Beyond A Paycheck: Additional Benefits Of The Federal Work Study Program At A Commuter Community College

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BEYOND A PAYCHECK: ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF THE FEDERAL WORK STUDY

PROGRAM AT A COMMUTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

By

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BEYOND A PAYCHECK: ADDITIONAL BENEFITS OF THE FEDERAL WORK STUDY PROGRAM AT A COMMUTER COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Abstract

Nationwide, community colleges have a graduation rate average of only 18%. As a result, institutions continually look for avenues to improve student success, persistence and achievement. While retention programs such as freshman orientation, communities of learning, TRiO and mentoring receive extensive study to catalog the factors associated with increased student persistence, data on the Federal Work Study Program is lacking. The majority of studies about the Federal Work Study program employ a quantitative design, comparing the graduation rates of participants to the general student population. While a positive trend is identified, the understanding of “why and how” students persist when engaged in the Federal Work Study program is minimal. This qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study focused on the experiences of the current Federal Work Study student or recent graduate (2012 to 2016). A minimum of two semesters of participation on campus was required to qualify a participant as persistent. Five themes were discovered in this study, through both the words and experiences of the participants and through utilization of student persistence theory. The five themes are: The Fledgling Student, Making Connections, Academic, Social and Institutional Integration, Non-Monetary Benefits and Giving Back. The Federal Work Study Program allows the participant to work up to eighteen hours per week on campus and increases interaction with supervisors,
faculty, staff and peers. These connections and learning opportunities were found to enhance the participants’ academic and social integration to the college culture, including discussion and future career planning. While participants in this study did not begin the Federal Work Study Program until their second year, efforts should be made to connect students earlier with the Federal Work Study Program to maximize the benefits of program participation.

Key words: Federal Work Study, Persistence, Commuter Community College, Qualitative, Phenomenology
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DEDICATION

To my Husband, Doug

Thank you for your love, support and patience.

Without you this journey would not have been possible.

To my Daughters: Victoria, Ashely and Cheyenne

You are the reason I push to obtain my goals. I want you to know that you can reach for your goals with hard work and perseverance. Thank you for inspiring me.
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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

While the creation of colleges and universities in the United States began in the 1600’s, the first community college was not founded until 1901 (“Community Colleges,” 2016; Crisp & Mina, 2012). Fifty years would pass before the community college found its niche and began to flourish (“Community Colleges,” 2016; Crisp & Mina, 2012). The creation of both the G.I. Bill in the 1950’s as well as the 1960’s Higher Education Act opened the doors to college education to over one million people (Berger, Ramírez & Lyons, 2012; Cooley, n.d.; “Significant events,” n.d.). College education, once exclusive to white males was now accessible to everyone (Berger, et al., 2012). Community colleges serve a diverse student population who enroll with just as many diverse goals, and their open-door policies allows for any and all to attend (Crisp & Mina, 2012). The student body is comprised of those from different races, genders, ethnicities, socio-economic ranges and includes those who have physical or learning disabilities (Arnold, 1999; Crisp & Mina, 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011; Juszkiewicz, 2014; Mooney, 2014). Student goals often include degree obtainment, transfer preparation, certificate program and personal development (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

Seventy-six percent of public community college students rely on financial assistance to access education opportunities (“Fast Facts,” n.d.). The Federal Government is the largest provider of financial support for students, supplying over $150 billion dollars annually (“Applying for Aid,” n.d.-a). Federal funding was initiated with the Higher Education Act of 1965 (Cooley, n.d; “Significant events,” n.d.). Federal Student Aid is composed of three areas; grants, loans and work study (“Types of aid,” n.d.-h.). Student education may be funded by a single type of aid or a combination of aid types based upon the student’s financial need. Student need is assessed when the student submits the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA)
Students are grouped into three different categories for calculating need: dependent students, independent students without dependents and independent students with dependents, other than a spouse (“The EFC,” n.d.). The basic formula consists of subtracting the expected family contribution (EFC) from the cost of attendance (COA) (“The EFC,” n.d.). Items considered in the calculation for EFC include taxable income, non-taxable income, cash on hand, investments and real estate. “Taxable income for parents and student, including wages, pensions, capital gains, interest, dividends, annuities, unemployment compensation, alimony received, rent collected, and business income” (Leider, 2016, para. 13). Non-taxable income is reported and is defined as:

…for parents and students, including workers’ compensation, welfare benefits (excluding food stamps), housing and food allowances, child support received, untaxed Social Security benefits, untaxed income from pensions and annuities, veterans’ non-education benefits, tax-exempt interest income, deductible payments made to a retirement plan (such as an IRA or Keogh), and earned income credit. (Leider, 2016, para. 13)

Cash on hand is determined by actual holding of cash, and the current balance of checking and saving accounts (Leider, 2016). Investments include “…stocks, bonds, CDs, money market funds, mutual funds, commodities, trust funds, education IRAs, state-based college savings plans… and real estate holdings (rental property and second homes) …” (Leider, 2016, para. 14).

The first type of funding comes from grants. Grants are distributed to recipients based on financial need and do not require repayment. From the U.S. Department of Education recipients can be awarded one of four types of grants; Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher

The other factor is the financial status of the community college student. The National Center for Educational Statistics listed nineteen percent of dependent students live in households with an income less than $20,000 and for independent students the percentage is approximately forty-eight percent (Radwin, Wine, Siegel, Bryan, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2013). Federal Pell grants account for the largest portions of Federal Grants distributed to community college students (Juszkievicz, 2014). Forty-four percent of community college students are the recipients of Federal Student Aid (Juszkievicz, 2014), while state and institutional aid accounts for twelve and thirteen percent of allocations, respectively (Juszkievicz, 2014).

While grants are more attractive to students because there is no form of repayment, loans make up the majority of educational funding. Loans are borrowed funds requiring repayment with interest. The U.S. Department of Education offers two loan programs, the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan program and the Federal Perkins Loan program. The William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan program is financed through the U.S. Department of Education while the Federal Perkins Loan program is financed through the college or university (“Types of aid,” n.d.-h.).

The William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan offers four types of loans: Direct Subsidized Loans, Direct Unsubsidized Loans, Direct PLUS Loans and Direct Consolidation Loans (“Loans,” n.d.-d.). For subsidized loans, the U.S. Department of Education pays the interest on the loan while the student attends college half-time or longer, for six months after the student
graduates and during any deferments (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). These loans are reserved for students with financial need (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). Direct Unsubsidized Loans require the student to be responsible for all interest that accrues during deferments (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). If the student chooses not to pay the interest as it accrues the interest is then added to the principle of the loan (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). Direct PLUS Loans are limited to students enrolled in professional or graduate programs and for parents acquiring loans to finance an undergraduate dependent (“Loans,” n.d.-d.). Once a student graduates they may request a Direct Consolidated Loan to merge multiple loans into one (“Loans,” n.d.-d).

There are other ways for students to earn money. The Federal Work Study Program was developed in 1965 (Troope, 2000) and now employs more than 700,000 students across U.S. campuses (Kenefick, 2015). Work Study students are awarded funding based on financial need, yet funds are dispersed at the discretion of the college or university (Blandizzi, 2013; Kenefick, 2015; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Troppe, 2000). Students are employed on campus or off campus with a “private non-profit organization or public agency” (“Types of aid,” n.d.-g.). The Federal Student Aid (FSA) Handbook (2014) defined non-profit organization as a federal or state incorporated group whose net earnings do not profit an individual or shareholders.

Federal Aid is just one component that helps students attend college. Colleges and universities implement a variety of programs to help increase student graduation and retention rates. To improve these rates the institution must target student persistence. Graduation, retention and persistence are interconnected, if students persist then they are retained. Students who are retained multiple semesters should graduate. Graduation rates are not just the focus of the community college, as the Federal Government is also concerned how graduation rates have fallen behind when compared to other countries. As a result, in 2009,
former President Obama challenged the nation to increase graduation rates to be the highest in the world by 2020 (Cook & Hartle, 2011; Duncan, 2010; “Higher Education,” n.d.). States across the country looked at the data and formulated plans for improvement.

2014 saw the development of University Innovation Alliance (UIA) partners, when eleven research institutions formed a collaborative to increase the number of graduates, work to improve the diversity of graduates, pool data and develop new ideas (Murty, 2016). Arizona, Georgia, Iowa, Michigan, Oregon State Universities along with Purdue, Ohio State and the universities of California, Riverside, Central Florida, Kansas and Texas at Austin make up the collaborative institutions (Murty, 2016). “Funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, Ford Foundation and USA Funds” (Murray, 2016, para. 1) have secured over three million dollars for the initiative (Murry, 2016).

One project solicited input from every state on retention and graduation figures for full and part-time students, thirty-three states provided information (Complete College America, 2011). Going forward, twenty-nine states intend to continue with the initiative looking for ways to improve retention and graduation rates (Complete College America, 2011). This was the first report to include all students, full and part-time in retention calculations (Complete College America, 2011). The states that did not participate include: Alaska, Alabama, Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, Michigan, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New York, North Dakota, Rhode Island, South Carolina, Vermont and Wisconsin (Complete College America, 2011).

While New Jersey did not participate in the study, New Jersey is rising to the challenge of former President Obama with the proposal of twenty new bills which cover topics including “college readiness, college completion, cost, data collection, accountability and pathways to
success” (Heyboer, 2014). Specifically, Bill A2804 stipulates that all community colleges work towards graduating 33% of their students by 2020 (D’Amico, 2014; Heyboer, 2014; Mooney, 2014; “New Jersey,” n.d.). A2804 was passed on November 13, 2014 (“New Jersey,” n.d.).

There are no mandates or Federal requirements that target specific retention numbers for colleges and universities, however all institutions must disclose retention numbers to the general public (“Middle States,” 2015; Tinto, 2006). Retention data are calculated for traditional, full time students (Arnold, 1999; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Traditional students are defined as those between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, enrolled in at least twelve credits per semester and qualify as a dependent (Arnold, 1999; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002). This calculation is determined from the number of freshmen who register for courses in the following year as sophomores (Arnold, 1999). Retention data may be misleading, as it does not account for the large number of part time students that attend colleges and universities (Complete College America, 2011). Part-time attendance is just one of several characteristics that define a non-traditional student (Arnold, 1999; Bers & Smith, 1991; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002). Other characteristics include those over the age of twenty-five, those who are employed and/or have dependents (Arnold, 1999; Bers & Smith, 1991; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002). Literature on retention links the improvement of graduation rates to retention rates (“Student retention,” 1998; Wilson, 2006). Furthermore, while it can be reasoned that by improving retention rates that graduation rates will also improve, this only represents a portion of the college population.

Interest in improving retention and graduation rates by colleges, universities and researchers spans many decades (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Hossler, 2006; Morrison & Silverman,
With significant focus on retention and graduation rates, it is disparaging how institutions spend more money recruiting students than is spent on retaining students (Fike & Fike, 2008). Hossler (2006) found very few institutions possess the funds to implement new retention programs and the scarcity of funds also prevents investigating the effectiveness of retention programs already in place. Hossler (2006) further supported this statement with his findings not just for the lack of studies but additionally the lack of rigor within these studies. Colleges and universities that do dedicate funds to retention programs and studies may choose to bring in outside consulting firms, often in effort to focus on the inclusion of students of diverse ethnic backgrounds, commuter students and part time students (Tinto, 2006). Consulting companies can help the college incorporate these specific populations into current and new retention programs.

Confusion can arise about the definitions of retention and persistence. Reason (2009) warned that the terms are often used interchangeably when they are in fact two very different terms. Retention is related to the college or university in that they retain students (Reason, 2009). Persistence on the other hand is specific to the student, the student makes the decision to persist to the next semester (Reason, 2009). To improve retention, individual student persistence must become the focus of the college.

There are many ways to help students persist, but programs that utilize identity and connection are more successful (Reason, 2009). If students interact with other students, faculty and staff at the institution, they are more likely to identify with the institution, and feel a connection (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986; Reason, 2009). These connections with students, faculty and staff can occur at an academic or social level (Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986; Reason, 2009). Researchers do not agree
about persistence at community colleges in comparison to four year colleges. Many community colleges are non-residential and one side of the argument is that the commuter student has limited time on campus and therefore cannot socially integrate (Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986). Other studies show that the community college student does integrate academically and socially to the culture of the college (Bers & Smith, 1991; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008). Students integrate through “academic and intellectual development”, “peer group interactions” and “interactions with faculty” (Bers & Smith, 1991, p. 545). Karp, Hughes & O’Gara (2008) found that social integration occurred within the academic function.

To understand the interaction between work study enrollment and student persistence, it’s vital to understand the programs community colleges currently use to retain their students. Community colleges employ numerous retention programs to enable students to persist. Mentoring, freshman seminars and communities of learning are just a few examples (Bean & Eaton, 2001; “Student Retention,” 1998). These programs receive extensive research to determine how they help students persist. What has been identified is a common core of traits related to integration (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Hossler, Ziskin, Moore III & Wakhungu, 2008; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2013; “The Art,” 2004). These programs encourage student to student, student to faculty and student to staff interactions (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Hossler, et. al, 2008; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2013; “The Art,” 2004). Interactions with faculty and staff coupled with information about the campus can boost the students’ confidence and give them the support they need to persist (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; “The Art,” 2004).

The Federal Work Study Program offers students with financial need an opportunity to work part time. The institution has the discretion to offer employment opportunities on campus
or off campus with qualified non-profit organizations. The job placements may be related to the students’ major but this is not a requirement of the program. The intention of the Federal Work Study Program is to help students with financial assistance. While this is one way to encourage student persistence, this program may offer more than just a paycheck in terms of student retention and persistence, as participation in the Federal Work Study Program is known to improve retention rates (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013). Scott-Clayton (2011) stated “the consequences of the FWS program have never been rigorously examined” (p. 507). While investigation has been done on the Federal Work Study Program, these studies do not delve into the student perspective of their participation in the Federal Work Study Program.

**Statement of the Problem**

Current research from the Department of Education puts the national community college graduation rate (those who will graduate within three to four years) at 18% for full time students (Complete College America, 2011; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2011; Marcus, 2013). Because only one third of community college students are full time, this graduation data does not provide a true picture of student success (Schuck & Larson, 2008). Community college students are more likely to be non-traditional, attending part-time, working at least part time, having dependents and commuter students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Schuck & Larson, 2008). In fact, the average age of a community college student is twenty-nine (Schuck & Larson, 2008; “Students at,” 2017) and non-traditional students (those not between the ages of eighteen and twenty-two) account for sixty-eight percent of all community college students (Schuck & Larson, 2008). Furthermore, this figure does not account for traditional students who transfer to a four-year college without completing the requirements for an associate degree (Bers & Smith, 1991; Crisp & Mina, 2012).
Many programs at colleges and universities are investigated for their role in student retention. To date there is limited research on the connection between the Federal Work Study Program and persistence or on the additional personal benefits of the Federal Work Study Program. With studies by Blandizzi (2013), Scott-Clayton (2011) and Troope (2000) utilizing quantitative research designs, a qualitative study can give added depth to this body of research and focus on the student perspective connecting the Federal Work Study Program and persistence.

In already financially difficult times, the challenge for college leaders is how to improve graduation and retention rates within the current college budget. One way is to investigate established programs and determine how well the program aids student persistence. The Federal Work Study Program is a well-established program and may provide a potential solution for student retention through persistence.

**Purpose**

This phenomenological study investigated student experiences within the Federal Work Study Program. Interviews were conducted with current students and those that recently graduated within the years 2012 and 2016 who completed two semesters of Federal Work Study participation in effort to collect stories on student experiences before and during Federal Work Study participation. Past studies compared the graduation rates of Federal Work Study students to students who do not work (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2011). These studies showed a positive trend for the Federal Work Study student but failed to look at specific aspects from the student’s perspective. Research shows to help students persist, academic and social
integration must occur, bonding them with the institution (Ackerman & Scibrowsky, 2007; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Dodd, Kirby, Seifer & Sharpe, 2009; Fabius, Gorelick & Grant, n.d.; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2013).

**Research Questions**

Community colleges are complex organizations that must contend with Federal and State regulations. Some of these regulations pertain to student success in the measurement of graduation and retention rates. To increase these rates, programs are implemented to increase student persistence. Students attending community colleges arrive with diverse backgrounds and personal situations. Each student arrives with preconceived ideas about college life, different financial status, employment status, and family situations (Deil-Amen, 2011; Schuck & Larson, 2008). This coupled with non-residency campus locations leads to a greater challenge for community colleges helping students persist (Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008; “Student retention,” 1998). Financial aid plays a key role in assisting students to attend and persist. One aspect of financial aid, Federal Work Study, may play a larger role in persistence than just financial support. To gain understanding of the student experience, interviews were utilized in this phenomenological study to obtain the student perspective and understanding of their integration and assimilation into the institution before and within the Federal Work Study Program as related to academic and social integration.

- How do students perceive and describe their experiences participating in the Federal Work Study Program?
- How do students describe the extent of their academic and social integration before participation in the Federal Work Study Program?
• What experiences do students describe that helped their social and academic integration before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program?

**Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is often viewed as the path for the researcher and audience to follow (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012; Roberts, 2010). Each path is unique and continuously develops as the research unfolds (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012; Creswell, 2012; Ravitch & Riggan, 2012; Roberts, 2010). The components for the conceptual framework are “…personal interest, topical research, and theoretical frameworks” (Ravitch & Riggan, 2012, p. 10).

The conceptual framework for this study began when the researcher noted how the Federal Work Study Program was influential on her academic success. Further investigation was needed to determine if other students recognize the same success. Research found that the Federal Work Study Program has a positive effect on student persistence (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013) the unanswered question is why? Deeper reflection on past experience with the Federal Work Study Program coupled with completed research uncovered academic and social integration as factors to be considered. Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) is found frequently in the literature. This theory looks for the level of academic and social integration as the factors that lead to the students’ decision to persist (Tinto, 1993). Academic and social integration are common threads within various retention programs such as communities of learning, freshman orientation and mentoring (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). In effort to determine if social and academic integration are recognized by current Federal Work Study students a transcendental phenomenological study was utilized.
To improve graduation rates, community colleges must focus in on what helps students persist. Many times, there is no set protocol for which programs institutions implement for improving student persistence. This gives institutions freedom to implement retention programs that will do the most for their students. One program that is consistent at all colleges and universities is Federal Student Aid. Since the Federal Work Study Program is part of every college and university, efforts should be made to harvest the retention benefits for students. Dickmeyer (2011) found that Federal Work Study students “…build new relationships and have an opportunity to commit more strongly to education and to identify with people who have already succeeded in education” (p. 2). Quantitative studies showed a positive trend of retention rates for students that participated in the Federal Work Study Program (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013; Cermak & Filkins 2004). Studies completed by Cheng & Alcántara (2007) and Leonard (2008) utilized focus groups at residential universities to explore the student perspective of working on campus. These studies did not differentiate between Federal Work Study students and other students who were employed on campus with alternate funding (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Leonard, 2008). Blandizzi (2013) identified the need to further evaluate special populations of students such as “independent students…students from very low-income families who, in addition to financing their own education, must contribute towards family expenses unrelated to their education…. students who lack knowledge about the financial aid available to them…” (p. 75).

Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) was developed in the 1970’s, through continued research this theory “has remained the dominant sociological theory of how students navigate through our postsecondary system” (Swail, 2004, p. 3). Tinto’s (1993) work looks at traits the student brings to college such as “family background, skills and abilities and prior
schooling” (p. 114) in conjunction to how the student perceives their fit within the institution. Tinto describes institutional fit as the academic and social integration of the student to the college or university (Tinto, 1993). It is these factors that influence a student’s decision to withdraw from the college or university. Tinto is not the only researcher to note the importance of academic and social integration as Dodd, Kirby, Seifert & Sharpe (2009) stated “…those students who fail to fully integrate into the culture of the educational institution are more likely to withdraw before completing their studies” (p. 3). How do students integrate into the academic and social life of the college? Tinto (1993) explained that the student must take the initiative to become part of the culture, even if the institution provides the means it does nothing if the student is unwilling to engage in the interaction. To encourage persistence, both academic and social integration must occur, but do not need to occur to the same level (Tinto, 2004). From academic assignments students, may interact with classmates, this interaction can lead to social integration (Tinto, 1993). Interactions with faculty members outside of the classroom can allow students to feel comfortable with the faculty member that they asked more questions in class or just become more engaged with the topic thereby increasing academic integration (Tinto, 1993). Student activities and clubs on campus are also meaningful in social integration (Eaton & Bean, 1995).

Tinto’s model (1993) noted that students will arrive at colleges and universities with preset beliefs, ideas and experiences that will influence interactions at the institution. Two other factors, the student’s education level and the level of education of family members effect the student. Once at the institution, new experiences the student engages in such as, course work, participation in clubs or other college activities can lead to academic and social integration. Again, these levels of integration can vary and it is these levels that help the student make the
decision to persist. By using a qualitative study, the researcher obtained the student’s perception of their level of academic and social integration, and experience with the Federal Work Study Program.

**Assumption/Biases**

As a former Federal Work Study student and current supervisor, the researcher possesses a bias that there are many positive aspects of the Federal Work Study Program. Information gathered through this study will be looked at from a fresh perspective, that of the current or recent graduated (2012-2016) Federal Work Study student. The Federal Work Study Program continues to undergo change and growth, and the study of how the program fully benefits student’s needs to be understood.

Furthermore, as every campus is different in how the Federal Work Study Program is structured, there may be variance in student experience. Therefore, this study will work with the demographic with the highest rate of dropout/failure to persist; the commuter community college student. By choosing the Federal Work Study Program, the assumption was made that participants possessed a financial need. Because retention theories were originally developed for four-year colleges (Morrison & Silverman, 2012), there are some researchers that suggested that these theories do not work for the community college population (Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Researchers cited lack of residency as the hindrance to social integration (Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986). Other studies found that the commuter community college student could socially integrate, even with their limited time on campus (Bers & Smith, 1991; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008).
Significance

In order to increase student persistence on commuter-only community college campuses, current programs must be assessed to discover new methods of student engagement. If community college students who participate in the Federal Work Study Program experience informal mentoring and a readymade peer group which furthers persistence over students not participating in the Federal Work Study Program, both the Federal Work Study Program and mentoring need further research (Leonard, 2008). The use of the Federal Work Study Program as a means for student persistence needs further discovery. Research completed on the topic of mentoring, whether formal or informal, showed the positive effects of mentoring related to student persistence (Crisp, 2010; Eby, Allens, Evans, Ng, & Deboise, 2008; Goff; 2011; Moman, 2002). Wilson (2006) stated that integration is the key to increasing persistence, students that feel included within the culture are more likely to stay within that culture.

Gathering student perspectives of their experiences while participating in the Federal Work Study Program illuminates the student voice concerning engagement and overall interest in their school surroundings. This knowledge may allow for further discussion about the importance and positive influence of Federal Work Study on student persistence and engagement, an issue that all commuter campus, community colleges face.

Definitions

- Academic Integration: “…Results from successful academic adjustment behaviors, ones that lead to academic competence and confidence” (Eaton & Bean, 1995, p. 622).
- Cash on hand: Consist of cash, and the current balance of checking and saving accounts (Leider, 2016).
• Community college: A college that provides the first two years of college education that results in the conferment of an associate degree. These colleges do not include on-campus residency.

• Investments: “…stocks, bonds, CDs, money market funds, mutual funds, commodities, trust funds, education IRAs, state-based college savings plans (except pre-paid tuition plans), and real estate holdings (rental property and second homes). You need not include the equity in your family’s primary residence” (Leider, 2016, para. 14).

• Learning Communities: “…share certain characteristics and intentions, including creation of an environment in which more intelligent interactions will occur among students and with the faculty and staff with whom students interact” (Stein, 2004, p. 3).

• Non-profit organization: A Federal or State incorporated group whose net earnings do not profit an individual or shareholders (“The FSA Handbook,” 2014).

• Non-taxable income: “...for parents and student, including workers’ compensation, welfare benefits (excluding food stamps), housing and food allowances, child support received, untaxed Social Security benefits, untaxed income from pensions and annuities, veterans’ non-education benefits, tax-exempt interest income, deductible payments made to a retirement plan (such as an IRA or Keogh), and earned income credit” (Leider, 2016, para. 13).

• Non-traditional students: Students possessing a combination of the following: over the age of twenty-five, enrolled in less than twelve credits per semester, are employed and possess dependents (Arnold, 1999; Bers & Smith, 1991; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002).
• Persistence: “…an individual phenomenon-students persist to a goal” (Reason, 2009, p. 660).

• Retention: “…an organizational phenomenon-colleges and universities retain students” (Reason, 2009, p. 660).

• Social Integration: “…Results from the successful adjustment behaviors such as socializing, making friends, and engaging in the social environment of the institution” (Eaton & Bean, 1995, p. 622).

• Taxable income: “…for parents and student, including wages, pensions, capital gains, interest, dividends, annuities, unemployment compensation, alimony received, rent collected, and business income” (Leider, 2016, para. 13).

• Traditional students: Students between the ages of nineteen and twenty-four, enroll in at least twelve credits per semester and qualify as a dependent (Arnold, 1999; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002).

Conclusion

Open access at community colleges increases the diversity of the student population. The diversity of the student population brings challenges to the goal of graduation. With Federal mandates to improve graduation rates, institutions look to retention programs to improve student persistence (“Higher Education,” n.d.). Utilizing multiple retention programs is recommended for helping diverse student populations (Tinto, 1993). Unfortunately, carrying multiple programs or adding new retention programs can be costly. With funding limitations, it is cost effective to analyze programs which already exist and take advantage of the benefits they can provide to students. The Federal Work Study Program exists in many community colleges and provides students the benefit of additional funds. Research suggests that the Federal Work Study Program
does increase retention rates (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013). More research from the students’ perspective is needed on how the Federal Work Study Program increases student persistence and how it can be administered to help additional students.

In Chapter Two the related literature will be explored. Beginning with Federal Student Aid; grants, loans and work study will be explained and discussed. The characteristics of four year and community colleges will be presented along with additional challenges the community college student encounters. Comparison will be made between the traditional and non-traditional students along with the factors that are used to classify each. Persistence in relation to retention and graduation is the next topic covered. Information will include factors driving the focus to clarify and increase graduation and retention rates. Student persistence theories and how social and academic integration factors influence persistence will be traversed. Connections between these attributes and established retention programs will be explored. Current findings of the connection between the Federal Work Study Program and student persistence will be probed along with the gaps in the literature. Chapter Three discusses the methodology, description of the setting and participants. Steps for data collection and analysis will be developed. Participants rights will be explained and potential limitations will be explored. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study beginning with the demographics of the participants. Each participant is introduced before the themes and subthemes are explored. Chapter Five will review the conclusions and recommendations as related to this research.
CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

There are many differences between four year colleges, community colleges and the students that attend them (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Swail, Redd, & Perna, 2003). All institutions of higher education implement an array of retention programs to effectively help their students (Morrison & Silverman, 2012) however, other programs, including those not specifically developed to enhance retention, can lead to higher rates of student persistence. The Federal Work Study Program falls within this category. The original purpose of the Federal Work Study program was to improve student persistence by providing financial assistance (Astin 1975a). However, current research shows that while the Federal Work Study Program does help with student persistence, the assistance is often derived from aspects that are not financial in nature (Astin, 1975a; Leonard, 2008). Due to limited funding retention programs are not often evaluated for effectiveness (Hossler, 2006).

Federal Work Study Program evaluations are generally through quantitative studies that utilize student satisfaction surveys or other quasi-experimental means (Aper, 1994; Blandizzi, 2013; Polson & Weisburst, 2014; Scott-Clayton, 2011). A phenomenological study can provide a new perspective about the benefits Federal Work Study students recognize and credit with improved persistence by allowing these students to voice their experiences.

While the primary focus of this study is on the persistence of Federal Work Study students at the community college, to fully understand the implications of the Federal Work Study Program on student persistence there must first be a basic knowledge about the Federal Student Aid Program. A detailed look the differences between four year colleges, community colleges and the students that attend to ascertain why it is important to complete more research at
the community college. And, explore other programs that are successful at helping students persist and why. Finally, Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (1993) will be explored, specifically the role academic and social integration play a part in student persistence.

Academic and peer reviewed journals were utilized to locate articles and documents. A selection of books contributed to the collection of information. The dates range from 1975 to the year 2017 in effort to fully understand current needs and struggles of students, but also allow for an explanation of the programs designed to assist and encourage retention.

**Federal Student Aid**

The Department of Education oversees $150 billion in aid annually (“Applying for Aid,” n.d.-a.). This aid is distributed in the form of grants, work study and loans. Grants and work study funds are allocated based on the financial need of the student. Students must complete the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) to determine eligibility for grants and Federal Work Study funding (Leider, 2016; “Types of Aid,” n.d.-h.). Students may receive funding from one source or a combination of the three types of aid.

Research focused on the impact of Federal Student Aid on student retention is conflicted. Studies found that retention varied with the amount and type of aid received (Astin, 1975a; Crockett, Heffron, Schneider, American Institutes for, & Noel-Levitz, 2012; Singell, 2001). While the retention percentages may differ, researchers agree that any increase in retention due to Federal Student Aid is beneficial for the student (Crockett, et. al., 2012; Herzog, 2008; Juszkiewicz, 2014; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Merit-based aid appears to impact retention at a higher level then financial need based aid (Singel, 2001). Tinto & Pusser (2006) found that Federal Work Study has the largest impact on student persistence when compared to other aid programs.
Grant Types and Availability

There are four types of grants awarded to students: Federal Pell Grant, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant (“Types of Aid,” n.d.-h.). Pell Grants account for the largest fraction of all grants dispersed to students enrolled at community colleges (Juszkiewicz, 2014). Grants do not require repayment.

Pell Grants issue a maximum award of $5,815 per year (“Federal Pell,” n.d.-b.). The exact amount is based on the student’s financial need, the cost of attendance at the chosen college, whether the student will be enrolled for a partial or full year and if that enrollment is full or part time (“Federal Pell,” n.d.-b.). Only undergraduates who do not possess a bachelor’s degree and maintain a grade point average (GPA) in accordance with the college policy qualify for such aid (“Staying Eligible,” n.d.-e.).

The Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grant (FSEOG) is designed to supplement other funding sources. Students can be awarded $100-$4000 annually (“What are,” n.d.). Eligibility requirements for U.S. Citizens include enrollment in a bachelor’s degree program for the first time and maintaining a GPA of at least 2.0 (“What are,” n.d.).

The Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education (TEACH) Grant is designated for future teachers that agree to teach for specific kindergarten to twelfth grades institutions in exchange for $4000 annually (“TEACH,” n.d.-g.). Students commit to give four years of service after graduation (“TEACH,” n.d.-g.). Additional criterion to be met are GPA of 3.25 or better, completion of FAFSA application, online counseling to cover terms and
conditions of the grant and a signed agreement (“TEACH,” n.d.-g.). If the student fails to complete the teaching assignment, the initial amount of the grant is converted into an unsubsidized loan for repayment (“TEACH,” n.d.-g.).

The Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grant is reserved for students who were enrolled in college at least part time when a parent or guardian was killed in service to the U.S. military in Iraq or Afghanistan after 9/11 (“Iraq and,” n.d.-c.). Other requirements for the student to meet include the student must be under the age of twenty-four and meet all Pell Grant criterion except the Expected Family Contribution (EFC) (“Iraq and,” n.d.-c.).

**Federal Loans**

Loans are funds borrowed by the student that require repayment with interest. There are two loan programs provided by the U.S. Department of Education, the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan and the Federal Perkins Loan program. The difference in the two loans is the financier, for the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan it is the U.S. Department of Education whereas the Federal Perkins Loan it is the college or university (“Types of Aid,” n.d.-h.).

The William D. Ford Loan is divided into four categories: Direct Subsidized Loan, Direct Unsubsidized Loan, Direct PLUS Loan and Direct Consolidation Loan (“Loans,” n.d.-d.). Students may utilize any one loan or a combination of loans when financing their education.

Direct Subsidized Loan is a subsidized loan that does not require the student to pay interest. Students who are enrolled half-time and possess financial need qualify for the U.S. Department of Education to pay the interest on the loan (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). Students will become responsible for the interest six months after graduation or immediately after withdrawing from college (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). Direct Unsubsidized Loans are unsubsidized, meaning the student is responsible for the accrued interest. These loans are available to all undergraduate or graduate students (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). The student is notified periodically of accrued
interest and given an opportunity to pay the interest (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f.). If the student chooses not to pay the interest that amount of interest is then added to the principle of the loan (“Subsidized and,” n.d.-f).

Direct PLUS Loans are limited to graduate students, students in professional degree programs and parents of undergraduate students (“Loans,” n.d.-d.). This loan type is unsubsidized and accrued interest may be paid periodically or allowed to be included in the principle (“Loans,” n.d.-d). Requirements include half-time enrollment and possession an acceptable credit rating (“Loans,” n.d.-d).

Direct Consolidation Loans are used to consolidate multiple student loans into one (“Loans,” n.d.-d). This loan can reduce interest rates and offer students different repayment options (“Loans,” n.d.-d). To be eligible for this loan the student must complete a degree program or reduce enrollment below half-time (“Loans,” n.d.-d).

**Federal Work Study**

Federal Work Study offers students the opportunity to work to earn additional funds. The intent of Federal Student Aid is that by providing funding for college expenses students will persist and graduate (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013). On campus work assignments, can include a variety of college departments such as laboratories, libraries and administrative offices (Astin, 1975a). The college may construct agreements for students to obtain employment with “private non-profit organizations” or public agencies (“Types of Aid,” n.d.-f.) off campus to supplement the on-campus offerings. Colleges are authorized by the U.S. Department of Education to dispense Federal Work Study funds at their discretion (Blandizzi, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Troppe, 2000).
Every year Federal Work Study helps thousands of students strive towards the goal of higher education. According to the 2011-12 National Postsecondary Student Aid Study (NPSAS:12), (Radwin, Wine, Siegel, Bryan, & National Center for Education Statistics, 2013) there were “26 million undergraduate students” (p. 1) included in the study. From Table 3, 1.8 percent of students attending two year colleges (p. 9) received Federal Work Study. This calculates to 468,000 students eligible to participate in the Federal Work Study Program in two year colleges.

**Four Year Colleges and Community Colleges**

The first college in America dates back to 1636 (“Historical Facts,” n.d.). Colleges of the time catered to the elite male (Berger, Ramírez & Lyons, 2012). While the four-year college now accepts a wide array of diverse students, they still possess the luxury of admitting only the students they feel best fit their college and who demonstrate the potential to succeed (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Traditional college students live on campus, range in age between seventeen and twenty-four, are dependents of a parent or guardian, at most work only part time and are unmarried with no dependents (Bers & Smith, 1991; Fike & Fike, 2008; Tinto 1993; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

While the traditional college in the United States dates back to the 1600’s it would be three hundred years before the first community college was established in 1901 (“Community colleges,” 2016; Crisp & Mina, 2012). The G.I. Bill of the 1950’s and Higher Education act in the 1960’s became the fuel that spawned a boom of community college campuses across the country (Berger, Ramirez & Lyons, 2012, Cooley, n.d; “Significant events,” 2016). The combination of these events, along with the open-door policies at community colleges led to the development of a highly-diversified student body (Crisp & Mina, 2012). There are often many
components to diversity, ethnicity, age, college readiness and preparation, citizenship status, language abilities, possession of physical or learning disabilities and socioeconomic disparities (Arnold, 1999; Crisp & Mina, 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011; Juszkiewicz, 2014; Mooney, 2014).

Community colleges opened the door for students where attendance at a traditional college with residency was an unrealistic feat. Non-traditional students exhibit a combination of the following characteristics; are above the age of twenty-five, attend college part time, commute to campus, are responsible for dependents, possess full time employment, are married or do not qualify as a dependent of their parents (Arnold, 1999; Bers & Smith, 1991; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Webbers, 2002). Commuter colleges can carry a disadvantage over residential colleges (Prather & Hand, 1986). For example, it is difficult to encourage commuter students to join student clubs or participate in campus activities when they are coming to the campus just for class (“Student retention,” 1998).

**Graduation, Retention & Persistence**

It would not do the topic justice to only speak to persistence. Persistence must be seen in relation to the big picture of graduation. Colleges and universities determine their success based on the graduation rates of their students. Four year colleges produce a higher number of graduates than community colleges (“Complete College,” 2011). With four-year college graduation rates at sixty percent (“Complete College,” 2011; Marcus, 2013) community colleges suffer from only an eighteen percent graduation rate (“Complete College,” 2011; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2011; Marcus, 2013). This disparity is often attributed to the selectivity of students, on campus residency and full time enrollment (Reason, 2009). Community colleges are not in the position to hand pick their students but instead work to provide education opportunities to any student who expresses an interest in enrollment (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Fike & Fike, 2008;
O’Gara, Karp & Hughes, 2009). Graduation rates for the United States are at their lowest level (Duncan, 2010). Former President Obama challenged the nation to turn this number around and by the year 2020 boast the highest graduation rate in the world once again (Duncan, 2010; “Higher Education,” n.d.). Colleges and universities work to improve graduation rates with the implementation of retention programs. Retention programs are looked upon as the vehicle that helps students persist. Colleges and universities may implement or improve retention programs through internal efforts or retain an outside firm to assist (Tinto, 2006).

Retention is defined as “…an organizational phenomenon-colleges and universities retain students” (Reason, 2009, p. 660). Retention studies date back to the 1930’s with a “…proliferation of studies that now number in the thousands, making undergraduate retention one of the most studied areas in higher education as a field of study” (Berger, Ramírez & Lyons, 2012, p. 11). Student retention rates are an ongoing concern for colleges and universities. Fike & Fike (2008) spoke to the importance of retention, “from institution’s perspective, the retention of students is necessary for financial stability and to sustain academic programs” (p. 69). In order for colleges and universities to keep their doors open, they need to retain students.

Retention is about helping the student adjust to college life (Wilson, 2006). Colleges and universities employ many different programs to support students to achieve success (Hossler, 2006). Examples of programs are freshman orientation, communities of learning, Freshman Interest Groups, service learning, mentoring programs, (Bean & Eaton, 2001) career seminars, tutoring and student clubs. Tinto (1993) advocates for using multiple programs to extend the furthest reach to encompass a multitude of students. It is noted by Tinto (1993) and Cermak & Filkins (2004) that making contact with students during the first year is crucial in retention.
Contact as defined by Tinto (1993) are interactions “…between the individual and other members of the social and academic communities of the college” (p. 55).

Persistence is defined as “…an individual phenomenon-students persist to a goal” (Reason, 2009, p. 660). Many theories exist about what attributes of programs increase student persistence. Prather and Hand (1986) state faculty and staff interactions with individual students are crucial to increase persistence. Other researchers find that any connection the student makes to the college or university is pivotal to increase persistence; this connection can be at an academic or social level (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986; Reason, 2009).

**Student Integration Theory**

Tinto’s theoretical framework on student integration (Tinto, 1993) is one of the most widely known and utilized (Bean, 1981; Berger, Ramírez & Lyons, 2012). This theory has multiple labels in the literature: Theory of Student Departure, Theory of Student Attrition and Theory of Student Retention (Bean, 1981; Demetriou & Schmitz-Sciborski, 2011; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Fike & Fike, 2008; Halpin, 1990; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008; Madgett & Bélanger, 2008; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; “The Art,” 2004;). Yet the description of the model is the same, beginning with characteristics of the student. Students begin college with preset influences such as family background, skills and abilities and prior education (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Influential to the student’s success is the student’s intentions, goals and institutional commitment (Bean, 1981; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Possibly in a conflicting manner on the student, external commitments may compete for the students’ time undermining the students’ success (Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Once enrolled, academic performance and interactions with faculty and
staff effect the extent of academic integration (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Influencing social integration are extracurricular activities and interactions with peers (Astin, 1984; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Lui & Lui, 2000; Tinto, 1993). Student intentions, goals and external commitments coupled with academic and social integration are the factors students use when deciding to persist (Tinto, 1993).

Many researchers customize this theory to adapt to a particular situation or to improve upon the structure (Bean, 1981; Guarino & Hocevar, 2005; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). Over the last three decades Tinto also continues to revise this theory (“The Art,” 2004). There are researchers that maintain Tinto’s theory is best utilized for the four-year college and does not function for the community college (Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986). Other advocates conducted research that shows Tinto’s theory can work for the community college (Bers & Smith, 1991; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008).

Being a part of a college culture the student develops a deeper connection to the college. Brock (2010) found that integration into the college culture could predominately affect retention. Social aspects of college life include participation in student clubs, study groups and college activities (Eaton & Bean, 1995; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008; Liu & Liu, 2000). Academic aspects include assimilating out of remedial courses into college level courses, obtaining passing grades and interactions with faculty and staff members (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Reason, 2009). Wilson (2006) made the connection that in order to persist the student must feel a connection to the college. Wilson (2006) discussed how integrating students into the social and academic life of the college is essential for re-enrollment. If the student feels a sense of belonging and inclusion, they are less likely to withdraw from classes and the institution (Karp,
Hughes & O’Gara, 2008). Brock (2010) asserted students must integrate into the college culture in order to increase persistence. As Tinto (2006) stated, the more programs that can be utilized to integrate students into the college culture the more successful the college or university can be at reaching a variety of students.

Schudde (2011) advocated residential colleges and universities are at an advantage in connecting students to the institution. Automatically residential colleges and universities bring with it a certain culture and access to on campus activities that improve bonding among students (Schudde, 2011). Researchers are divided when comparing academic and social integration at four year and community colleges. Some explained community college commuter students spend limited time on campus, they often do not socially integrate to the college culture (Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986). At the same time, other researchers supported that community college students do integrate academically and socially to the campus culture (Bers & Smith, 1991; Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008). Social integration could occur simultaneously with academic integration (Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008). Eaton & Bean (1995) found that “…academic and social integration are not mutually exclusive…” and “…suggest that academic integration may be a sub-construct of social integration” (p. 636).

**Retention Efforts**

Just as no two students are exactly alike in terms of educational background and life experiences, no one retention program can assist all students (Fike & Fike, 2008; Reason, 2009; Tinto, 2006). Colleges must implement a variety of programs to reach a larger population of students (Reason, 2009; Tinto, 2006). Programs such as mentoring, communities of learning and freshman orientation work to integrate students academically and socially into the culture of the college (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).
Mentoring

There are many variations of mentoring programs. They may be formally set up by the institution to encourage regular interactions between students and faculty, students and staff or students and students. Even without a formal program set by the college, many times informal mentoring occurs. Studies about mentoring programs tout positive outcomes on retention and grade point average (Baranik, Rolings & Eby, 2010; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Crisp, 2010; Eby, Allens, Evans, Ng & Deboise, 2008; Goff, 2011; Hu & Ma, 2010; Moman, 2002).

Mentoring programs serve to integrate students into the culture of the institution and also provide resources for students (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Crisp, 2010; Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Mentors can be a wealth of information on how to navigate institutional processes such as registration or obtaining a tutor (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Salas, Aragon, Alandehani & Timpson, 2014).


Research on mentoring showed positive outcomes for students regardless of the structure of the program (Crisp, 2010). Both academic and social integration occurred through mentoring relationships at the four-year college (Komarraju, Musulkin & Bhattacharya, 2010; Salas,
Aragon, Alandejani & Timpson, 2014). Researchers found that more investigation on mentoring programs specific to the ramifications of academic and social integration are required to fully understand the impact on the community college student (Crisp, 2010; Wild & Ebbers, 2002).

**Freshman Orientation**

Freshman orientation is often presented as a special seminar, multi-day program or mandatory course offering (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Davig & Spain, 2004; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wofle, 1986). Each institution tailors freshman orientations to meet the needs of their specific student population (Robles, 2002). Topics covered may vary from college to college and within one college (Davig & Spain, 2004). Topics can include but are not limited to campus tours, advising, institution policies and procedures, career exploration, time management, study skills, personal development, stress management and money management (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Davig & Spain, 2004; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wofle, 1986). Orientation can serve as a meet and greet for students to interact with each other and faculty members (Burgette & Magun-Jackson, 2008; Davig & Spain, 2004; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wofle, 1986). These activities are credited with assisting students with academic and social integration (Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Lui & Lui, 2000; Pascarella, Terenzini & Wofle, 1986; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). Freshman Orientation sessions “…assist students with developing academic, personal and social skills to help them succeed in college” (Robles, 2002, p.2). Involving faculty in freshman orientation informs students that faculty care about them and their success (Robles, 2002).

**Communities of Learning**

Communities of learning date back to the 1920’s when Alexander Meiklejohn began an “…experimental college at the University of Wisconsin” (Stein, 2004, p. 5). While the
definitions of communities of learning may vary Stein (2004) asserts these definitions “…do share certain characteristics and intentions, including creation of an environment in which more intelligent interactions will occur among students and with the faculty and staff with whom students interact” (p. 3). This program increased student and faculty interactions by utilizing special rules, block scheduling and cohabitation in dorms. The Great Depression put an end to this experiment and communities of learnings did not resurface until 1948 (Stein, 2004). Today communities of learning come in various forms that can be implemented in a variety of ways on the college and university campus (Stein, 2004). Some institutions select a group of students that are enrolled together in all of their courses, this increases the bond between students (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Stein, 2004; Tinto, Goodsell-Love & Russo 1993). Tinto, Goodsell-Love & Russo (1993) noted that students expressed “…receiving social, emotional and academic support from peers…” (p. 20). Learning communities show similar traits of academic and social integration which increases student persistence (Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Lui & Lui, 2000; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell-Love & Russo, 1993). Engstrom & Tinto (2008) found that students “…were more academically and socially engaged” (p. 47). They attribute this engagement to providing students with “…safe places to learn, places where they were free to express themselves and learn from one another” (p. 48). Students in learning communities develop trust among their peers which in turn enables them to openly participate in class (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008). It is with prolonged contact with the same group of students and faculty that a support system can develop which leads to an increase in the sense of belonging (Engstrom & Tinto, 2008).
Federal Work Study and Persistence

The Federal Work Study Program’s first priority is to help students with the financial aspect of college. Financial support is not the only positive effect that can come from the Federal Work Study Program. Studies located show the Federal Work Study Program can increase student retention (Astin, 1975a; Cermak & Filkins, 2004; Leonard, 2008). These studies investigated primarily four year colleges.

In addition to the numerical data, some studies mentioned additional aspects of the Federal Work Study Program that played a role in retention (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013; Cermak & Filkins, 2004; Dickmeyer, 2011; Leonard, 2008; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Leonard (2008) and Blandizzi (2013) listed the following aspects they see as additional benefits of the Federal Work Study Program: connection to the institution, informal mentoring and retention. These benefits in turn attempted to help the student make a deeper connection to the college allowing the student to persist until graduation (Dickmeyer, 2011). Astin (1975a) completed a study to look at the impact of Federal Student Aid on student retention. Astin (1975a) stated that “these positive effects might be attributed to the greater degree of student involvement in campus life which may result from participation in work-study programs” (p. 15). Interactions with staff and faculty provide role models for students to emulate which in turn enhance integration (Blandizzi, 2013; Dickmeyer, 2011). Additional time on campus outside of class can increase attachment, the Federal Work Study Program can provide this opportunity (Astin, 1975b; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Dustmann & Soest (2007) mentioned that peer pressure can dissuade students from dropping out of college. When work study students interact on the job it creates a peer group and informal mentors. Leonard (2008) investigated this aspect for her report, A Study on the Effects of Student Employment on Retention, where students in her focus groups equated the
work unit with a family and felt comfortable asking their supervisors questions about college life. Students reported feeling a closer connection to the college as work study students, becoming part of a special group that can access things behind the scenes (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007). Aper (1994) concluded that students employed on campus engaged with faculty more frequently than students not working on campus. Participation in the Federal Work Study Program gives students commonality they need to make additional connections with students outside of the classroom (McKenzie, 1981).

Cheng & Alcántara (2007) discovered that students may initially seek employment for financial reasons and end up “…with greater access to the world beyond the campus gate, on-the-job learning, and opportunities to interact and network with people in the workplace” (p. 306). They also found the “…experience academically and socially more meaningful” (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007, p. 308). Terenzini, Yaeger, Pascarella & Nora (1996) recognized enhanced socialization opportunities for students who participated in the Federal Work Study Program. Students increased interactions not only with peers but also staff and faculty (Terenzini, et. al., 1996). Cermak & Filkins (2004) found involving students within the Federal Work Study Program in the first year of college yields the greatest outcome for retention. Scott-Clayton (2011) noted that off campus employment can negatively affect academic success, but the benefits from on campus employment can outweigh the potential negative effect on a student’s grade point average.

It is important to note that the studies completed by Aper (1994), Blandizzi (2013), Cermak & Filkins (2004) and Leonard (2008), investigated four year institutions. Scott-Clayton (2011) and Terenzini, et. al. (1994) both included a mixture of four year and community colleges
within their studies. The study by Scott-Clayton (2011) included all of the colleges in West Virginia. Polson & Weisburst (2014) patterned their study following Scott-Clayton’s (2011) research but limited their sample to two year colleges in Texas.

**Conclusion**

Differences in community college structure, offerings and students are reflected in the graduation rates. Selective four year colleges show graduation rates to be forty percent higher than those of community colleges (“Complete College,” 2011). Efforts to improve graduation rates often start with retention programs. These programs focus on individual student persistence as the avenue for improving graduation rates. Colleges employ multiple retention programs to help a diverse array of students (Tinto, 1993).

Many of these programs received extensive research to determine their effectiveness for student persistence (Crisp & Mina, 2012; Hossler et. al., 2008; Morrison & Silverman, 2012; Tinto, 2006). Mentoring, freshman orientation and communities of learning are three such programs. Research shows that they increase the integration of the student academically and socially which in turn increases student persistence (Astin, 1984; Bean & Eaton, 2001; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Lui & Lui, 2000; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993; Tinto, Goodsell-Love & Russo, 1993).

The Federal Work Study Program began as a way to increase student persistence through financial support (Astin, 1975a). Quantitative studies of the Federal Work Study Program link the program to an increase in persistence (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013). This body of literature shows that persistence may not just be related to financial support and the Federal Work Study Program may exhibit characteristics similar to other retention programs (Astin, 1975a; Leonard 2008). Qualitative studies identified convenience of location, sympathy to class schedules,
improved job skills and increased interactions with staff and faculty as positive attributes of working on campus (Cheng & Alcántara, 2007; Leonard, 2008). Further exploration of the characteristics would benefit from a qualitative study specifically employing a transcendental phenomenological study to gather additional student perspectives.
Community colleges serve a diverse population of students; students who often face numerous challenges in their quest to attain education and a degree. These institutions employ many means to help this population, one of which is by utilizing federal funds and offering low tuition rates. Unfortunately, funding alone is not enough to help students persist and ultimately reach the goal of graduation. The current graduation rate for full time students that graduate within three to four years with an associate degree is eighteen percent (Complete College America, 2011; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2011; Marcus, 2013). Each student brings a unique background and set of goals to the college setting. No one retention program can effectively help every student, and employing multiple programs broadens the reach to help students persist (Tinto, 1993).

There are a variety of initiatives developed to help the institution and the student. One that has caught the attention of law makers, news reporters and institutions is former President Obama’s challenge to the nation to produce the highest graduation rate in the world by the year 2020 (Duncan, 2010; “Higher Education,” n.d.). To complete this task of improving graduation rates, many institutions turn to consulting companies (Tinto, 2006). Consulting companies such as Achieve the Dream Inc., look to involve all departments on campus. The idea is to identify current retention programs that can be improved upon or new programs to be implemented. Some colleges and universities cannot afford to hire outside consultants and will work on their own to identify ways to improve student retention and graduation rates.

Research may occur as a quantitative, qualitative or mixed method study, each yielding a different perspective. Previous studies selected quantitative research designs, two studies located utilized focus groups obtaining data from the student’s perspective (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi,
Most of the information gathered on retention and student persistence is in the form of quantitative student surveys or generated by comparing graduation rates of students in special programs to the general student graduation rate (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013; Cermak & Filkins, 2004; Scott-Clayton, 2011).

Blandizzi (2013) stated “additionally, a deeper look into the relationships identified in this analysis is needed. If the findings are correct, then the implications for practice are focused solely on the work study program, as opposed to financial aid in general” (p. 71).

The purpose of this transcendental phenomenological study was two-fold, as most studies concerning this topic studied it through a quantitative method and at four year colleges. These studies employed student satisfaction surveys and other surveys that were already in place at the college (Astin, 1975a; Blandizzi, 2013; Cermak & Filkins, 2004; Scott-Clayton, 2011). As a result, this study instead examined the qualitative aspect of student perspectives about the relationship between their work study role to academic and social integration at the community college. This study examined participants’ descriptions of experiences before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program. It was through these descriptions that the level of student academic and social integration could be understood and determined if there is a relationship to persistence. Through interviews the researcher attempted to answer the following questions:

- How do students perceive and describe their experiences participating in the Federal Work Study Program?
- How do students describe the extent of their academic and social integration before participation in the Federal Work Study Program?
• What experiences do students describe that helped their social and academic integration before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program?

**Qualitative Research and Phenomenology**

Merriam (2009) described three basic attributes for qualitative studies: “… (1) how people interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) what meaning they attribute to their experiences” (p. 23). She further explained how each type of qualitative study design is designated by its specific rules. As this study sought to understand the experience of students who participated in the Federal Work Study Program, through collected stories of the students’ experiences, and allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon of the program that helped students persist. Transcendental phenomenology is just one of seven variations of phenomenological studies (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013; Smith, 2013). Some literature referred to this type as Transcendental Constitutive Phenomenology (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013; Smith, 2013). Merriam-Webster defines “transcendental” as related to Kantian philosophy “of or relating to experience as determined by the mind’s makeup” and “transcending experience but not human knowledge” (2016). “Transcend” is defined as “to rise above or go beyond the limits of” (Merriam-Webster, 2016).

To conduct this type of research, the researcher needed to delve past their current knowledge to see the phenomenon from the participants’ perspective without any preconceived ideas. Transcendental phenomenology required the researcher to exclude their own personal experiences with the phenomenon that is being studied (Chan, Fung & Chien, 2013; Moustakas, 1994; Smith, 2013) and the process operated under a distinct set of steps; epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation and synthesis (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).
Moustakas (1994) defined “epoche” (p. 22), as the time when the researcher suspends what they know of the phenomenon in order to see it from a fresh, new perspective. While suspending one’s pre-existing beliefs, this experience the researcher must still be aware of how the experience can influence their perspective of the phenomenon. Chan, Fung & Chien (2013) recommend bracketing occurs before data collection, “the directive of the questions and the manner in which the researchers ask them during the interview affects the way the participants tell their stories” (p. 4).

Phenomenological reduction occurs as the researcher hones in on the specific essence of the experience. “Essence” as defined by Merriam-Webster (2016) is the “…ultimate nature of a thing…the most significant element, quality or aspect of a thing or person.” Creswell (2013) described the essence of a phenomenon as the “underlying structure” (p. 82) of the phenomenon. The reduction process is accomplished by singling out the different aspects of the phenomenon from the interview transcripts (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994).

Once the reduction is completed the researcher then reflects upon the data and attempts to look at the experiences from many different viewpoints, this is the imaginative variation (Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). Extensive reflection can allow the researcher to develop a variety of scenarios that will allow for full understanding of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). The reduced data is then coded to discover patterns (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Synthesis of phenomenological data can occur using the steps of the Stevik-Colaizzi-Keen method for analyzing phenomenological research (Moustakas, 1994). For each participant in the study every statement is reflected upon for significance to the study, those statements that are found to be significant are logged (Moustakas, 1994). Duplicates are removed and the significant statements are transformed into a textural-structural description (Moustakas, 1994). Once this is completed
for each participant the textural-structural descriptions are combined becoming one statement that describes the phenomenon for the participants collectively (Moustakas, 1994).

**Setting**

This study was conducted at a three campus, two-year community college in the eastern United States. The three campus locations each possess a unique geographic setting and all are commuter campuses. The main campus is in a suburban area set on about 400 acres of wooded property. A second campus is located in a suburban type setting but it is also a seasonal area, with a high influx of tourist during the summer months. A third campus location is also subject to a summer tourist season, yet it is located in an urban city. This college will be referred to as Tri-campus Community college (TcCC). The average number of students enrolled in credit and certificate programs in New Jersey is approximately 7,000 students per community college (“2016 Fact,” 2016). The average enrollment for continuing education classes per community college in New Jersey is roughly 4,500 (“2016 Fact,” 2016). Three community colleges in New Jersey show similar averages for credit and certificate programs (“Preliminary enrollment,” 2016). These same institutions are below average for the non-credit enrollment rates (“Noncredit enrollment,” n.d.). TcCC’s enrollment figures reflect this data.

**Participants/Sample**

The selection of participants was criterion-based sampling, meaning participants were a specific selection of those who have experienced the phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Participants for this study were limited to current working students and/or recent graduates (2012-2016) who participated in the Federal Work Study Program on campus for two semesters. These students and graduates were selected because they successfully persisted at least one year.
Federal Work Study students that have been supervised by this researcher will be excluded from the study. It should be noted that this study will not be limited to full time students, provided the student meets the above criteria.

Studies showed that if students made a connection to the college during their freshman year they are more likely to be retained into the sophomore year (Cermak & Filkins, 2004; Tinto, 1993). Graduate students (2012-2016) were successfully retained to the completion of an associate’s degree. It is these students’ experiences that will provide the details of why they persisted. Investigating what connections students and graduates (2012-2016) made to the college during their first and/or second year can help identify what programs are working to increase student persistence, specifically the Federal Work Study Program. Studies also identified that students who work on campus see a benefit in retention and graduation rates (Astin, 1975a; Cermak & Filkins, 2004) where working off campus leads to higher drop out and stop out rates (Scott-Clayton, 2011). Students who work on campus are more likely to work less than nineteen hours per week (Work Study Student Coordinator, phone conversation, 2015) in contrast to students who work off campus, where employers schedule them for over twenty hours per week. Research shows the ideal number of hours for a student to work and maintain a positive grade point average is between fourteen and twenty hours per week (DeSimone, 2008; Stinebrickner & Stinebrickner, 2003). Only students who were employed on campus were included in this study.

Contact was first made with the Director of the Federal Work Study Coordinator through email correspondence (Appendix B). This email requested permission to work with the Federal Work Study Coordinator to obtain participants. The criterion for participants was emailed to the Work Study Coordinator along with information about the study, participation and the
researchers contact information (Appendix C). The Work Study Coordinator sent an email to those students that fit the criterion, specifically, sophomore students who work on campus and completed two semesters of Federal Work Study. They were given the researcher’s University of New England email address to arrange an interview. The interviews were conducted in the Spring 2016 and Fall 2016 semesters. The interviews occurred at a public library that was convenient to the participant or other agreed upon neutral location (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Initial interviews were conducted in person, with follow up contact via email and telephone conversations. If needed, additional interviews would occur. In addition to financial need, students at TcCC must be enrolled in at least six credit hours to be eligible to participate in the Federal Work Study Program (Work Study Student Coordinator, phone conversation, 2015). There is no distinction of students who are working towards a degree or certificate program (Work Study Student Coordinator, phone conversation, 2015). There were about 70 students participating at job locations on and off campus program (Work Study Student Coordinator, phone conversation, 2015). Students working on campus earned $8.38 per hour.

To increase student persistence, a connection to the institution should be made within the first semester of attendance (Tinto, 1993; Cermak & Filkin, 2004). Therefore, second year Federal Work Study students were chosen because they showed persistence to the second year, and it is assumed that their connection to the institution played a role in their success. Phenomenological studies tend to use smaller samples of participants as a means to limit the amount of data to be analyzed (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984). It is recommended that a sample size should encompass three to ten participants (Creswell, 2013; Dukes, 1984). To achieve data saturation, it was determined that six to ten participants would be chosen for this study. Merriam (2009) explained that data saturation occurs when no new data continues to be added to the
study. Multiple participants aided with triangulation which is a secondary method to validate data. Creswell (2013) and Merriam (2009) explained that triangulation develops when multiple participants independently express the same information.

**Data**

Data collection utilized interviews of Federal Work Study participants who are current students or those that graduated between 2012 and 2016, were employed on campus and participated for two semesters. These interviews were conducted to gather narratives and stories from students of specific experiences to obtain a deeper level of information that cannot be learned from surveys. Moustakas (1994) stated “the phenomenological interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions” (p. 114).

General interview guide approach was used for this study. General interview guide approach allows for questions to be applied as a guide to assist the researcher collecting specific information (Turner, 2010). An open-ended format provides the participant freedom to divulge detailed responses and the interviewer may deviate from the guided questions to ascertain more detail from a response (Turner, 2010). General demographic information was gathered at the start of the interview (Appendix F). This information included age, parent and sibling education information, reason for attending college and choosing TcCC, when they began their Federal Work Study assignment, how they found out about the Federal Work Study Program, reason for participation and number of hours worked weekly. Collection of these descriptive statics allowed for potential patterns to emerge (Salkind, 2011) and provided information about the student as it pertains to Tinto’s Model of Student Integration (Tinto, 1993). The interviews were
semi-structured and, after the initial questions, the remainder of the interview was more conversation-like and allowed to flow naturally (Gill, Stewart, Treasure, and Chadwick, 2008; Merriam, 2009).

Only one interview was conducted per day as to allow the researcher time to reflect upon the information. To balance between the interview and other obligations for the participant, interviews were scheduled in ninety minute blocks. The interviews each lasted between forty-five to ninety minutes (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). If needed and both parties are agreeable, the session could be extended an additional half hour, but this did not occur for any of the interviews. The interviews were recorded with an electronic recorder (Creswell, 2012). The researcher took limited notes during the interview as to be fully engaged with the conversation (Creswell, 2012; Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). All interviews were transcribed by the researcher within seventy-two hours of the interview. Transcription occurred at the researcher’s office. Transcriptions were sent to the participant for review, comments and corrections via email, providing the first of two member checks (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Any needed follow up occurred via email, telephone or interview as requested by the participant or the researcher (Jacob & Furgerson, 2012). Interview questions are attached in Appendix F.

Analysis

Data gathered through the interviews then underwent analysis. Data analysis began with the three steps of phenomenological analysis, epoche, phenomenological reduction and imaginative variation (Lin, 2013; Merriam, 2009; Moustakas, 1994). The work of Miles & Huberman (1994) and Saldaña (2013) was utilized by the researcher for the coding of data and
aided with the phenomenological reduction stage. The researcher made use of analytic memo writing to chronicle the coding process, keeping reflections of interviews and cataloging thoughts related to the research (Saldaña, 2013).

In the first step, epoche the researcher first recorded their own personal experiences with the phenomenon (Chun, 2013; Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). This allowed the researcher to be fully aware of their experience in effort to keep their experience from the data being collected. The epoche process allowed the researcher to identify new perspectives that can emerged from the data.

Phenomenological reduction for this study began with reflection about the data during the transcription of the interviews; this assisted the researcher to become fully engaged with the data. Each interview was transcribed with every sentence being numbered. These transcriptions were printed on different colored paper, one color for each interview. Coding began after the transcription of the first interview (Miles & Huberman, 1994; Saldaña, 2013). This reduced the amount of data that was coded at any one time and increased the quality of the coding. Saldaña (2013) describes coding as “…the transitional process between data collection and more extensive data analysis” (p. 5). Sentences from the transcripts were coded into emergent concepts (Lin, 2013). Lin (2013) defines concept as “… a label for a discrete happening, event or other instance…” (p. 473). It was from these concepts that themes developed (Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004). The themes were then used to create textural descriptions or the “what” that was experienced (Chun, 2013; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994). Structural descriptions were developed to explain the “how” it was experienced (Chun, 2013; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2004; Moustakas, 1994).
Using both the textural and structural descriptions, the researcher then employed imaginative variation. Imaginative variation occurs when the researcher looks at the data from many different perspectives in order to investigate the phenomenon from new viewpoints (Chun, 2013; Moerer-Urdahl & Creswell, 2013; Moustakas, 1994). The textural and structural descriptions were sent to the participants and this allowed the participants an opportunity to confirm the researcher captured their experiences. This was the second member check. Member checking validates the data when participants take the opportunity to comment on the research (Creswell, 2013; Merriam, 2009).

**Participants Rights**

Participants were given background information on the study in the initial email invitation. Participants initiated inclusion in this study when they emailed the researcher and those selected for interviews could opt out at any time during the process. To protect the identity of the college and participants, pseudonyms were given to the participants. The college was identified as Tri-campus Community College (TcCC). Interviews were conducted in person and all interviews were recorded. Participants signed a consent form prior to the interview (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) (Appendix A). Participants could choose to refrain from answering specific questions and still provide information for others (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Participants were sent copies of the transcription of their interview(s) as they were completed to review and critique. This was the first of two member checks, allowing the participant to confirm the information and the inflection was properly captured (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009). The participant received the textural and structural descriptions when completed to assess, this step again provided the participant the opportunity to validate the information was accurately synthesized (Creswell, 2014; Creswell, 2012; Merriam, 2009).
The participants were instructed to refrain from using proper names during the interview that could identify the participant or college location. Any names or locations that are given were changed by the researcher. All electronic data is stored on an external hard drive along with any other documents are stored in a locked safe (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Email was utilized to contact interview participants; their email information will be deleted after the completion of the study. All other items will be destroyed five years from the completion of the study.

**Potential Limitations**

The selection of one community college limits the number of eligible participants. While only limited data may be collected with the selection of one community college this study provides information that could apply to other community colleges. The selected site currently employs approximately 70 students in the Federal Work Study Program at TcCC. The number of participants is unlikely to be divided equally among freshmen and sophomore students. The actual number of on campus, Federal Work Study students with sophomore status was unknown at the time of this study. Furthermore, student participation was optional and student response was low.

Another limitation is the level of participant commitment to the study. As participation is strictly voluntary; family, education and work obligations may compete with the limited free time of the participant. Not all participants took the time to review transcripts or structural and textual descriptions. Finally, Fereday & Muir-Cochrane (2006) warned of the limitations of a study with just one researcher, stating diversity of coding themes can be limited with just one perspective. Analytic memo writing can alert the researcher to lack of diversity in the coding, allowing the researcher the opportunity to explore other perspectives (Saldaña, 2013).
Conclusion

When searching for connections between the Federal Work Study Program and persistence it is important to catalog and understand the student experience and the need for academic and social integration. While there is research that investigates the numerical data of the Federal Work Study Program and persistence; little data is available from the student’s perspective. Investigating the student’s experiences gives clues to the phenomenon that aids in persistence. What is it about the student’s experiences that compels them to persist? Utilization of a phenomenological study with the use of interviews provided much needed qualitative data and a true understanding of the phenomena of persistence. Additionally, viewing these student descriptions from a variety of new perspectives provided new information about how the Federal Work Study Program can support student persistence.
CHAPTER FOUR: RESEARCH FINDINGS

Community colleges serve a diverse population, and their open-access invites all to attend. As a result, student populations are unique and diverse (Crisp & Mina, 2012). This diversity is expressed as differences in age, citizenship, college preparedness, economic standing, ethnicity, language abilities and physical or learning disabilities (Arnold, 1999; Crisp & Mina, 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011; Juszkwiewicz, 2014; Mooney, 2014). This diversity creates not only academic challenges for the community college to help students mitigate, but often additional financial and social challenges that come from off campus residency. This is best reflected in the national graduation rate of eighteen percent for full time students (Complete College America, 2011; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2011; Marcus, 2013). In addition, community colleges cater to a large group of non-traditional students, including those who attend part-time, commute, maintain outside employment, dependents and those above the age of traditional college students (Deil-Amen, 2011; Schuck & Larson, 2008). Retention programs are often effective at improving graduations rates by assisting students in their quest for academic and social integration (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986; Reason, 2009). Mentoring, freshman seminars and communities of learning are some of the programs that are widely implemented and studied (Bean & Eaton, 2001; “Student Retention,” 1998). The Federal Work Study Program assists students with financial needs to attend college, these funds are disbursed at the discretion of the college (Blandizzi, 2013; Kenefick, 2015; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Troppe, 2000). Federal Work Study may offer additional benefits to students beyond a paycheck when it comes to retention and persistence. To learn more about benefits participants receive, quantitative studies using student satisfaction surveys are common throughout the literature (Aper, 1994; Blandizzi, 2013; Polson & Weisburst, 2014;
Scott-Clayton, 2011). Since student voices and perspectives are seldom heard, this phenomenological study investigated the connection between the Federal Work Study Program participation and student persistence. This study attempted to answer the following questions.

- How do students perceive and describe their experiences participating in the Federal Work Study Program?
- How do students describe the extent of their academic and social integration before participation in the Federal Work Study Program?
- What experiences do students describe that helped their social and academic integration before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program?

This chapter presents the data collected from the six participant interviews. An update on the data collection process will be given. Demographics of the participants will be explored before individual narratives for each participant are provided. The chapter will conclude with a discussion of the identified themes and subthemes.

**Participant Acquisition**

During Spring semester 2016, the Federal Work Study Coordinator at Tri-campus Community College (TcCC) sent out requests via email to those students that met the criterion, a total of five invites, which was far less than anticipated (Appendix D). As a phenomenological study required six to ten participants in effort to reach data saturation (Merriam, 2009), the criterion was expanded to include second semester freshman and first semester sophomores who began participation as freshman. Permission for this change was obtained from Institutional Review Board (IRB) one week after the initial approval. The TcCC Federal Work Study Coordinator noted that many of the current students do not work continuously semester to semester. Interestingly, this is a change seen in recent years. To obtain a true picture of the
current Federal Work Study student, continuous participation was not a requirement. Within a day of the first email, one participant responded and requested an interview. This participant was asked to refer other Federal Work Study students to utilize snowball sampling (Merriam, 2009) however this proved unsuccessful. As the weeks passed, the criterion was revisited and modified again to open the pool of participants, again amending the IRB approval. This approval allowed for the inclusion of recent graduates between the years 2012 and 2016 and the creation of a Face Book page (Appendix E). As Summer 2016 ended, the approaching school year brought a renewed vigor, the final modification to the IRB approval was the removal of specific semester terms for freshman and sophomore participation and allowed for two semesters of Federal Work Study participation. At the start of the Fall semester, the Federal Work Study Coordinator sent another email requesting participants, one additional student contacted the researcher. This participant knew of others in the Federal Work Study Program. It was requested that she pass along the researcher’s contact information to obtain participants through snowball sampling, however this did not yield any additional participants. Five more invitations were sent, however no responses were received. The remaining participants were obtained by way of the Facebook page. As supervisors of Federal Work Study students were “friended,” they alerted students to the opportunity. Students were willing to participate when a trusted coworker spoke of the opportunity instead of just a general email invitation from the Work Study Coordinator.

As each interview was conducted, transcripts were typed by the researcher within seventy-two hours and before the next interview occurred. To facilitate member checking, all transcripts were sent to participants to give them the opportunity to review for accuracy and
respond to any additional questions that were included. Two participants did not respond. Email was utilized for follow up questions. All participants were assigned a pseudonym to conceal their identity.

Demographics

A total of six participants were interviewed for the study. The participants were equally divided geographically, two living by each local campus. While most attended the local campus exclusively, one participant attended classes at two campus locations and another attended predominantly on-line. The on-line student declared a major that could be completed entirely off campus, yet provided the option to complete some courses on-campus. The on-line student’s Federal Work Study assignment was not at the local branch campus. Instead, the on-line participant chose to take advantage of the abundance of employment assignments at the main campus, utilizing available funding from the Federal Work Study Program.

Of the six participants, three were male and three were female. Only two of the participants were considered traditional students, meeting the age range of between eighteen and twenty-two years, and attending college full time. Two participants fell within the age range of traditional students but attended only part time. The last two exceeded the age range and were enrolled on a part time basis. Furthermore, two of the participant’s mother’s earned associate’s degrees with one currently attending college. Of the fathers, one was identified as having attended and the other five did not. Three of the participants possessed at least one sibling who attended college at the same time as their enrollment and one participant was enrolled with their mother. Of those parents that did not attended college, the participants expressed that they were encouraged to surpass their parent’s educational achievements. Table 1 provides a visual of the distribution of the demographics for reference.
### Table 1
Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Enrollment Status</th>
<th>Traditional/Non-traditional</th>
<th>Mother attended college?</th>
<th>Father attended college?</th>
<th>Hours worked per week</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Abigail</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Becky</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>FT</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christopher</td>
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<td>FT</td>
<td>Traditional</td>
<td>Yes, A.A. Degree</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Daisy</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>Yes, A.S. Degree</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Edward</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>Currently attending</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Frank</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>PT</td>
<td>Non</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Enrollment status can be full-time (FT) or part-time (PT).

Associate degree options are Associate in Arts (A.A), Associate in Science (A.S.) and Associates in Applied Science (A.A.S.).

Three reasons were cited equally by participants as the reason for enrollment at TcCC: 1) location, 2) the low cost of tuition, 3) small size of the college. Public transportation was utilized by half of the participants to attend classes. This made the three-campus arrangement more appealing to students. While all three campus locations are within an hour drive of each other, public transportation can take over three hours to travel from campus to campus.

One participant worked six hours per week, the other five participants worked the maximum of eighteen hours per week. Half of the participants noted their grade point average (GPA) did not change with participation in the Federal Work Study Program. Two participants stated their GPA declined. Christopher cited the completion of prerequisite courses and transition to program courses for the decline. Becky credited the decline to family issues, and not her participation in Federal Work Study. Abigail was the lone participant who realized an improvement of her GPA, she recognized that she withdrew and failed classes prior to Federal Work Study participation.
Each participant possessed differing history and experiences for attending college. Each shared new and unique information and stories. As a result, the next section will further investigate their experiences, providing fragments of their personal stories. Moreover, it will set the framework for the emergent subthemes that evolved into the overarching themes of the fledgling student, making connections, integration, non-monetary benefits and helping others.

Abigail

Abigail is the first generation of her family born in the United States. Her parents immigrated from another country where they were only able to receive a middle school level education. They are adamant that Abigail and her siblings continue with their education into college. Abigail spoke of her parents:

I came from a strict background. They’re [her parents] Haitian American. They want me to really pursue my education because they really didn’t have an education back then. So, they want me to work hard to get the good job that I need to support myself.

Abigail was in her early twenties when she attended TcCC on a part-time basis. When she first enrolled at TcCC, she was unaware of financial aid and took only one or two classes at a time, paying out of pocket when she could afford to do so. She learned of financial aid through TcCC’s website and applied. Abigail admitted she is extremely shy and pushed herself each semester to reach out to the world around her. She set a goal to make one new friend in each class she enrolled and to participate in one college activity monthly. Abigail reflected on the difficulty of social interactions on campus:

Each class I meet like one person and then the next person and the next person and I become friends with them. And they’re [the friends] not really active because some have other jobs and they just go straight home from school.
While she utilized the tutoring center, she initially felt as though she “wasn’t smart enough to get the help.” She recognized that she should reach out for help but this is difficult for her to do. She additionally mentioned that opting into this study was an accomplishment. She was extremely nervous but knew the interview experience was important in helping her work past her fears.

It was through the Free Application for Federal Student Aid (FAFSA) that she noticed the box for Federal Work Study. She then went to the campus to find out more about the Federal Work Study Program. Abigail’s primary reason for participation was for job experience. Abigail realized securing her first job would give her employment experience and would make her more marketable after graduation. She explains, “I was never in it for the money, I just wanted something for my resume, something for the future.” Abigail worked in two different departments before finding the right one for her. Due to her extreme shyness, Abigail noted that her placements felt overwhelming when they required daily interactions with students and staff. She felt it was her shyness and slower pace that led to her relocation to another department. Her second placement in an academic department lasted five months, and while there were less students and staff with which to interact, it was a fast-paced environment and she could not keep up. Her supervisor did not feel she was learning the skills of the job quick enough and suggested she seek a different job assignment. When this happened, she was upset but over time, she was able to let those feelings go. Her third placement in an administrative office with few staff members was the perfect fit and she maintained employment in that department for over three years. The duties of this job assignment aligned with her major, office systems technologies. Abigail stated “…the job I am in now, I love it. It is teaching me a lot of valuable things I can
take with me for my future…” Her supervisor was a former work study student and Abigail approached her with questions not related to the job assignment. With Abigail’s limited contact with peers and faculty, having a mentor she is comfortable with not only gives her a valuable resource but also a role model to emulate.

The connections Abigail made through tutoring and her job assignment encouraged her to persist. Participation in tutoring allowed her to obtain positive feedback of the progress she made as she improved her coursework. Connections at the job assignment helped put her at ease and she found it easier to interact with students in class and on campus. One short term goal Abigail set was to join a student club on campus to deepen her interactions with fellow students.

Abigail is determined to complete her goal of graduation from TcCC. After graduation, she plans to transfer to a four-year institution. In addition, she wants to lead by example and hopes to encourage her parents to return to school to further their education. Abigail stated “…I want a degree to show my parents that it is not too late to get an education.”

Becky

Becky is a full-time student in her early twenties. She attended college alongside her two siblings. Her parents were recently divorced and neither attended college. Becky was recruited from her high school, originally contemplating the Jump Start Program to begin college enrollment in her senior year of high school. The Jump Start Program at TcCC brings information about college enrollment to local high school seniors. Those interested can complete the entrance exam and registration process at their high school, providing faster access for classes in the summer or fall semesters. However, she chose to wait as she was involved in many high school activities which she found important. As a result, she waited to enroll at TcCC until after high school graduation. Becky remained interested in extracurricular activities and
immediately joined a student club upon enrollment. Becky described her social activity as
mainly on campus but studious at home; concentrating on school assignments. She further
described:

…I had a social life I just didn’t do much outside of school. I [have] never really been
that kind of person though, even when I was in high school all of my friends and all of
my social interaction was in school. Once I left school grounds for the most part it was
just kind of homework, relax.

It was not until Becky’s second year that she began Federal Work Study. This was around the
time her parents separated and the need for additional funds surfaced. She learned of Federal
Work Study via the box on the FAFSA form, and navigated the campus to complete the steps
needed to obtain a work assignment. While she explored, she found some resources the college
offered such as financial aid. She was also unaware of other campus programs such as tutoring
until she began participation in the Federal Work Study Program. She retold the steps she took:

So, my second go around I definitely needed some kind of work. Especially, since my
dad had just left, and a lot of things were going on. I was like I have to be able to provide
for myself. I ended up going to financial aid, getting the slip that tells you how much you
are eligible for, then going to the advisement desk and getting the application, filling out
the application and turning it in, then the Federal Work Study Coordinator called me for a
job.

This process can be confusing for the new student unfamiliar with the various departments at the
college. Through trial and error Becky navigated three departments to secure a Federal Work
Study position. First, Becky needed to locate the financial aid department to determine if her
Federal Student Aid offered her funding for the Federal Work Study Program. Once she
established she was eligible and the amount of the funding award, she then found the Federal Work Study Coordinator to complete an application for employment, the Federal Work Study Coordinator then set up an appointment to interview at the tutoring center. After the successful interview, she returned to the Federal Work Study Coordinator to finish the remainder of the employment paperwork.

Becky’s work assignment in the tutoring center allowed her to interact with students, staff and faculty. She felt the additional interactions gave her an advantage when choosing which faculty to take for different classes. Another benefit mentioned was that the work schedule was around her school schedule. This allowed her to keep school her priority. Her enthusiasm for TcCC was evident and she described how she helped informally mentor other students she met either at work or in classes. Becky elaborated:

I am not involved officially through the school [as a peer leader] but I kind of do it anyway. Because I know a lot of people on campus and a lot of them come to me for help with different things, weather it is school related [or] family related. I just kind of help anyone out that needs help.

As a social person, Becky’s work assignment allowed her to meet many of the students on campus and she was not only recognized on campus but also when she is out at local stores.

…I think that it helped a whole lot with my social interaction. I am seeing more people and interacting with more people, more one on one versus just a couple of people I know and people they know. So, honestly it gave me more connections…

This came with benefits as well as drawbacks. The tutoring department was often very busy as it provides service to many students. Interactions with her supervisor were on a limited basis due to the work load. She expressed the interactions could range from informal
conversations to how to deal with difficult situations that arose on the job. Another drawback was that she often found it difficult to complete her own assignments while on campus, as students would ask her for assistance, regardless of whether or not she was at work. Becky stated a clear goal for her attendance at TcCC was to complete a degree in early childhood education and then transfer to a four-year institution. She attributes her work study experience to keeping her motivated:

…I am the type of person that likes to keep busy or I will start slacking off and not getting things done. So, by having eighteen hours of work a week plus five classes and choir, it keeps me busy enough that way I don’t have time to slack off and not do homework or put things off to the last minute. I don’t have that kind of time anymore.

So, it keeps me busy and it keeps me motivated to keep moving.

As with anything, there are positives and negatives. For Becky, the positives outweigh the negatives and she is in her second year of tutoring through the Federal Work Study Program. She plans to continue until graduation.

Christopher

Christopher is a recent graduate of TcCC and continued his education at a four-year in-state university. While enrolled at TcCC, Christopher was within the age range to be considered a traditional student. He attended college full-time. The youngest of his family, his mother and siblings provided guidance and support for college tasks. When it came to items such as registration or financial aid, it was family he turned to. Christopher explained “…we are a big family, three people have gone through the system already, they knew. They just pointed me in the right direction, if not just took the information out of my hands and did it themselves.”
A self-described loner, Christopher did not interact socially with other students at the college. Many of the faculty he encountered also taught his siblings. This connection led to faster bonding with faculty members. While he preferred to keep to himself, this did not hinder his ability to speak up in class stating he was usually the one to speak up and ask the question everyone wanted to ask but was too afraid:

[I] felt comfortable to ask questions, felt comfortable to interject. I have a weird habit of being the one to ask the stupid question…. when it kind of got quiet and everyone wanted to ask something but it …sounded really bad to ask it, I just bit the bullet for that a number of times.

It was the need for money and experience that led Christopher to inquire about a work study position. Again, family guided him through this process as they already navigated this route with previously attending siblings. Christopher is one of two participants that worked for multiple departments. He worked multiple semesters for each department; first as an art gallery attendant that did not require interaction with the students any further than keeping them from breaking any rules. The second was in the tutoring department; a very different assignment in terms of workload and responsibility. When asked about interactions with co-workers in the art gallery Christopher responded:

…there was occasional work with people but mostly it was solo. You get to sit in a small room with art and make sure people didn’t touch it. Most of the real team work stuff didn’t happen till once maybe twice a month for the pickup and breakdown of the various shows and parties.

Work assignments at the art gallery are coveted by student workers. The main component of the position is to supervise guests who visit. Attendance at the art gallery is intermittent and allows
for times when the student worker is alone. Many students utilize this unoccupied time to complete assignments and study for class. Christopher mentioned the art gallery was a great place to spend long blocks of time in between classes, all the while earning a paycheck. Christopher elaborated:

…let’s be honest, the art gallery was not a difficult job. Being able to sit there and have something to do for the four or five hours depending on what day, it was just a good place to be…it was a good room, a good location, good place to be able to hunker down for your given time.

The art department is tranquil in contrast to the tutoring department which can be turbulent as frazzled students come to the tutoring center looking for clarity and a passing grade on their next exam. While not an art major, Christopher did what he could to help the lost art student looking to complete the latest assignment. It was the tutoring department that he saw how the future could be if he continued towards his goal to become a teacher. The Federal Work Study Program gave him relevant experience to add to his resume while confirming his goal was the right one for him.

Not one to participate in clubs or college activities, when asked if there was an increase in these activities while participating in Federal Work Study Christopher stated, “if work study was a college activity then I sort of increased my college activity….” There were more interactions with students through the tutoring center and students would often say hello to Christopher on campus outside of the tutoring center and even off campus at local stores.

Christopher’s advice to other students is to take advantage of the Federal Work Study Program if they are eligible, but do not take advantage of the situation:

Don’t take it jokingly, don’t take advantage of people who work in the system, it’s really
beneficial financially, for your time you can get a lot out of it. So, don’t take it for granted, but if you can, do it. When the option is there to do it or not, do it every time. The Federal Work Study Program is an actual job that will give you experience you can use later in life. Students need to be aware that to get the most out of the opportunity, they must put the effort into the job.

Daisy

Unlike the other participants, Daisy’s primary reason for participation was for enjoyment rather than funding. She was the lone participant that worked less than the maximum of eighteen hours per week with her scheduled six hours. Daisy was a non-traditional student, above the traditional age range and taking classes part-time. Directly out of high school, Daisy enrolled in a four-year college out of state, only to return home before the end of her first year. Daisy felt the promises the college made to garner her enrollment never materialized and put her at a disadvantage to do well at that institution. Once home, she chose TcCC for its location, deciding to complete her prerequisites before going back to a four-year college. Daisy compared the assistance at TcCC to the four-year college in relation to her learning disability:

I am dyslexic, so the counselor [at TcCC] takes care of all of the paperwork [for accommodations], even though I never speak to the woman [interacts with her assistant],
I have met her once. But there was no help out there [at the four-year college] so I came home after the first semester.

It was at TcCC that Daisy determined her original goal of a program in the sciences was truly not for her. She noticed her math and science grades were her lowest grades, and she excelled in the liberal arts. As a result, she changed her major to allow her to take the courses she enjoyed, giving her a realistic and obtainable goal.
Daisy is close with her parents; her mother earned a college degree and her father attended college but she believed he did not graduate. While her mother had experienced college, she gave Daisy the room to figure out things on her own. A conversation with her mother was what helped her to change her major. She recalled that she sarcastically thanked her mom and included “you couldn’t have shared that with me sooner?”

There are academic departments that require more than a whiteboard to teach. Courses such as laboratory sciences, art and theater require additional supplies and assistance in managing the materials. A course Daisy took fell into this category and she continued to clean and organize the room supplies after her own supplies were cleaned and put away, garnering the attention of her professor, who spoke to her about the Federal Work Study Program, and what the benefits may be. Daisy explained:

I am not quite sure of the time line because the work study just happened organically, me wanting to help the professor and organizing the class when I was in there and she told me I needed to go see the person in the administration building and get signed up for Federal Work Study.

As this occurred, she joined a liberal arts student club. While Daisy admits that she was not overly social with her class and club peers, she enjoyed the interactions on her terms, socializing when she wanted. Daisy compared her interactions before and after Federal Work Study participation “nothing really changed, I either socialize with the kids in class or I don’t and that had nothing to do with the work study because I don’t know any of the work study people.” She noted that she was recognized by more students who were familiar with seeing her in the classroom while she worked during their class. Daisy’s supervisor lent her out to assist the other faculty members in the department, which gave her a larger support system. She could network
with the faculty member that could assist her best with the area she needed assistance such as registration or class decisions. She noted her age as the reason for her comfort level during interactions with faculty and staff “now I am thirty-five, yes I think I am more comfortable with faculty and staff. Still very respectful but they are people like everybody else.” Daisy enjoyed the work she did as it also related to her life outside of college, it gave her experience she can apply in the world around her.

While she would encourage other students to participate in the Federal Work Study Program, she would not participate if it was for a different department. Daisy possesses gainful employment outside of the college and her work study position is for enjoyment rather than financial reasons. Her plan is to continue taking classes part-time for personal satisfaction.

Edward

Edward was the second oldest of the participants, he was also the only participant who is married with children. A non-traditional student in almost every aspect, age, family and credit hours, Edward supplemented his part-time credit hours with summer classes. He elaborated:

I noticed that three [classes] keeps me where I can get a good education and still have a life. I keep it there instead of going to four or five [classes], because that space in between you need time to relax, your brain needs time to relax. Summer time I use to makeup because I am only doing three classes, I do two classes. That whips me through so spring next year, this next semester I will be graduating with my associate’s degree.

Edward came to TcCC through the Workforce Development Program that provided financing for a certificate program. It was during these classes that Edward realized his potential and how he wanted to continue with his education and earn an associate’s degree. He recounted, “for the
most part, I am well driven. I have hit a lot of hard spots in life, finally at this age I figured out you’re smart, you’re actually smart why don’t you go to school?”

After the completion of the certificate program, Edward attempted to enroll with the help of the Workforce Development Program. The bureaucratic red tape was daunting and hindering Edward’s progress. His mother, who at the time was a student at TcCC, took Edward under her wing and led him through the path of financial aid. As he recounted:

Actually, my mother. I was trying to do it [register] through One Stop Career Center and it kept so many hoops you had to jump through because of its funding, and a whole bunch of other stuff. And she [mom] was like “I’ll let you talk to the lady” who was at financial aid at one point and then I talked to her and got everything on a roll and I have been here since. And it has been pretty good.

With the assistance of a Pell Grant, Edward finally enrolled in an associate’s program. While Edward did not go into the details of his earlier life, he notes that it was not easy and back then it was a major accomplishment to earn a high school diploma. Edward dropped out of high school and took the GED test, passing on the first attempt. He spoke of that time:

…growing up not to get too deep but just growing up in the atmosphere wasn’t you are going to go to school, you are going to go to high school and then you are going to college. That wasn’t programmed, if you finished high school you were great, you would be like the first to finish…. My mother was pushing, me being a knucklehead in high school. She said “no, you are going to get a GED or something.” I left high school at sixteen, I took my GED and passed it the first time.

In addition to his mother, his two younger siblings attended college. This family endured a late start to college enrollment but they embraced the opportunity. Edward learned of the Federal
Work Study Program from the box on the FAFSA form. That box coupled with guidance from his mother to navigate the process on campus placed him in a student service position on campus.

Edward’s mother provided guidance and support but it was limited. It is the relationship with his supervisor that gave him the most knowledge about procedures and opportunities at TcCC. Through his supervisor, Edward came to participate in the Peer Mentor Program and assisting at student orientation seminars. As Edward stated, participation in the Federal Work Study Program provided stability and growth, “once I was stable here, I started to grow roots then that’s when the leaves started to branch out to other things like the honor society.” Participation gave Edward the opportunity to interact with faculty, staff and peers more frequently than before. Edward further noted that he informally mentored many of his peers that he met on the job or in class. This is a good thing but at times can be trying, such as when Edward was taking a break or working on his own school work, if he did not hide he would be interrupted.

Edward maintained part-time status to fully concentrate on the individual class and therefore maintain a high GPA. The other reason for part-time status was to maintain balance between school, work and home. When asked about the benefits of the Federal Work Study Program Edward reiterated “…it gave me stability, it gave me comfort and it also gave me favor in a place to network out of.” This is the longest employment position Edward has maintained. When asked how he would convince another student to participate in the Federal Work Study Program, he started out talking about the monetary benefit that comes from working and then mentioned:

… you can build roots and connections, plus it makes you have to participate with the
college. The more integrated you get into the college; the more opportunities open up for you and that is what I am starting to truly understand.

As a father, Edward wants to do well to give his children someone to model, something that was lacking in his life when he was younger. His children will see that he achieved an education and they can too, helping them to go further than his educational achievements. He also spoke that as individuals recognized the need to further their education, families will become stronger making communities stronger and this will affect the strength of the country and the world.

Frank

Frank was twenty-three years old and attended TcCC part-time, making him a non-traditional student. Frank worked another job in addition to his Federal Work Study assignment. Frank will be the first person in his family to obtain an associate’s degree when he graduates next year. Advice from his parents led to his enrollment at TcCC after high school graduation. As the cost of a community college is usually less than tuition at a four-year institution, financially it made sense for Frank to stay close to home. The smaller size of a community college was another positive factor in his decision to enroll at TcCC. Frank stated a clear goal for his future in the health and wellness field, choosing this goal to help others live healthier lives “my official goal is to work at a hospital or doctor’s office and do nutrition, help other people lose weight…. or even open my own gym and run it myself as an owner, be there all the time.” Frank is a very social person and quickly made friends at TcCC. During the interview, he reflected that those first friends did not take college seriously, procrastinating, going out and not focusing on long term goals. He described the situation:

Before, actually I was more with group that was like “let’s put our work off till later, let’s go out and hang out over here.” Not like a group that was focused on big goals they were
short term little goals, just little things they wanted to do. Not like want [ing] to go be doctors…

When he was having difficulties in class, Frank withdrew from class stating, “first semester, second semester I was still looking, oh this class is too hard, let me go to another class, oh this class is fine and I was just jumping around way too much.” It took time for Frank to find services or assistance at the college when it was needed, as he possessed no knowledge of how to navigate the system, nor who to ask. He would ask staff members or students that he met:

> What do I do for this, what do I do for that? I was the kid that had to be pointed in the direction that I had to go to. Just point me the way because I don’t know where I am going.

As the semester progressed, Frank made new friends, some who were participants in the Federal Work Study Program. He became involved in the Federal Work Study Program when his supervisor noticed him hanging around with one of her work study students. She asked if he too wanted a job. She walked him through the steps to navigate the paperwork and process. The position is at one of the branch campus locations and as it is smaller than the main campus Frank interacts with almost all the faculty and staff at this location. He is aware that his circle of friends changed over time and that those original friends left the college before graduating. He noted that the friends he currently interacted with focus on long term goals and offer support for each other. He reduced the amount of “jumping” around to different classes. Another benefit that Frank expressed was the closeness to faculty and staff that developed since participation began:

> It has become a lot more they want to know what I want to go for…. they know that I have a lot of goals, they see that I want to do a lot so they kind of keep me in check like a
big family, like my aunts and uncles, they make sure, keep doing what you are doing. He is close with his supervisor and he knows she can help him with any issue he may encounter with financial aid, registration etc. Frank mentioned that his supervisor held high standards for him and he worked hard so that he did not disappoint her, at work and in class.

His interaction with peers grew since he began the Federal Work Study Program, he mentored other students feeling like the “wise man of the college.” Conversations revolved around college classes, college activities and future goals. His advice to other students is that if you get a chance to participate in the Federal Work Study Program to do it. You can productively use time between classes to make some extra money and gain experience you can list on a resume.

Themes

After multiple reviews of the interview transcriptions, fourteen subthemes were identified. The subthemes included: social isolation, lack of integration, limited knowledge of college resources, family assistance, mentors, encouragement from others, knowledge of college resources, academic integration, social integration, institutional integration, experience, downtime, giving back, and lead by example. The subthemes were not equally divided and some participants did not fit every subtheme. Similar subthemes were combined into the overarching themes: the fledgling student, making connections, integration, non-monetary benefits and helping others. While not every participant experienced all the subthemes, the experience of the same themes and subthemes provided triangulation for the study. Subthemes were grouped together using similarities and Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) to form the basis for the overarching themes. The fledgling student includes social isolation, lack of integration and limited knowledge of college resources. These attributes can occur when one is
introduced to a new experience. The next overarching theme is titled making connections, participants through need or random interactions began to meet other students, staff and faculty members. Interactions occurred when the participant sought out college resources, through interactions completing college processes, participating in class group assignments or attending a college activity. Some interactions led to the development of mentor relationships for the participants. These interactions provide opportunities for the participants to receive encouragement from others. Mentoring is another aspect that helps students persist, Crisp (2010) stated:

…mentoring, be it formal or informal, may not be limited to a single relationship between a student and faculty member…. a combination of person’s in an individual’s life, including faculty, staff, senior or graduate students, peers, friends, family members, and/or religious leader. (p. 40)

In this study, the participants identified their supervisors as mentors. Supervisors could be faculty or staff members. Even before the participants found support and encouragement on the college campus, they found it from their family. Family support and interactions help students not only adjust to college life but it is identified that these students maintain higher grades (“The Role,” 2010). The overarching theme of integration was taken from Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993), the experiences of the participants gave the theme its sustenance. The participants shared experiences of increased social interactions and/or the positive changes they noticed in their academic endeavors. These coincide with social and academic integration. The third subtheme (of this theme) is institutional integration, composed of institutional and goal commitment. The participants described their goals, plans for the future and their commitment to complete their associate’s degree at TcCC. Non-monetary benefits arose from student
descriptions of how the experience will assist them in future undertakings. Included in this theme is the productive use of the time between classes, saving on commuting time and providing opportunities to earn a paycheck. The final theme coalesced from the participant’s willingness to give back by helping other students and emulating a positive role model for others. This theme is labeled as, helping others. In the next section, the themes and subthemes will be explored in chronological order rather than alphabetical. Table 2, is provided on the next page to show the distribution of themes by participant.

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<td>Distribution of Themes</td>
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<table>
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<th>Theme</th>
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<th>Becky</th>
<th>Christopher</th>
<th>Daisy</th>
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Theme One: The Fledgling Student

Meriam-Webster (n.d.) defines “fledgling” as “a person that is immature and inexperienced” and “one that is new.” The college life is unlike any educational experience a student in kindergarten through twelfth grade as ever experienced. For many students, this is the first time they alone are responsible for themselves. Learning to navigate not just a new environment but also a host of processes needed to accomplish tasks such as registration, financial aid applications and finding a tutor, just to name a few. For some students, reading a class schedule and finding the proper classroom can be a daunting task. These fledglings are not limited to the seventeen or eighteen-year-olds fresh out of high school, at a commuter community college, fledglings can encompass a wide range of ages. This term was chosen to reflect the student as they enroll in college, as often they are excited and for the most part new to the experience. They can experience a range of emotions as they begin their college education. When asked about his feelings and emotions during the first month of attendance Frank reflected:

I would say emotionally I was very excited about going to college and seeing how things would be different and also scared because of how my high school teachers would say “it’s a lot harder in college.” But my first month I loved because it was more freedom then high school and the classes were not that hard…. just having so much freedom and [to] have change was nice.

From the experiences of the participants three subthemes emerged under the main theme, social isolation, limited knowledge of college resources and lack of integration. For many, social isolation, a lack of integration and limited knowledge of college resources are most prevalent when the student first arrives on campus. As discussed in earlier chapters, students at a
commuter community college lack on campus housing that can assist the student’s integration into college life. Commuter community college students can experience social isolation and a lack of integration as they first begin taking classes. These students are socially isolated from peers, faculty and/or staff for the simple fact that they do not know them yet. For many students, the social isolation will gradually fade as they interact with others in the classroom. From these initial connections, many students will learn more about college life and begin to develop a support system. As they learn about college processes, resources and interact with peers, faculty and/or staff they begin to integrate into the college culture. Each subtheme will be explored to discover if and how the participants experienced social isolation, lack of integration and limited knowledge about college resources.

**Subtheme a: social isolation.** “Social isolation” is defined by PsychologyDictionary.org (n.d.) as “voluntary or involuntary absence of having contact with others.” Three participants expressed times of social isolation. Christopher’s and Daisy’s social isolation was self-imposed while Abigail attempted to change this factor of her life. When inquiring about their social life before the Federal Work Study Program, Christopher stated “nonexistent, let’s be fair, I am the shuttest of [shut] ins, I didn’t, there was not one.” Daisy spoke of interacting on her terms “…I either socialize with the kids in class or I don’t…” In contrast, Abigail stated, “for me when I take classes I meet different people, I don’t have friends, I wish I did.” Abigail’s job placement failed to offer her additional peer interactions as she was the only student worker in that area. While this subtheme was one of the least frequently experienced by the participants, it does highlight that social isolation can be self-imposed rather than by circumstance. Participants such as Daisy and Abigail may work in departments with minimal interactions with peers, faculty and/or staff. Other participants like Christopher adapt their skills to meet the demands of the
department, interacting with others when and how it was appropriate. Social isolation can be independent from the lack of integration and limited knowledge of college resources discussed in this section.

**Subtheme b: lack of integration.** Becky quickly transitioned to the college environment when she joined a student club. Becky did not allow herself to be isolated from peers and took less time to integrate socially. Each of the other participants expressed a lack of integration with the college. Christopher stated “…given my complete lack of interactions in most cases, only in the capacity of when I was working.” Christopher was content with his level of integration and did not attempt to integrate on a social level. He would interact with faculty, staff and students while on the job, appropriate to the task at hand. Daisy described how she limited her interactions to those that are friendly, about college services, she stated “depends on which resource we are utilizing, friendly people that I know, the internet portion of this, not so much.” In reference to her interactions with peers she states “…I either socialize with the kids in class or I don’t…” Edward and Frank both initially focused on attending classes and going home. Frank stated, “I didn’t have time to be part of clubs or do anything student activity wise. It was just work, classes, home that was my routine.” Edward reflected further “…I wasn’t integrated into the school. I wasn’t really doing any of the volunteer work, the clubs or anything like that.” While Frank quickly made friends, he noticed the group of students he socialized with were not integrated into college life. He described how they would put off work to hang out and their focus was on the here and now and not future aspirations. In his words:

Before, actually I was more with the group that was like “let’s put our work off till later, let’s go out and hang out over here.” Not like a group that was focused on big goals, they
were short term little goals, just little things they wanted to do, not like want[ing] to go be doctors or this thing.

Some participants were slow to interact with peers, faculty and/or staff. Just as they were getting to know those around them, they would go through a similar process when learning of college resources. While in the administrative building to speak with financial aid the student may notice the cafeteria or student life center, adding to their knowledge of the campus. Just becoming a Federal Work Study participant led the participants through many steps and interactions with multiple staff and departments. The participants would need to learn where the financial aid department was located and with whom to speak in order to find out if they were eligible for Federal Work Study. Once they learned their award amount, they needed to contact the Federal Work Study Coordinator. After completion of the application, they were sent to potential supervisors for an interview. If accepted, the participant was sent back to the Federal Work Study Coordinator to complete more paperwork. This is just one example. Obtaining a tutor, resolving an issue with a final grade or financial aid award all carry specific steps for completion. For some participants, the connections they made with peers, faculty and/or staff accelerated their attainment of knowledge of college resources and processes. In the next section, what resources and how they were discovered will be examined.

Subtheme c: limited knowledge of college resources. As new students, participants were often baffled by the processes of the college and unsure of where to turn for assistance. Navigation of things such as financial aid, registration or finding a tutor were often clumsy and time consuming for the participant. Stumbling through tasks was not an effective option; opportunities may be missed. Abigail did not learn about financial aid when she first enrolled, “I never knew about financial aid, I just paid out of pocket.” Becky communicated difficulties
navigating registration and stated, “I didn’t know that tutoring existed until I actually started
going through the process to get my first work study job as a tutor.” Becky additionally spoke
about the registration process:

I navigated everything on my own, because I have always been the type of person [to]
figure it out myself. And like registration, my first semester I obviously had to deal with
the advisor, it’s your first semester, you don’t know what to do plus they didn’t have this
nice online, self-serve thing they have now. I kind of went through the motions, got
registered and did all that stuff for myself.

While Edward received some assistance through his mother’s experience, there were still
resources that were foreign to him. He spoke about his first semester, “as far as knowing faculty
is out there for you I had no idea. I didn’t know I could go to certain staff or get things done, I
had no idea it was my first year in college.” Growth occurred over time and the participants
learned about themselves, their aspirations and the reality of those plans.

Just as a small child learns about the world around them, these new students slowly
learned of the college world around them. Unlike a small child, these adults utilized self-
awareness to assist in learning about themselves and the world around them. Several participants
expressed statements of self-awareness. This tied into goals and motivation. When students are
conscious of their strengths and weaknesses, they often develop goals that play to their strengths
and/or improve areas of weakness. Moreover, they develop clear and concise goals and develop
a plan of action that will lead to goal attainment. Daisy identified that she did not want to
continue with her original major in the sciences and changed her major to liberal arts. This
was linked with her job assignment in the Federal Work Study Program. Her work assignment was
related to her new major and her off campus hobbies. She stated, “I don’t think I would probably
do work study for just anybody.” Edward found that he could successfully handle three classes per semester and still leave time for work and family. He expressed, “for the most part, I am well driven.... going to college is one of those things where you need to improve and enhance yourself so you can make yourself more marketable in the job field.” Abigail noted how her nervousness prevented her from signing up for tutoring sooner, “for me I feel I wasn’t smart enough to get the help.”

Each participant encountered obstacles to overcome on their own. Becky, Frank, Daisy and Edward fought to learn how to overcome any issue; be it appealing to financial aid, learning how to register, enrolling in a preferred course or finding a tutor. Each participant expressed a clear goal that they would pursue until fruition.

Abigail communicated a specific plan for self-improvement and explained “I never ask for help, that is really bad. I should reach out for more help.” Abigail’s self-awareness gave her the drive to push out of her comfort level. She set goals in the past to meet one new person in each class she attended and to participate in one college activity each month. To further engage, Abigail intends to join a student club this semester. In addition, another step in her growth is to interact with peers, faculty and staff. As the fledgling students grew, it was noted that growth was not limited to interactions on campus. Some growth affects the world off the college campus. Daisy and Christopher both spoke of personal growth. Daisy saw that her assignment in the Federal Work Study Program gave her experience that she could use outside of college:

…the fact that I am working in an area where I am gaining experience in things that I can apply to my life. These are things I do in my free time as well. It has helped my learning curve, a lot of useful knowledge.
Christopher spoke of how working in the tutoring center was beneficial for his future endeavors. His time in the art gallery was additionally beneficial but in a different way:

As for the art stuff, you help enough students…who come through with their art finals [this is a take home packet; student must observe a variety of works of art and write to the specific prompts in the packet] you pick up stuff….But, it was useful, it was good information, it is just one of the humanities, it is one of those well-rounded person type things.

The art experience contrasted the tutoring job assignment. The art gallery could be learned on the job and the tutoring center required prior knowledge to excel. Christopher explained “when it came to tutoring though, you definitely needed to have the talent. You needed to know the math, you needed to be able to talk to people…” While Christopher preferred not to interact with others, he was cognizant of the fact that interactions with faculty and staff were unavoidable, social isolation would subside and integration would occur.

As each participant became acclimated to college life, they could access more opportunities. The Federal Work Study Program was one of these opportunities. Participation in the Federal Work Study Program allowed the participants to interact with students, staff and faculty.

**Theme Two: Making Connections**

The making connections theme arose from the way participants interacted with others on campus. Connections were made when participants interacted with faculty, staff and/or other students in class or outside of class during student clubs or college activities. Reason (2009) found that “…positive interactions with faculty members and peers, especially interactions that further and relate to academic matters, increase the likelihood that students will persist” (p. 674).
The subthemes for this section include family assistance, mentoring, encouragement from others and knowledge of college resources. Family assistance can take on many forms, monetary assistance, guidance through college processes and offer advice about college life. In terms of Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) research is concerned with the education level and socioeconomic status as influential in the student’s persistence (Reason, 2009; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). In addition to family assistance, students spoke of other members of the college community that functioned as mentors. Crisp (2010) stated that:

…mentoring, be it formal or informal, may not be limited to a single relationship between a student and a faculty member…often be provided by a combination of persons in an individual’s life, including faculty, staff, senior or graduate students, peers, friends, family members, and/or religious leader. (p. 40)

Mentors provided encouragement for the participants, but they were not the only source. Participants spoke of receiving encouragement from faculty members, tutors and family members. The connections participants made were also a source for information. When participants had questions about college resources or processes, they were able to seek out one of their connections to gain information. Participants found they could speak with mentors about career and educational choices. Some participants did not need the Federal Work Study Program to make connections with peers, faculty and staff. Yet, the Federal Work Study Program allowed for deeper connections to develop between participants and those around them.

**Subtheme a: family assistance.** Family assistance, as it was discovered in the participants’ experiences, refers to the help or encouragement that was offered to the student by family members. This is not the same as family influence as depicted in Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993). Tinto’s theory asserts that the educational level and
socioeconomic standing is a factor in a student’s decision to persist (Tinto, 1993). Only two participants stated a parent completed college and yet all the participants persisted for multiple semesters. Four of the six participants boasted family members who attended college at the same time. Abigail’s two siblings attended college, one at TcCC and the other at a four-year institution. Becky’s two siblings attend TcCC and Christopher’s attendance overlapped with two of his siblings. One sibling recently graduated from graduate school and another was preparing to attend graduate school. His mother was enrolled in a bachelor’s program on-line. Edward’s mother was enrolled with him at TcCC and they took some classes together. Daisy’s mother is a college graduate and Frank is the first in his family to attend college.

Becky noted that her mother filed her original FAFSA form, but did not state that siblings or her mother further assisted her both academic and process troubles, including finding a tutor, how to register and completing financial aid tasks. Christopher’s family provided the most support of the participants, with his mother and multiple siblings guiding him through the processes of financial aid, registration, even securing a position in the Federal Work Study Program. He stated “…three people have gone through the system already, they knew. They just pointed me in the right direction. If not just took the information out of my hands and did it themselves.” Edward’s mother was very proactive when it came to applying for financial aid and the Federal Work Study Program, other areas such as registration or tutoring he figured out on his own.

**Subtheme b: mentors.** Five of the six participant identified that their supervisor behaved as a mentor and or role model to them. Crisp (2010) found “…that college students perceive mentoring as several types of support: (a) psychological and emotional support, (b) degree and career support, (c) academic/subject knowledge support, and (d) the presence of a
role model” (p. 42). The participants described a variety of mentoring they received. Abigail spoke of conversations with her supervisor “like school and what I am going through? Yes, I would have conversations like that.” She went on to say:

...talking to my supervisor about my major and where do I want to go from there and how I am going to get there. I remember talking to my supervisor, she was telling me about how she was involved in work study as well as how it helped her a lot. Now she is a senior manager which I find awesome!

Daisy would not utilize just her supervisor for advice and guidance but other faculty members in the department based on the area she felt they could best assist her. In relation to her recent registration, Daisy stated “…typically I go to my supervisor or another faculty member in the department because she is a bit more technical.” In Becky’s experience, the department was usually busy but she did identify times when she would talk informally with her supervisor about “random stuff.”

When asked about his supervisor, Edward stated, “my boss is awesome, phenomenal, I would speak to him and he would point me in the right direction.” Edward’s relationship with his supervisor was not limited to the work environment, as his supervisor wore many hats at the college. Edward spoke of this variety “[an] excellent thing about my supervisor is that he is a teacher in two different departments and my boss, three in one, I can’t lose. I had him for one course and he was also my tutor.” Frank spoke about how the small size of the campus he attends allows him to interact with every staff and faculty member. He stated “…they kind of keep me in check like a big family…” Encouragement and support was not limited to mentors for the participants.
Subtheme c: encouragement from others. Mentoring can come in the form of encouragement from others. Abigail found the tutors would encourage her, “they see progress in me. Like I changed so much in college.” Abigail additionally received encouragement from her cousin who convinced her to stay the course with her goal and not drop out of college when she ran into difficulties from a low GPA:

My cousin, she motivated me to go back to school and to further my education. I was on the financial aid appeal in the past, I was down and was willing to drop out, but “without and education you won’t really go far” is what she said to me.

Edward found many people on campus who offered encouragement not just to help enrollment numbers but genuine concern:

Always kind, pleasant, always professional. Everybody here wants to help you. There are some students that don’t understand the degree of how much they want to help you.

We would love to say it is just for education but when you boil it down to it numbers, percentages make a difference in college, because that determines your funding, which programs are going to close or what students are going to get. As far as faculty and staff they are open hands.

Interactions with peers, faculty and staff were helpful for the participants to learn about resources the college offered.

Subtheme d: knowledge of college resources. As the participants talked of their experiences, many of their early stories involved them going around campus attempting to find the resources they needed. Astin (1984) defines resources not just as the “…physical facilities (laboratories, libraries and audiovisual aids) …” but includes “…human resources (well-trained faculty members, counselors, and support personnel), and financial resources…” (p. 520). Each
participant was successful in some aspects of navigating the college bureaucracy but still lacked other areas. As participants connected with supervisors and peers through the Federal Work Study Program, the participants found short cuts through the bureaucracy. Abigail worked with a counselor to check her progress towards her degree. Becky spoke of getting to know faculty members:

It really helped a lot to let the professors know who I am and I know who they are. It also gives me an advantage when I am picking classes…. that way I get a professor that is good for me…

Daisy learned about the testing department, and interacted with the enrollment office, she stated:

…and talk with another employee there about my papers or getting signed up to take my quizzes or test in the library so it has really been their office is really helpful. The woman at the front desk in enrollment is always very helpful.

Edward spoke of how much of a resource his supervisor was when it came to learning things about the college and how to complete different processes:

My boss is awesome, phenomenal, I would speak to him, and he would point me in the right direction or when it came to registering, as soon as I saw the registration pop up I would go and register. If they did advising in March I would do that. I learned procrastination in college is an enemy.

He spoke further about learning the way of life at the college, “as the semesters go on you start to become a pro, financial aid and how to get through the system, it can be a merry-go-round if you are not well equipped.” As the participants progressed, they learned more about the college experience. They could develop a network of people who could further assist them when it came to navigation of college tasks.
Theme Three: Academic, Social and Institutional Integration

Tinto’s Theory of Student Integration (Tinto, 1993) begins with the personal attributes a student enrolls in college with, family background, prior education, skill and abilities (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). The student will enroll with specific intentions, goals and institutional commitment yet it is only after enrollment that interactions with faculty, staff and students can affect academic, social and institutional integration and ultimately, persistence (Astin, 1984; Bean, 1981; Eaton & Bean, 1995; Lui & Lui, 2000; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto, 1993; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Academic, social and institutional integration can occur independently of each other. Some participants experience all three while others experienced just one or two forms of integration.

Subtheme a: academic integration. Academic integration is influenced by the student’s academic performance and interactions with faculty and staff (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto & Pusser, 2006). Eaton and Bean (1995) define academic integration as “…results from successful academic adjustment behaviors, ones that lead to academic competence and confidence” (p. 622). Academic integration is not limited to interactions within the classroom, it can stem from interactions at college events, during student clubs and even social interactions with peers, faculty and staff (Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, 2008). There is debate that for the commuter community college student, academic integration is limited to classroom interactions due to limited student social interactions (Reason, 2009). Karp, Hughes and O’Gara (2008) found “…these two forms of integration develop in concert for community college students. The same activities lead to both academic and social relatedness”
Lui & Lui (2000) discovered that academic integration is dominant over social integration when it comes to student persistence. Five of the six participants described experiences of academic integration.

Becky noted that her experience with the Federal Work Study Program gave her insight to choose faculty members helping her avoid those that may not be compatible with her and her learning style. She elaborated:

It really helped a lot to be able to let the professors know who I am and I know who they are. It also gives me and advantage when I am picking classes. If I know a certain professor that not a lot of people get along with and I have a sneaking suspicion that I won’t get along with them either I am able to pick a different professor, that way I get a professor that is good for me…

In the beginning of her attendance at TcCC, Abigail admitted that she would not speak up in class and would only speak to the professor once class was over. Now she finds it easier to speak with faculty members and work with other students. She stated, “I met one person in my online class, he didn’t talk much we just work[ed] together on [an] assignment for our final project last semester, we ended up getting an A.” Abigail continued to be encouraged by her tutors that she improved and this was reflected in her GPA. She reflected, “English is my tough struggle. I try my best but I go to tutors. They see progress in me, like I changed so much in college.” When asked about her GPA she beamed “…it was good. Now it is really good…”

Frank spoke of getting to know his professors at a deeper level than just classroom interactions:

I try to get to know them, I try not to do any little jokes and things and just get to know them. What they like, what they don’t like, what is their comfort level with certain
things. [Once he has gotten to know them] I most of the time get along, play around, it is almost like a big family.

Frank made additional comments about the faculty; “they know I have a lot of goals, they see that I want to do a lot so they kind of keep me in check like a big family, like my aunts and uncles…” Edward originally came to TcCC for a certificate program, at the completion of the program he realized he wanted more. He stated, “I kept going into my associate’s degree, I figured I might as well be a social worker.” Edward further spoke of the faculty “always kind, pleasant, always professional. Everybody here wants to help you.” The discussion turned to Edward’s GPA since beginning the Federal Work Study Program. He replied, “I am at a 3.7 right now, I try to keep A’s and B’s with that is it is just staying at a solid pace.” By maintaining three classes per semester, Edward could keep his GPA high. Daisy believed her GPA improved and stated “It actually might be better at the moment. In the beginning, I was taking a lot of my generals: bio[logy], chem[istry] and math which I had to take a couple of times before I got through.” When asked about her comfort level with speaking up in class, Daisy asked what the researcher thought. The conversation went to Daisy’s outgoing nature. She added, “I think that comes with age though.” Daisy feels comfortable in the classroom, so much to the point that she would stay after class organizing supplies. Christopher also noted that there were no problems interacting with faculty and other students; he stated, “I’ve had bad teachers and I have had good teachers and I really want to be that one good teacher from high school for more people.”

**Subtheme b: social integration.** Eaton and Bean (1995) stated that social integration “…results from the successful adjustment behaviors such as socializing, making friends and engaging in the social environment of the institution” (p. 622). Social integration does not rank at the same level of importance for everyone, some people may engage in a very active social life
while others socialize on a smaller scale. Students must find the balance in the amount of social integration they experience, there should be enough that they continue to persist but too much social integration can negatively affect persistence (Lui & Lui, 2000). When students are overly social, time spent with peers or participating in college clubs and activities can reduce the amount of time a student spends on coursework, leading to missed assignments and poor test grades (Lui & Lui, 2000). Participants such as Christopher and Daisy were quite content with their low level of socialization or socializing on their terms. Christopher noted that “if work study was a college activity, then I sort of increased my college activity.” He did admit to being recognized more on campus and even at local stores. Daisy explained, “nothing really changed, I either socialized with the kids in class or I don’t.” Abigail, in contrast to Christopher and Daisy, wanted to increase her socialization. She repeatedly mentioned that she was close with her supervisor and when asked if she felt the Federal Work Study Program made it more comfortable to interact with other students she replied, “yes.” Social integration can fall into the category of too much of a good thing, Becky and Edward spoke to being overly recognized to the point that they needed to hide to complete their own work. Edward stated “…sometimes I have to literally have to leave out of my area to get a break, as long as I am here I am working.” Becky went further speaking of self-conflict:

Because you never get alone time that you need to do homework and someone will be like “hey, can you help me with this?” I don’t know how to handle that sometimes, I don’t want to be rude, they need help so I am like…

Becky spoke about her how socialization improved because of her Federal Work Study position:

I actually think that it got a whole lot better because, I go to a store and see people and they are like ‘you work in the tutoring department’ and we get into a whole conversation.
So, I think that it helped a whole lot with my social interactions. I am seeing more people and interacting with people more… Honestly, it gave me more connections, now my siblings insist that three quarters of the campus knows me. I wouldn’t doubt it.

Becky enjoys interacting with others. The more people that acknowledge her throughout the day gives her positive feedback and a sense of belonging with her peers and to the college. It is the sense of belonging that reinforces her desire to continue school. Frank addressed how his socialization was not just about him being recognized but extended into his reaching out to others:

   Everyone at the college knows who I am or knows of me. I try to be involved and help every person possible. I will also do little events myself. I’ll do a club [activity] if a club needs some people to participate, I participate.

The final subtheme of this section develops when the student combines their goals and academic commitment with academic and/or social integration. The next section will present experiences of institutional commitment and the future educational goals of the participants.

**Subtheme c: institutional integration.** Institutional integration is comprised of academic and social integration coupled with institutional and goal commitment (French & Oaks, 2004). Experiences of the participants show a deeper connection to the college, such as school spirit and/or loyalty. These experiences along with the participant’s specific goals, academic and/or social integration lead to institutional integration.

When asked about her relationship with her supervisor Daisy noted, “it is very good, comfortable, she is always happy to see me.” It was learned that Daisy took it upon herself to help this faculty member while enrolled in her class. The faculty member knew of the Federal Work Study Program and sent Daisy to the coordinator to check for availability of funds so she
would be paid for her efforts. After her hire, Daisy reached out to other faculty members in the department to offer assistance. Abigail spoke of experience that gave her comfort in her surroundings “I find work study very helpful to overcome shyness and being comfortable in a different setting.” Becky enthusiastically talked about the campus:

I love the environment. Most of the people here are pretty awesome, again there are going to be the one or two that you just have to weed out of the bunch. But for the most part it is just a really good all around campus.

For Frank, he became a regular fixture at his campus, known by all the faculty, staff and many students. He participated in activities held by various student clubs and developed events to host for students. Edward elegantly summed up his experience at the college following the start of his Federal Work Study assignment, “once I was stable here, I started to grow roots, then that’s when the leaves started to branch out to other things like the honor society.” He repeated this sentiment and further elaborated:

It gave me a place to grow roots….this job is the longest I have had since I have been working. Stable, it is constant…. That is what it gave me…. stability, it gave me comfort and it also gave me favor in a place to network out of. Just being here you are in a hub, everything comes through this department and then you have a boss that is intertwined and he gets things, like you [referring to the interviewer]. So, if I wasn’t working here, I wouldn’t be able to do this interview…. So, when things come across him and he says I fit this, he passes them along to me. The peer mentor job came through my boss, he saw it and said listen they’re doing a lot of things that you want to do, I think it would be good for you, here. So, roots, stability.
Five participants expressed a goal for their college education and future employment. Daisy was the only participant that was unsure if she would continue her education at a four-year institution:

I haven’t planned on going any further in education, I am not saying that is the end of education, there are definitely some classes I would enjoy coming back and taking. That I think would benefit me in the real world.

Christopher started the second phase of his education when he transferred to an in-state four-year institution. He explained his current enrollment, “math major with and education swing, at the four-year institution where I attend you go for the full math major and then there is a one-year master’s program to get the master’s degree and the education degree…” Becky expressed a plan to enter the education field as a preschool teacher; “I am hoping to go off to a university to pursue my bachelor’s [degree] and eventually end up teaching a preschool classroom. And from there with schooling I am hoping to get a master’s [degree] in special ed[ucation].” Frank and Edward expressed a desire to help people Edward as a social worker and Frank as a nutritionist and/or fitness instructor. Frank elaborated on his goal and desire to attend college near a city:

My official goal is to work at a hospital or doctor’s office and do nutrition, help other people lose weight…. or even open my own gym and run it myself as an owner, be there all the time…. I want to transfer to a four-year college in state. From there, I want to also live in the city, I want to get out of our small town for a while…. I want to see if I can make a living in the city plus try to go to school there, just something different.

In contrast Edward expressed a desire to stay local when asked about attending a four-year institution:
I am looking for what is most convenient and one of the two local four-year colleges may be the most convenient but I keep hearing they do not have social work on that campus so it looks like the other local college is my only choice.

Abigail, with a major in office systems technology, did not provide a detailed plan and simply stated, “I am going to be transferring to a four-year college next semester.” As the participants integrated academically and socially, they formulate goals and integrated institutionally. Integration allows for comfort in the surroundings from which they could reach out to help others which will be explored after theme four, non-monetary benefits.

**Theme Four: Non-Monetary Benefits**

Additional benefits from involvement in the Federal Work Study Program were noted by the participants. While participation began to earn extra money, other benefits were also realized. Job experience and productive use of down time were two of the benefits acknowledged multiple times by the participants. Becky spoke of the monetary aspect when she entered the Federal Work Study Program after her parents separated to support herself, “especially since my dad had just left, and a lot of things were going on. I was like I have to be able to provide for myself.”

**Subtheme a: experience.** Abigail stated, “I was never in it for the money, I wanted something for my resume, something for the future.” When asked about the benefits of participation she went further, “it is teaching me a lot of valuable things that I can take with me for my future major…” Frank made several statements referring to the benefit of Federal Work Study participation:

It just gives me experience…. instead of having a job at a restaurant or in retail…it gives me experience with the fax machine, experience with PowerPoint, experience with
Microsoft....and socializing skills, the money isn’t like an amazing thing but it does help. It gives me so much experience I can put on a resume....it just looks good when you talk about it.

Daisy noted the experience participation gave her, “it definitely benefits me in the fact I am working in an area where I am gaining experience in things that I can apply to my life.”

**Subtheme b: down time.** Christopher also spoke of how his participation gave him experience for his future career aspirations but it was from a question about his favorite aspect of working on campus that other benefits surfaced:

...I used it as a bridge, I didn’t like coming most days, I like getting stuff done on one or two days....scheduling as it is, that doesn’t work out too well when you have two early classes and one at night. So, having a place that was going to pay me to sit down....being able to sit there and have something to do for the four or five hours depending on what day, it was a good place to be, so yeah, it was a good room, a good location, good place to be able to hunker down for your given time.

Daisy saw the experience in a similar manner to Christopher she noted:

I actually like being work study, because I can have a class in the morning and a class in the afternoon and I don’t have to go home and come back, I can be productive with the middle of my day.

Daisy noted her favorite part of her job assignment, “my favorite part is basically I have my own schedule.” Her advice to other students considering participation in the Federal Work Study Program was:

You are already here anyhow; you might as well get paid and get some experience. Then you can say I had a job at TcCC so when it is on your resume you are not going to a place
being green. I have heard that from a lot of younger kids, “oh I can’t get hired anywhere because I have never had a job.” I tell them, you could get a job here. So, you are going to be here so you might as well, help out your teachers and help out yourself.

Daisy’s final observation about participation was, “it is kind of like a little safety pool until they release you out into the world.”

The participants unanimously agreed that, if given the opportunity other students should participate in the Federal Work Study Program. Edward covered all of the subthemes of this section when asked, what he would tell a student to encourage other students to apply for Federal Work Study Edward gave multiple points:

You are going to need money for books, you are going to need money for other stuff.

And, you can build roots and connections plus it makes you have to participate with the college. The more integrated you get into the college the more opportunities open up for you, that is what I am starting to truly understand. You first have to stop somewhere and grow roots, because jobs are jobs, you bounce around from jobs, but once you grow roots here you can start a career.

**Theme Five: Helping Others**

As participants became integrated in their surroundings, they could reach out to assist others. This integration occurred as they learned about the college life and the resources that were available to them. This section contains two subthemes: giving back and leading by example. When giving back the participants are actively engaging with other students to assist them. With leading by example the participants want to model positive behaviors for others.

**Subtheme a: giving back.** Christopher recognized how he was a role model for others and that his work assignment in the tutoring center gave him credibility. “…if you’re a tutor and
a student comes in, even if you are also a student, they realize you’re the one teaching here, you know what you are talking about.” Becky found others who seek out her assistance with not just school related items but also personal issues “because I know a lot of people on campus and a lot of them come to me for help with different things, weather it is school related, family related, I just kind of help anyone out that needs help.” Frank spoke to the changes he noticed since participation in the Federal Work Study Program:

Now I have become more like the wise man of the college; I try to point people to [where they need to go] instead of just going to do this [I] go a little further. It is a lot more college talk, more goal oriented conversations. Not just little talks anymore.

Edward reached out to help students, he explained:

I am now more integrated, I like to, I don’t want to say meddle in student’s lives but I want to know what is going on with them to help them become a better student. Because stresses at home, being unequipped, not having the right tools or not having the proper study place, the quiet to concentrate, it affects everything. It’s like when I see a student struggling, when they don’t have to struggle. I ask them what is going on at home? And if I find a student in my class I will offer my services weather I am at work or not at work…

Edward further explained his role in helping other students:

The best is that I help people. If you need a paper done, I can point you in the right direction. I can be a liaison between your financial aid or I can point you in the right direction when you need something done in student services.
The participants recognized that they could not only actively assist other students with classes, registration and advice, they could serve as role models. Being a role model is not limited to the students on campus, participants could be role models for others outside of the college campus.

**Subtheme b: leading by example.** Abigail spoke of when she thought about dropping out of college and how encouragement from her cousin renewed her determination to complete her studies. Abigail noted an additional goal to lead by example she stated “…I got good grades, I motivated myself to do better, I want a degree to show my parents that it is not too late to get an education.” Edward further strives to be a role model for his children, “being a role model, giving them a blue print so when they become high school age I can already start telling and preparing them, look this is going to happen after high school. It is going to be college.”

**Conclusion**

This chapter began with a brief look at the demographics of the participants, age, enrollment status, parental college experience, hours worked and campus location. Individual sections for each participant were then introduced to gain deeper insight of the participant’s experience. From the experiences described a subset of fourteen themes were identified, social isolation, lack of integration, limited knowledge of college resources, family assistance, mentors, encouragement from others, knowledge of college resources, academic integration, social integration, institutional integration, experience, down time, giving back, and lead by example. These fourteen subthemes were organized into five themes, the fledgling student, making connections, integration, non-monetary benefits and helping others. Edward provided an analogy for the themes of the chapter that can be built upon:

… you can build roots and connections plus it makes you have to participate with the college. The more integrated you get into the college the more opportunities open up for
you, that is what I am starting to truly understand. You first have to stop somewhere and
grow roots, because jobs are jobs, you bounce around from jobs, but once you grow roots
here you can start a career.

Each participant experienced their college career differently, and neither age nor
enrollment status seemingly impacted the issues each noted. Each participant experienced a
mixture of the subthemes within the overarching themes. Social isolation, lack of integration and
limited knowledge of college resources are factors of being new to the college and for many, will
gradually fade with time. For students to engage in the healthiest experience they need to make
connections at the college, this can be through peer, faculty and/or staff interactions. It is the
connection to other people that allow for the student to effectively learn about college processes
and resources. As the connections and knowledge deepen integration, academically, socially
and/or institutionally can occur for the student. It was recognized by the participants that
involvement with the Federal Work Study Program offered non-monetary benefits in terms of
connecting to others and access to knowledge involving college resources. The cycle is
completed through helping others, those that are integrated then become the ones that help future
fledgling students. In the next chapter, the research will be interpreted. From the interpretations,
implications will be presented along with recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

This study began with a comparison of the differences between the four-year college and the community college. Four-year colleges offer residency, where most community colleges cater to the commuter student. Four-year colleges recruit the traditional student, with selective enrollment, four-year colleges choose the students who best fit the institution. It is the community college that provides much of the educational opportunities to the non-traditional student. Factors that classify students as traditional or non-traditional are age, non-traditional students may be older than the traditional college age (eighteen to twenty-four years old), marital status, possess dependents and/or attend college part-time (Arnold, 1999; Bers & Smith, 1991; Complete College America, 2011; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). Furthermore, community colleges’ open-enrollment policies admit students who exhibit physical or learning disabilities, different ethnicities, various language abilities, different levels of college readiness and different income levels (Arnold, 1999; Crisp & Mina, 2012; Deil-Amen, 2011; Juszkiewicz, 2014; Mooney, 2014). Although the four-year institution admits these students as well, assisting these students is the niche of the community college.

Additional assistance for the community college student comes from Federal Student Aid, providing funding for seventy-six percent of the community college population in the form of grants, loans and Federal Work Study (“Fast Facts,” n.d.). Grants are funds that are given to the student and do not require repayment. The Federal Government, issues Federal Pell Grants, Federal Supplemental Educational Opportunity Grants (FSEOG), Teacher Education Assistance for College and Higher Education Grants (TEACH) and Iraq and Afghanistan Service Grants (“Types of Aid,” n.d.-h). Federal Work Study is funding a student may earn through work assignments on campus or off campus at “private non-profit organizations or public agencies”
(“Types of Aid,” n.d.-f.). These funds are provided by the Federal Government but dispersed at the discretion of the college (Blanzizzi, 2013; Scott-Clayton, 2011; Troppe, 2000). Students not eligible for grants or work study may apply for Federal Loans. Loans may be financed through the Federal Government using the William D. Ford Federal Direct Loan and by the college or university with the Federal Perkins Loan (‘‘Types of Aid,’’ n.d.-h.).

With a graduation rate of eighteen percent for students who complete an associate’s degree in three years (Complete College America, 2011; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2011; Marcus, 2013) community colleges work to improve this statistic. Colleges have long invested in and promoted retention programs, including freshman orientation, communities of learning, Freshman Interest Groups, service learning, mentoring programs, career seminars, tutoring and student clubs (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Wild & Ebbers, 2002). While not considered a retention program in of itself, Federal Work Study Programs are designed to help students persist by offering campus-based work opportunities. Thus, this program often shares traits of other retention programs such as, mentoring, freshmen orientation, communities of learning, summer bridge and TRiO programs (Mitchell, Alozie & Wathington, 2015; “National Studies,’’ 2009; Walsh, 2000).

This phenomenological study’s intent was to learn about the Federal Work Study participant’s experience to identify the events that assist with persistence. Through this research, the following questions were explored:

- How do students perceive and describe their experiences participating in the Federal Work Study Program?
- How do students describe the extent of their academic and social integration before participation in the Federal Work Study Program?
What experiences do students describe that helped their social and academic integration before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program?

The conception for this research began when the researcher participated in the Federal Work Study Program at a commuter community college. It was recognized that the Federal Work Study Program was influential in her success, many years later the question became, is it influential to current Federal Work Study participants and if so, how? From the literature review and deeper reflection of the researcher’s experience, integration was discovered to be influential on student persistence, specifically academic and social integration (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Halpin, 1990; Prather & Hand, 1986; Reason, 2009). Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) was chosen as the theoretical framework for this research. Tinto’s theory is well known and utilized for many studies in the past forty years (Bean, 1981; Berger, Ramírez & Lyons, 2012). This theory states that students arrive at college with specific background traits, educational experiences, family experience with college and a predisposition to learn (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003; Tinto, 1993). The student expresses career goals and institutional commitment at multiple stages of the college experience (Bean, 1981; Swail, Redd & Perna, 2003). As the student attends classes and navigates the campus they begin to interact with faculty, staff, and peers. These connections lead to academic and social integration that the student considers along with their goal and institutional commitment to determine if they will continue enrollment (Bean, 1981; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1980; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1979; Tinto & Pusser, 2006).

Previous studies on the connection to Federal Work Study Programs and student persistence utilized student satisfaction surveys currently in place at many colleges, this research does not address the students’ experiences with the Federal Work Study Program and integration
(Aper, 1994; Blandizzi, 2013; Polson & Weisburst, 2014; Scott-Clayton, 2011). Blandizzi (2013) noted that more research is needed that looks at the independent student and those in low income brackets that assist with family expenses. Tinto (2006) advocated for more research on persistence involving low-income students at two and four year colleges. Additionally, identifying programs that lead to academic success for this group of students (Tinto, 2006). Two-year commuter community colleges need to be further explored to determine if Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence (Tinto, 1993) applies to their students. Bers & Smith, (1991) and Karp, Hughes & O’Gara, (2008) advocate that the theory does work at the commuter community college while Halpin, (1990) and Prather & Hand, (1986) oppose this viewpoint. Specifically, Karp & Hughes (2008) identified that information networks are the factor that allows students to integrate at the commuter community college. This phenomenological study’s intent was to add to the body of knowledge, studying the Federal Work Study participant at a commuter community college. Gathering the experiences of the commuter community college student in their words to gain insight into the phenomenon that leads to student persistence. The assumption is made that the participants are low-income due to the financial need that is required to obtain funding in the Federal Work Study Program.

To obtain the students’ experiences a transcendental phenomenological framework was chosen. The criterion for the participants included current students or those that graduated between the years 2012 to 2016 and who participated in the Federal Work Study Program on campus for two semesters. Full and part-time students were accepted for this study. This criterion led to the gathering of six participants, only two of which fit the definition of a traditional student. The other four were above the traditional age range, attended part-time and/or possessed a spouse and dependents. While unintended, the sample included the same
number of male and female participants. There was equal distribution of residency based on location to Tri-campus Community College’s (TcCC) three campus sites, two participants resided near each of TcCC’s three campus locations. From the experiences of the participants, fourteen subthemes were identified and organized under five themes, the fledgling student, making connections, integration, non-monetary benefits and helping others. In this chapter, the phenomenon that allowed the participants to persist will be discussed and recommendations for future research will be presented.

**Interpretation of the Findings**

Participation in the Federal Work Study Program allows for employment for up to eighteen hours per week at TcCC, this gives participants up to an additional eighteen hours on campus to interact with faculty, staff and peers. The findings of Halpin (1990) and Prather & Hand (1996) stated students only come to campus for class at commuter community colleges which limits the opportunities for students to integrate socially to the college culture. This is contrary for the Federal Work Study participants interviewed at TcCC. This research shows that even when integration is a low priority for the participant, as not every person feels the need to sustain a large social circle, the participants still integrated to the college culture through interactions with their supervisors, faculty, staff and the students they serviced through their job assignments. These supervisors, faculty, staff and students are who the participants sought for assistance with non-job related tasks and issues. The participants spoke of how interactions developed into relationships that allowed the participant to feel accepted and cared for by their supervisor. That their supervisor genuinely cared about them and their progress at TcCC. As Leonard (2008) found through her research using focus groups of student workers, this study also found that participants expressed that interactions gave them a sense of family. This is
important for those participants that were the first in their family to attend college, in a study by Thayer (2000) he found students who are the first in their family to attend college are less likely to persist. While participants of this study were the first in their family to attend college, the relationships they forged with supervisors, faculty, staff and peers allowed for development of a “surrogate” family. This “surrogate” family could provide the information about college life that the participant could not acquire from family members. The creation of a “surrogate” family benefited the students whose parents attended college and those currently attending with family members. Participants in this study expressed that family members provided little information about college life and processes, even when the family member possessed college experience.

In this study, there was not a clear division for the acts of academic integration versus social integration, both forms occurred through similar and different processes. Participants developed academic integration through the interactions with peers outside of the classroom just as they developed friendships within the classroom. Participants further expressed academic integration occurred through their Federal Work Study assignment. Karp & Hughes (2008) found that integration developed from the formation of information networks, this is reflected in this study. When participants spoke of integration, it was the experiences when they learned how to navigate student processes that facilitated the feelings of being comfortable in their surroundings. Knowing how to secure a tutor, which department to contact with questions about appealing a grade, or completing financial aid verification.

When the participants first attended, they experienced a range of emotions from excitement to apprehension, they were isolated and alone. Without information about the college and its processes, the participants missed out on opportunities, such as financial aid, tutoring and even the Federal Work Study Program, at least initially. As the participants met students, staff
and faculty that could assist and guide them through processes, they acclimated to college life. The familiarity of supervisors, faculty, staff and students allowed for accelerating the collection of college knowledge. It was through participation in the Federal Work Study Program that allowed for the familiarity to develop. Similar to the findings of Karp & Hughes (2008), the Federal Work Study supervisor provides a point of contact for the participant to obtain needed information about the college. The relationship with the supervisor allowed the participant to shed the feelings of isolation and loneliness they experienced upon arrival at TcCC. For participants working in student service areas there was opportunity to make connections to the students seeking assistance, these students initially seeking information could later provide information that was helpful for the participant. Participants spoke with students about faculty members and would exchange information relating to which were the best to choose and who should be avoided. Evolution of information networks were not one-sided in favor of the participant; information networks could be enhanced for other students separately or in conjunction with the participants’ development.

Career planning for the participants was a crucial factor in their decisions to persist subsequent semesters. While career and institutional goals are part of Tinto’s Theory of Student Persistence, (Tinto, 1993) it was only through this study that the researcher learned of the importance of participants expressing concise career goals. Participants that came to TcCC with a career plan or developed one within the first year exhibited a confidence not seen in those without a concise career plan. The career goal was significant in the realm of student persistence and was a strong factor of persistence for the part-time student. Possession of a career goal further influenced academic and social integration, having a specific plan allowed participants to engage in conversations with supervisors, faculty, staff and peers about their plan and learn about
the plans created by others. Career plans served as a conversation starter for participants, opening lines of communication with those around them. Discussions about career plans were often confidence boosters for the participants when supervisors, faculty, staff or peers agreed the chosen career path was a well-suited choice. Participation in the Federal Work Study Program additionally served as an avenue to confirm career plans. The tutoring department allowed opportunities to teach students, which could solidify the decision to become an educator. Working in the student services department provided the opportunity for a participant to help students in a variety of college tasks, confirming that social work was an appropriate career goal. It is important that career selection is developed early in a student’s educational endeavors to assure that only needed courses are taken in effort to reduce the length of time needed to graduate.

**Research Question 1: How do students perceive and describe their experiences participating in the Federal Work Study Program?**

Initially, employment positions were secured through the Federal Work Study Program to obtain monetary benefits. Once immersed in the Federal Work Study assignment the participants realized they received on-the-job experience, networking and career exploration as additional benefits. Integration into the college life matured concurrently with learning about college resources. The participants developed support systems complied from supervisors, faculty, staff and peers. This support system could assist with college processes, telling the participant where to go and who to speak with to clear up problems with financial aid, registration and the like. Supervisors became mentors to the participants, offering guidance and advice not just related to college life but for the participants’ personal life as needed. Supervisors additionally kept the participants accountable for tasks not just on the job but even their class assignments. For some
participants, supervisors were positive role models, that participants could strive to emulate. It is the connections the participants made that allowed for their isolation and insecurities to diminish.

This means that students who are the first to attend college in their family can develop relationships with those that attended college and/or are experienced with aspects of the college such as processes to complete task related to registration, financial aid, academic appeals etc. These supervisors, faculty, staff and/or peers can assist the student where family members cannot. Supervisors, faculty and or staff further engaged the participants by encouraging them to do well in their course work and with conversations of future aspirations. They provide a positive role model of what the student can achieve with persistence, the completion of a college degree and the possession of gainful employment.

**Research Question 2: How do students describe the extent of their academic and social integration before participation in the Federal Work Study Program?**

Upon arrival at TcCC, academic and social integration were nonexistent for the participants. The majority of the participants did not chose to join student clubs or attend college activities. As non-traditional students, social interactions were a low priority when compared to spending time with family or completing schoolwork. The participants that did engage in student clubs and activities only connected superficially with peers. They did not exhibit social circles that supported their college life. When it came to navigating college processes participants stumbled around, finding resources by trial and error. Initially, the participants did not know of financial aid, the Federal Work Study Program, tutoring or registration processes. They were lacking information that could ease the college experience by providing financial and other types of assistance. Participants were hesitant to interact during classes, and therefore did not receive help that was needed. Often participants dropped, withdrew or failed classes when
they did not interact with the instructor. The participants were unaware of academic resources offered by the college at no cost to the student such as tutoring and faculty office hours. Many faculty at TcCC are available outside of class hours, when they will assist students, helping with course work, registration questions and casual conversations. None of the participants spoke of deep or meaningful connections with faculty, staff or peers before participation in the Federal Work Study Program. In the midst of college life, they were still isolated from those around them.

Research Question 3: What experiences do students describe that helped their social and academic integration before and during participation in the Federal Work Study Program?

Before participation in the Federal Work Study Program participants found minimal integration through student clubs and college activities as the majority of participants never engaged in these opportunities. They did not take advantage of college resources such as tutoring as they were unaware of the availability of such programs. It was the Federal Work Study Program that allowed for all participants to integrate into the college experience through interactions with supervisors, faculty, staff and peers. Once in the program students spent up to eighteen additional hours on campus every week, providing additional opportunities to interact with more faculty, staff and peers. In addition to the extra hours on campus each week the supervisors functioned as a point of contact for the participant, the Federal Work Study Program created a specific link for the participant to the supervisor. Supervisors facilitated the development of a relationship with the participants. Taking a genuine concern for the participants assigned to them, the supervisors not only were concerned with the participants work responsibilities but also their academics and personal development. Supervisors alerted the
participants to opportunities that could benefit the participant such as peer mentoring, volunteering as tour guides on new student day and participation in this study. Once the participants became part of the Federal Work Study Program they then partook of other college activities and clubs, unprompted by their supervisors.

**Implications**

The Federal Work Study Program first benefits students by creating the opportunity to spend up to an additional eighteen hours on campus. With additional time on campus participants spent portions of this time interacting with faculty, staff and peers. It was through these interactions that the participants made connections to others who could assist them when help was needed. This created information networks that allowed students to integrate academically and socially. When students worked on campus they developed a relationship with their supervisor and/or coworkers, they became comfortable in their surroundings. Through participation, students interacted with faculty, staff and peers creating networks they could use when they needed to learn a college process or locate available resources. The Federal Work Study Program provided a network for the participant, and, if they chose to take advantage of this network, they could learn about college resources and processes. Mitchell, Nonye & Wathington (2015) advocated the importance of providing not just remedial courses for incoming students but additionally, to offer knowledge of college resources and processes. When it comes to disseminating information to students about college resources and processes, the Federal Work Study Program can also accomplish this goal.

It was identified that institutional and goal commitment play a larger part in persistence than initially thought by this researcher. Of the six participants, five maintained highly developed goals and they appeared to be more engaged in the college and its culture than the one
participant whose goals were not as well formed as the others. It was clear to see that when the participant specified plans for their future, within education and career aspirations that it facilitated a stronger connection to the institution. The connection between career goals and student persistence was stronger than first thought, coupled with participation in the Federal Work Study Program added to the experience of the participant. When work environment aligned with the participants’ career goals it allowed the participant to ascertain if specific career goals were a viable option for their future. Participants were able to confirm career choices or develop a new option that was better suited for them and, if needed they could consult their Work Study supervisors, faculty, staff and peers.

When investigating research on persistence of the commuter community college the areas that stand out in relation to success of the student are the attributes the student brings to college with them and how and when they integrate academically and socially. These attributes are the student’s “prior education, family background, skill and abilities” (Tinto, 1993 p. 114). While these are important, this study showed that a strong connection to institutional and goal commitment is just as important as integration. The term institutional integration was described by French & Oaks (2004) as a combination of academic and social integration with institutional and goal commitment. In terms of institutional commitment most the participants possessed an emotional connection to the college, describing a deeper connection than the connotation of the term institutional commitment might suggest. From the experiences described by the participants, institution integration was realized after the participants began their Federal Work Study assignments.

Students that reached out to be included in this study were motivated, they exhibited an
internal drive that fueled their desire to obtain the goals they set. Motivation that allowed them to budget their time accordingly so they could participate in this study. Motivation that pushed them past their comfort levels to reach out and do something that could have a positive effect not just for them but for others around them. While this group was a good beginning for identifying the traits from Federal Work Study participation at TcCC, efforts should be made to include a wider variety of students in follow up studies. Further research could include a mixed methods survey mostly multiple choice with a few open-ended questions that all participants are invited to take. Efforts should be made to find the diversity of the Federal Work Study participants to obtain a larger variety of experiences and collect information from each of the job assignments. Are there students who reluctantly participate in the Federal Work Study Program and are just getting by academically and it turns them around helping them to become a better student? How do the different job assignment locations affect the experiences of the participant?

The Federal Work Study participants did not begin participation in the first year and learned of the opportunity in the second year of attendance. For some, their part time status did give them the required credit hours to be considered freshman, but they attended for a full year. For freshman status, a student may earn up to twenty-seven credit hours and for a sophomore the credits are between twenty-eight and fifty-nine (“Academic Policies,” n.d.; “Resources,” n.d.; “Transfer Credit,” n.d.).

Many participants noted a troubling lack of assistance received from family members, except for Christopher. It is unknown if the family members themselves were struggling to find their own way in college life, or if other external family dynamics played a role in the separation that kept family members from assisting each other further. Despite not having more family support, the participants navigated the processes of college life to complete necessary tasks,
registering, financial aid appeals, and finding a tutor are a sample of tasks completed. Participants developed networks that include supervisors, peers and faculty.

When popular retention programs that are utilized by colleges to retain students are explored, there are commonalities: peer interaction, the dissemination of information about the college and processes, connecting to faculty and staff (Bean & Eaton, 2001; Bers & Smith, 1991; Hossler, et. al, 2008; Linderman & Kolenovic, 2013; “The Art,” 2004). This research shows that these traits are inherent within the Federal Work Study Program. Additionally, the Federal Work Study Program can offer what these other programs cannot, a paycheck. While not advertised as other retention programs on campus, the lure of a paycheck succeeded in recruitment of participants who chose not to engage in other retention programs offered at TcCC. The Federal Work Study Program can aid the integration of students who may shy away from other programs such as peer mentors.

Federal Work Study participation does help students integrate academically and socially, and at the same time may help participants confirm career choices. Participants also spoke of supervisors who functioned as mentors, guiding the participant when solicited or appropriate. Each participant expressed Federal Work Study was more than a paycheck, identifying job experience and networking. Extracted from their experiences, supervisors function as mentors, connections to faculty and staff are strengthened and in some cases peer group development.

**Recommendations for Action**

From this study, it was identified that the participants did not know about the Federal Work Study Program during their first semester on campus. This exposes a missed opportunity to support these students earlier in their college careers. As other research, shows it is crucial to student success to connect new students to their college within the first year (Cermak & Filkins,
2004; Tinto, 1993). Connections can include faculty and peer interactions, retention programs and work opportunities on-campus. Development of a marketing strategy to increase student awareness of Federal Work Study opportunities in the first semester is essential to place students in work assignments by the second semester. Utilization of social media to communicate the availability and benefits of Federal Work Study is one way to alert students. Information about how and where to apply for Federal Work Study opportunities can be distributed through printed materials and verbally communicated at new student day programs.

A second recommendation is to expand the number of students serviced by the Federal Work Study Program. While the funding is limited, reducing the maximum limit of hours of employment per student would allow additional students to participate. A reduction from eighteen to twelve hours per week would allow one new student placement in the program for every two current students. At TcCC participation in the Federal Work Study Program is estimated at seventy students, reducing the hours would allow for thirty-five additional students to participate.

The participants in this study that expressed concise goals for future education and employment exhibited a deeper connection to the college and continuing their education. The community college, in addition to serving as the starting point to a career or a bachelor’s degree, provides personal development for others. More information and resources need to be provided to students to assist the discovery of career aspirations, ideally within the first year. Once the student acquired a career goal, a plan can be developed to facilitate the completion of the goal. Federal Work Study job assignments can provide students with an opportunity to try work that is similar to their future goals, thereby offering a way to sample the future career.

While the above recommendations can be implemented at a local level, a method needs
to be developed at the national level that will account for the graduation rates of the non-traditional student and those that transfer before obtaining an associate’s degree. Accounting for these characteristics will allow for data to emerge that can be used to assist these groups. Questions could be answered about why students transfer without obtaining an associate’s degree and what assistance could students use to complete degree requirements sooner?

**Recommendations for Further Study**

While this study adds to the body of knowledge, the small sample size was a limitation and the results are not generalizable. Further research with a larger sample size could be beneficial. A larger sample size would add to the diversity of the students that participate, gathering an expanded variety of experiences. This research topic could benefit from a longitudinal study where students could be interviewed before they begin participation and then again as they progress through their college career. This may allow for a holistic picture of the before Federal Work Study Program to be collected. Depending on the length of time they participated, some of the participants from this study were unsure of the timing of some experiences that occurred before Federal Work Study participation. The use of a longitudinal study could alleviate gaps in the timeline of the experiences described by the participants. A bigger sample that is more inclusive and employed an alternate method of data collection would add to the student perspective. The time constraints of the in-person interview may have deterred potential participants from coming forward, an online survey or focus group could be conducive to obtain a larger sample.

To explore the potency of the Federal Work Study Program on student persistence, a longitudinal study on the reluctant participant could be conducted. Reluctant students could include those who are attending college to pacify family members or enrolled as a second choice.
Once identified, initial interviews would occur before placement in the Federal Work Study Program. Further interviews would be conducted during participation to determine the effect of the program on the student’s outlook in relation to their commitment to educational endeavors.

Can the Federal Work Study Program integrate the aversive student?

**Conclusion**

For the commuter community college student, this study supports that the Federal Work Study Program assist the integration of students through the development of information networks. The Federal Work Study Program provides a point of contact for the participant with the supervisor and opens additional connections with faculty, staff and students. The connections can further support first generation college students with supervisors, faculty, staff and/or students functioning as a “surrogate” family for the student. The “surrogate” family can provide information about college life that the student cannot obtain from their family.

Identifying all the aspects of Federal Work Study participation that enhance student persistence cannot be explained in a single paper. From the breadth of studies available, not even years of study leads to a singular answer for the dilemma of increasing student persistence. Perhaps the best approach is tailoring retention programs to fit a wide array of students in effort to assist a large population. Two thirds of community college students attend part-time (Schuck & Larson, 2008), they are the largest population of students and efforts are needed to create new calculations for computing graduation rates to include this population. This data could lead to better programs to assist part-time students, what support do they need to meet their educational goals? While they are not graduating in three years, what is the actual completion timeline?
With part-time students as the majority, it is good business practice to better serve this population.

Federal Work Study Programs continue to provide students with positive work and life experience, opportunities to network with faculty, staff and peers and funding to assist with the cost of college attendance. Research from the student perspective provides information about the aspects of the Federal Work Study Program that aids students’ persistence. From these experiences, programs and interventions can be developed to help the general population of the commuter community college which in turn can improve graduation rates. The Federal Work Study Program is a retention program in disguise. Yes, Federal Work Study assist students financially so they persist at college but, the program offers much more to its participants. Participants are afforded the opportunity to connect with a supervisor who provides more than on-the-job training, they are a connection to the college, resources and processes. Supervisors and job duties can introduce participants to other faculty, staff and students that extends the information network for the participant. The Federal Work Study Program can reach those students who avoid traditional retention programs, giving them a support system that allows for student integration and student success.
References


Fabius, S., Gorelick, A., & Grant, G. (n.d.). Integration of a Theoretical Framework to Enhance Student Retention and Completion: Nova Southeastern University’s Success Coaching Model.


doi: 10.1177/009155219001700405


*Journal of College Student Retention: Research, Theory & Practice*, 7(3-4), 245-261.

Work-study Coordinator, personal conversation, October 1, 2015.
Appendix A: Consent for Participation in Research

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND

CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: Beyond a Paycheck: Additional Benefits of the Federal Work Study Program at a Commuter Community College.

Principle Investigator: Terri-Lynn Hamby, Graduate Student, University of New England.

EMAIL: thamby@une.edu, Phone: (609) 675-1074

Brianna Parsons, Faculty Advisor, University of New England.

EMAIL: bparsons4@une.edu, Phone: (207) 299-3627

Introduction:

This study looks to gather Federal Work Study students and or graduate at a commuter community college understanding and perception about their involvement in the program to determine if and how it affects their enrollment at the college.

Who will be in this study?

To be selected the student or graduate must fulfill the requirements below:

- Current student or recent graduate (2012-2016) of a commuter community college.
- Employed two semesters in the Federal Work Study program. (Not required to be consecutive.)
- Eighteen years of age or older.
- Work assignment is/was on campus.
- Work assignment was not in the Science Department with the researcher at any time during Federal Work Study participation.

At least six participants are needed, no more than ten will be chosen.

What will I be asked to do?

- Complete this consent form and return to the researcher via email, electronic document signature program or standard mail service.
- Participate in a ninety-minute interview (90 minutes) in person or via online communication platform.
• Review the typed transcript (30-60 minutes).
• Participate in a shorter second interview if needed (30-45 minutes).
• Review the highlights of the combined data (30-45 minutes).

Only one interview per day will be scheduled. Transcription of interview recording will occur within 72 hours of the interview.

**What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?**

• No physical harm should come from participation.
• To lessen any discomfort, participants can choose not to answer any questions they are uncomfortable with.

**What are the possible benefit of taking part in this study?**

While it is not expected that the participant receives any benefit from participation, participant may gain:

• Realization of positive effect of participation on academic or social interactions.
• Learn about college services and programs that could assist the student.

**What will it cost me?**

The student may have travel expenses that will not be reimbursed. To lessen this cost, the researcher will schedule the in-person interview at a public library that is most convenient for the participant. Online interviews will occur via a free communication platform.

**How will my privacy be protected?**

• Pseudonym will be assigned to the college.
• Pseudonym will be given to all participants.

**How will my data be kept confidential?**

• Electronic data will be stored on an external hard drive.
• Documents and hard drive will be stored in a secured safe.
• A copy of your consent form will be maintained by the principle researcher for at least five years after the project is complete before it is destroyed.
• The consent forms will be stored in a secured safe that only the principle researcher will have access
• Audio recording of interviews will stay within the possession of the principle researcher and a copy sent to the participant.
• Information from the transcripts may be shared with the faculty advisor.
• Data extracted from interviews will be sent to you for review.
• Final findings will be sent to you at the conclusion of the study.

What are my rights as a research participant?

• Your participation is voluntary. Your decision will have no impact on current or future Federal Work Study participation or interactions with the college.
• You may choose to skip any questions within the interview.
• You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.
• The principle researcher may terminate your participation in the study if information is not truthful, difficulty in arranging an interview and/or the participant does not fulfill the outlined duties.

Whom may I contact with questions?

• The researcher conducting this study is Terri-Lynn Hamby. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at thamby@une.edu. Phone (609) 675-1074.
• The faculty advisor, Brianna Parsons, Ed.D. may be contacted at bparsons4@une.edu. Phone: (207) 299-3627.
• If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D.Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

• You will be given a copy of this consent form.
Participant’s Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

__________________________________________  ______________________
Participant’s signature or Date

Legally authorized representative

_________________________________________
Printed name

Researcher’s Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

__________________________________________  ______________________
Researcher’s signature  Date

_________________________________________
Printed name

Adapted from UNE Adult Consent Template 8/29/2012.
May 3, 2016

Director of Student Development at TcCC,

I am writing today to ask for your assistance to obtain research participants for my doctoral dissertation, Beyond a Paycheck: Additional Benefits of the Federal Work Study Program at a Commuter Community College. My study is from the phenomenological aspect to obtain student stories of their Federal Work Study experiences and identify the phenomenon about the program that has assisted with their persistence at the college.

For this research, I would like to conduct interviews with 6-10 participants. These participants must be eighteen years of age or older, were sophomore students and employed on campus as a Federal Work Study student in the Spring 2016 semester. These students must have also begun participation in the program as freshman. Student who have been work study participants for the science department are disqualified for selection. I want to keep the college and students anonymous and would prefer if the Work Study Coordinator at TcCC could send the initial invitation to the students who meet the criterion for participation, this way I would only receive information from the students when they initiate participation.

I have obtained site permission from TcCC and the University of New England Instructional Review Board (IRB) has given me an exemption to conduct my study. I have attached copies of these documents along with the information I sent to the IRB which contains a brief summary, my resume, letter to the student, participant consent form and the interview guide questions.

If I have your permission I will send Work Study Coordinator at TcCC individual documents for the student letter, participation consent and interview guide questions to be sent to the qualifying students.

Please contact me if you have any questions, concerns or suggestions.

Thank you

Terri-Lynn Hamby
May 5, 2016

Work Study Coordinator at TcCC,

Please find the attached documents to send to perspective participants for this study. The criterion for participants are

Second semester sophomores.

Eighteen years of age or older.

Began the Federal Work Study program as freshman.

Work on campus.

Both full and part time students will be eligible to participate.

Thank you for your assistance

Terri-Lynn Hamby

May 12, 2016

Work Study Coordinator at TcCC,

I have permission to add the following two criteria for obtaining participants.

*First semester sophomores who are eighteen years or older and began the Federal Work Study program as freshman and work on campus.

*Second semester freshmen who are eighteen years of age or older and began the Federal Work Study program as first semester freshmen and work on campus.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thank you!
Terri-Lynn Hamby

June 6, 2016

Work Study Coordinator at TcCC,

I still only have one participant for my study. I have received permission for expansion of the criterion. This batch will target on campus students that started and stopped and maybe started again. They still need to be eighteen or older and work on campus. I have revised the invitation letter and included a copy of the consent form. This will be the last expansion that I can do with the current pool of students. If you can send the two attached document to these students it would be greatly appreciated. Thank you so much for all of your assistance with my research. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Terri-Lynn Hamby

October 6, 2016

Work Study Coordinator at TcCC,

I just received permission to change the criteria. If you could please send out one final mailing to the qualified students I would appreciate it. This is the last change that I am allowed, so fingers crossed I get the participants needed. Now any student who works on campus and has participated for two semesters can be asked. I have attached the new letter and consent form. Here is the updated list.

- Current student or recent graduate (2012-2016) of a commuter community college.
- Employed two semesters in the Federal Work Study program. (Not required to be consecutive.)
- Eighteen years of age or older.
- Work assignment is/was on campus.
- Work assignment was not in the Science Department with the researcher at any time during Federal Work Study participation.

As with before if you can let me know how many students were emailed that would be great. I cannot thank you enough for all of your help, my progress thus far would not be possible without your assistance.
Hello! My name is Terri-Lynn Hamby. I am a full time employee of Atlantic Cape Community College and currently a doctoral student at the University of New England. I am working on my dissertation, Beyond a paycheck: Additional benefits of the Federal Work Study program at a commuter community college. I am seeking six to ten volunteers to interview.

You have received this email because you may meet the criterion to participate in this study. To be selected the student or graduate must fulfill the requirements below:

- Current student or recent graduate (2012-2016) of a commuter community college.
- Employed two semesters in the Federal Work Study program. (Not required to be consecutive.)
- Eighteen years of age or older.
- Work assignment is/was on campus.
- Work assignment was not in the Science Department with the researcher at any time during Federal Work Study participation.

All information about the specific college and identity of the interview participants will be concealed. Interviews will occur via Skype or other online communication program and last about ninety minutes. I also request that you review the recorded interview and transcripts for accuracy. You will also be sent the structural and textural descriptions of the complied data to review and ensure I have captured the information properly.

If you are interested in learning more about this study or would like to schedule an interview, please contact me at thamby@une.edu.
Appendix E: Facebook Information

Facebook Information

Terri-Lynn Hamby’s Dissertation Research

This Facebook page has been developed to facilitate the recruitment of study participants. Please feel free to share this page.

Study Information: This study looks to gather Federal Work Study students and/or graduates at a commuter community college understanding and perception about their involvement in the program to determine if and how it affects their enrollment at the college.

Volunteers Needed! I am looking for five to ten participants to complete a ninety-minute interview on their experiences before and during participation in the Federal Work Study program at a commuter community college.

To be selected the student or graduate must fulfill the requirements below:

- Current student or recent graduate (2012-2016) of a commuter community college.
- Employed two semesters in the Federal Work Study program. (Not required to be consecutive.)
- Eighteen years of age or older.
- Work assignment is/was on campus.
- Work assignment was not in the Science Department with the researcher at any time during Federal Work Study participation.

On this page you will find photos of the Consent form and questions that will be utilized during interviews. Pdf versions will be sent through email as requested.

About the researcher: I am currently a graduate student completing the dissertation requirements for a doctoral degree in Educational Leadership at the University of New England. I have been employed at Atlantic Cape Community college for over twenty years. My employment at Atlantic Cape Community college began in the Science Department through the Federal Work Study program.

If you have any questions and/or would like to participant, please feel free to contact me
through a private message. Thank you.

Appendix F: Interview Guide/Questions

Interview Guide/Questions

1. Can you tell me about yourself?
   a. Age  
   b. Goals
   c. Major
   d. Credit hours

2. Tell me about your family
   a. Parents
   b. Sibling(s)
   c. Education
   d. Degree

3. How did you become enrolled at TcCC?
   a. Reason

The next set of questions is about your college experience before participation in the Federal Work Study Program.

4. Tell me about your social life and friends prior to working in the Federal Work Study Program.

5. How did you navigate things like financial aid, registration or tutoring who would you speak with?
   a. Comfort level utilizing resources

6. Describe your interactions with faculty members and staff?

7. Tell me about your experience with student clubs and college activities.

8. What was your academic standing before Federal Work Study participation?

9. How did you become involved with the Federal Work Study Program?
   a. Start date
   b. Source of job opening
   c. Reason for applying
   d. Hours/week
The next section of questions pertains to after beginning your Federal work study assignment

1. Describe your work environment.
   a. # of Staff    b. # of Students    c. Department

2. Tell me about your social interactions with other students since beginning the Federal Work Study Program.

3. How has your work in the work study program affected your interactions with faculty/staff members?

4. What is your participation level in student clubs and/or college activities?
   a. If different than before: Why do you think it changed?

5. What is your current academic standing?

6. What are your favorite/least favorite parts of working on campus?

7. What do you like most/least about your job assignment?

8. Tell me about your relationship with your supervisor?

9. How do you feel your Federal Work Study assignment benefits you in ways other than money?

10. If another student asked you about participating in the Federal Work Study Program what would you tell them?

11. Do you ever think about leaving TcCC?
   a. Yes: Please tell me about that and why you decided to stay.
   b. No: What is it about TcCC that you like?

12. What do you plan to do after you reach your goal at TcCC?

Is there anything you would like to add?