning included concern about loans, childcare, caregiver role, time away from family, lack of grants or scholarships, and the age of other students in their program (Kimmel et al., 2014b). Most participants in the research study expressed concerns around financing their studies, including tuition fees and books. These financial concerns can put unnecessary stress on students. Time constraints, involving studying, working, and family, and the complications surrounding childcare, were all conclusive results. Consistent with the literature many WAS view working full or part time as necessary to meet demands of survival. WAS who have a significant other to share the financial concerns with revealed feelings of guilt if they were not contributing to the household income. Participants confirmed the findings in the literature (Harris, et al., 2014; Munich, 2014; Smith, et al., 2016). Colleges and universities should consider implementing work programs at the schools to assist students with the cost of education. This could be a way to increase persistence in educational attainment and aid in the financial need of the WAS.

Differences in Student Needs

The participants highlighted various reasons behind the barriers that influenced their experiences and successful integration in the classroom, at work, and factors influencing them at home. Nontraditional aged students have varying roles to play in their lives, such as a parents, employees, and students. Conflict between these roles create stress within the learning environment, as they struggle to maintain their separate

roles (Kimmel et al., 2012). Some of the participants identified the stress of parenthood and being a student. This issue results in a lack of focus and attention on either part.

Traditional and nontraditional students often differ in their learning styles, strategies, learning skills, and motivations, placing pressure on institutions of learning to adapt their styles of teaching practice (Brinthaupt & Eady, 2014). Some of the participants made use of study groups, while others preferred online services for their studies. The college assists students by offering numerous forms of educational tools for these learning differences. A large concern for the participants was the time constraints of being a WAS. This issue meant that proper time management between working, tending to personal family needs, and providing enough time to concentrate on their studies was a tough reality.

Additional Aid to Assist Working Adult Students

Leaders in college and universities are looking at ways in which programs and policies provide aid to or detract from the ability of an adult learner to complete his or her degree. Issues concerning financial aid, work schedules, and childcare or eldercare acquisition influences an adult learner's ability to persist for purposes of retention and degree completion (Kimmel et al., 2012). By addressing these external factors of influence, the students can devote more focus and time to their studies. Shillingford and Karlin (2013) expanded this aspect and found that extrinsic motivational factors affect a student's persistence in obtaining a college education. Persistence leads to increased retention and higher pass rates in WAS students.

Participants indicated that some of the services provided by the school were helpful as a WAS. The online media library services were helpful to most of the participants. Levy (2004) confirmed the influence of these factors by confirming that student satisfaction is an important influential factor in determining persistence.

Analyzing Nontraditional Learners

Nontraditional aged students assume many roles such as parent, employee, and student (Jameson & Fusco 2014; Kimmel et al. 2012; Kukkonen et al. 2016). Financial aid, work schedules, and childcare or eldercare matters can influence an adult learner's ability to persist for purposes of retention and degree completion (Jameson & Fusco 2014; Kimmel et al. 2012; Kukkonen et al. 2016). These themes were prevalent in the research conducted with the 10 participants, as they highlighted their roles as parents, time constraints due to working schedules, and childcare and financial aid, as pertinent barriers. Conflict between these roles create stress within the learning environment, as they struggled to maintain their separate roles (Jameson & Fusco 2014; Kimmel et al. 2012; Kukkonen et al. 2016). Participants in my study referenced feelings of an internal struggle when trying to meet school and family needs concurrently. Nontraditional learners have barriers to persistence, and they tend to drop out of academic courses at high rates when issues arise that either threaten their nonacademic world or make completion a less desirable option. Levy (2007) examined the reasons that students failed to persist in e-learning and distance education courses, which indicated that student satisfaction might be the most influential factor in determining persistence. My study

supports student satisfaction, and support from the nursing faculty provided extrinsic motivation for persistence.

The nontraditional student felt they were financially independent from their parents when financing their education through student loans (Kimmel et al. 2014b). All but one participant used federal student loans to pay for college. Many of the participants in my study expressed concern over the incurred debt. However, this debt increased their persistence for completion and passing state boards, so their income would then allow for the additional expense. Several of the participants were receiving Pell Grants throughout the program so that they could meet living expenses through their 2-year associate degree nursing program. One participant paid out of pocket and did not want to let her husband down by failing; she did feel as if she was at a disadvantage because she spoke English as a second language and her writing skills were novice. This student further reported that a faculty member had told her she was not going to make it through nursing school. As the literature suggest, it is important to the success of the student to have support services from faculty that foster a caring and connecting atmosphere (Smith et al.,2016).

My study contributes to the knowledge on this topic. No single intervention, but multiple interventions and strategies, should be considered by faculty and administrators for the nontraditional student based on their individual needs. Students benefit from an inclusive approach to socialization, connectiveness, creativity, learning, and resources. Educators can make a positive impact with empowering students in a learning centered environment resulting in a positive impact on retention.

Recommendations

The first recommendation for future studies in this topic is a larger sampling size of participants. The sample should include a broader demographic of students. This sample can provide more data for analysis and might include factors influencing the retention rates of WAS in community colleges that were not discussed during this study. With more participants, a greater elaboration on the barriers that these students faced could be consolidated and provide a more solid foundation to create social and educational interventions.

The second recommendation for future studies is to expand the research of students beyond the 2-year degree. The factors of influence and student resilience may prove different dependent on the duration of the degree. By comparing various degree lengths, a greater depth of data of the specific factors influencing WAS based on the timeframe required to complete their degrees could be obtained and analyzed.

The third recommendation is to include students who are currently WAS enrolled in a college, students who failed to complete their studies, and students who successfully completed their studies. An increase in the sample size and expanded status of student populations would provide a more coherent data supply for analysis. It might provide insight into the factors that caused students who failed to complete their studies in comparison to students who successfully completed their studies. These data could be used to further assist students who are currently busy with their studies and allow for social and educational interventions to take place.

The fourth recommendation is to expand the focus group beyond students studying nursing. Students in other disciplines may face the same issues that WAS in a nursing program face. By expanding the research beyond one focus of study, researchers could determine whether there are specific factors influencing student retention based on subject, age, and demographic, and might prove useful for educational institutions in developing interventions to address some of the pertinent issues around the retention rates of these students.

Implications of the Findings

I sought to expand on the factors of influence in WAS. I expanded on research previously conducted, that can be used in the future for positive social and educational change for working adult students. I sought to understand the specific needs of working adult students, which will prove helpful to administrators in community colleges in developing supports and services that promote successful degree completion for this student population.

Positive Social Change

I expanded on current studies to highlight the factors influencing the barriers of success and the issues surrounding retention rates of nontraditional nursing students. The 10 participants highlighted individual barriers, needs, financial implications, work commitments, and family situations. The most prevalent factor influencing the success of the students is their support structures. This system of support creates an inner belief system in the students, leading to greater motivation for the students to push through the tough times and assist fellow students struggling in various facets. This research can be

used in the implementation of social and educational interventions in assisting students with time management classes, to ease the stress of being a WAS. College leaders should consider providing daycare facilities for WAS to decrease the worry about their children and increase the focus on their studies. Implementation of support systems and additional services to meet the WAS needs, leads way to providing communities with future health care workers, decreases the unemployment rate, and provides a way to secure a productive and purposeful life with meaning.

Methodological and Theoretical Implications

I used a qualitative case study approach to address research questions related to the participants' perceptions of services and supports that are helpful to WAS as they progress toward completion of 2-year degrees in nursing. I sought to bring a personalized insight into the factors that influenced the success and retention of WAS. The qualitative approach allowed for flexibility to explore participants' experiences and perspectives regarding retention supports and services.

The findings from this research study were found to be consistent with current literature regarding factors surrounding being a WAS (Karsten & DiCicco-Bloom, 2014; Munich, 2014; Northall et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2016; Stevens, 2014). These factors included parenthood, working full time, and time constraints, as highlighted in the previous literature (Karsten & DiCicco-Bloom, 2014; Munich, 2014; Northall et al. 2016; Smith et al. 2016; Stevens, 2014). I provided a better insight into factors surrounding working adult community college students and the challenges that they face in completing a 2-year nursing degree. I consolidated the identified factors that specifically

influence this group of individuals, with the hope that this information is useful for building in future research and to assist in influencing educational and social interventions in assisting WAS in the successful completion of their degrees.

An overarching theme in response to how could colleges enhance services to assist WAS towards completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree was on-site child care and more information on scholarships. The availability of on-site childcare at colleges and universities was beyond the scope of this study as was information on scholarships. However, considering many WAS have children in the home on-site child-care should be considered as a strategic measure to increase retention rates.

Summary and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore the supports and services that might be helpful to working adult students over the age of 25 to complete a 2-year nursing associate degree program at a local college. The 10 participants offered concise and ample data on the factors that influenced barriers toward successfully completing their degrees. The data, gathered from the study, led to five main themes: support systems, effects of work on studies, services utilized in school, and recommendations for changes in school services. The participants expressed challenges that made being a WAS difficult and supports that assisted them in completing their degrees. Most of the participants reported support was received from instructors, school staff, classmates, and families. Participants indicated they might have experienced certain barriers as a WAS with juggling work and studies, the barriers were dependent on the participants' situations at home, such as participants with younger children, indicating childcare as

challenging. It was difficult to balance work, school, paying bills, eating, and still having

enough time to study. School resources provided additional references to better

understand lessons through online media. The Student Success Center was a service used

by the participants. Some of the participants indicated a flexibility in schedule would be

helpful, especially during lab assignments and clinical rotations. There was consensus

that participants wished for more interaction with the instructors, financial support and

the availability of onsite childcare.

The current literature indicated similar findings as my study (Jameson & Fusco

2014; Johnson et al., 2016; Kimmel et al. 2012; Kukkonen et al. 2016), in that students

were influenced by factors, such as the challenges surrounding childcare for their

children. These challenges posed both timing and financial issues for parents who were

WAS. The literature review covered the factors surrounding assistance in funding, which

included tuition fees, books, and computer equipment, (Barrow et al., 2016) childcare

was not included. These concerns were also highlighted by the findings of this study.

There were differences in student needs, and I confirmed this as true, as not all factors of

influence were considered barriers by all participants. It is necessary to evaluate the

factors of influence on an individual basis and consideration be given to the unique

aspects of their situation.

The findings from this research study have expanded the knowledge regarding

nursing students, at the age of 25 or older, studying a 2-year degree through a local

community college and what influential barriers they faced as working adult students. I

consolidated factors specifically influencing this group of individuals, and this

information could prove useful for further research to expand on the findings and the

suggestions for college enhanced services, such as on-site child care. Future research

should include larger sampling sizes of participants, a wider demographic, and students

currently studying and not currently studying. These might prove useful for educational

institutions in developing interventions to address some of the pertinent issues around the

retention rates of WAS.

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Appendix A: Interview Protocol

Research Question 1: What types of support would be helpful to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

-Subquestion: How does your working adult student (WAS) status affect your participation in your studies?

-Subquestion: Have you experienced any barriers as you have worked toward your degree?

-Subquestion: What kinds of support would be helpful to you as you work toward your degree?

Research Question 2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS towards completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree?

-Subquestion: What services have been helpful to you as you have worked toward your degree?

-Subquestion: How can services be changed to better meet your needs as a WAS?

-Subquestion: Are there additional services that you would find helpful?

Appendix B: Observation Protocol

The purpose of this protocol is to guide observation of working adult students in the classroom. Observations will focus on participant attendance, participant engagement, interpersonal dynamics between participants and instructors, dynamics between participants and other class members, and any other observations that relate to the following research questions:

Research Question 1: What types of support would be helpful to complete a 2-year associate nursing degree?

-Subquestion: What do I observe in the classroom that relates to supports that would be helpful to working adult students (WAS)?

-Subquestion: Does participant attendance relate to supports needed by WAS?

-Subquestion: Do interactions between WAS and other students or instructors indicate supports needed by WAS?

Research Question 2: How could colleges enhance services to assist WAS towards completion of a 2-year associate nursing degree?

-Subquestion: What do I observe in the classroom that relates to services from the college that might meet the needs of WAS?

-Subquestion: Does participant attendance relate to services that might meet the needs of WAS?

-Subquestion: Do interactions between WAS and other students or instructors indicate services that might meet the needs of WAS?